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FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO THE EMPLOYMENT OF BATSWANA
WOMEN IN THE CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY

by

LOGONG RADITLHOKWA, B.S.W.

A thesis submitted to the
Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in Partial Fulfilment of
the requirements for the degree of
Master of Social Work

School of Social Work

CARLETON UNIVERSITY

Ottawa, Ontario

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Thesis Supervisor

Director, School of Social Work

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ABSTRACT

Despite the rhetoric about the state's commitment to enhance the position of Batswana women, post-independence development institutions continue to be dominated by a conservative patriarchal system. Structural sexism in development planning has contributed to the high rate of unemployment and degenerative conditions that victimize powerless women.

The construction boom that occurred in the late 1980s coincided with the semi-proletarianization of female rural migrants, who work as unskilled general labourers. Using the "internal colonization" thesis, this study identifies and explicates a host of factors which contributed to their employment. The feminization of the construction industry is not a revolution. It was motivated by the industrialists' dire need for cheap and compliant labour. The socio-economic situation of marginal female proletariat can only be upgraded if, and only if, the oppressive conditions that they experience in their work places, homes and other spheres of their lives are effectively challenged and changed.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Abstract	iii
Acknowledgements	iv
Table of Contents	v
List of Tables	vii
Acronyms	viii

CHAPTER ONE

1.0	The Problem	1
1.1	Introduction	1
1.2	Background	4
1.3	Statement of the Problem	10
1.3.1	Social Work and the Marginalization of Female Construction Workers	12
1.4	The Objective of the Study	23

CHAPTER TWO

2.0	Industrialization and "Women in Poverty" In Botswana	25
2.1	Research and Poverty-Afflicted Women	25
2.2	Peasant Women and Rural Poverty	29
2.3	The Construction Sector	36
2.4	Labour Legislation	40
2.5	Women-Owned Construction Companies	41

CHAPTER THREE

3.0	Theoretical Framework	42
3.1	Internal Colonization Thesis	42
3.2	Resource Extraction Economy	52
3.3	The Impact of Internal Colonization on the Tswana Family	54
3.4	Maintenance of Children and Divorced Wives..	59
3.5	Hypothesis.....	65

CHAPTER FOUR

4.0	Research Methodology	66
4.1	Sample Population	66
4.2	Data Collection Instruments	68
4.3	Summary of Research Questions	71
4.4	Process and Ethical Considerations	74
4.5	Helping Factors.....	76
4.6	Limitations	78

CHAPTER FIVE

5.0	Factors Influencing Women to Seek Employment in the Construction Sector.....	84
5.1	Women's Origins	84
5.2	Education and Economic Participation	89
5.3	Cultural Colonialism and Collapse of Traditional Institutions of Welfare	98
5.4	Poverty and Public Policy	105
5.5	Domestic Sector Employment	107
5.6	Female Employment in the Construction Sector	113
5.7	The Exploitation and Oppression of Labour in the Construction sector	147
5.8	Wage and Cost of Living	156

CHAPTER SIX

6.0	Conclusion	158
	Bibliography	165

LIST OF TABLES

TABLE	Page
1. Trade and Gender Statistics	7
2. BHC Houses Built In a Ten Year Period	38
3. BHC Project Costs During 1990/1991	39
4. Distribution of Population of Gaborone and Mogoditishane by Gender.....	66
5. Summary Data On Forums and Interviews	69
6. Women's Origin	84
7. Sources of Child Support	87
8. Women's Age Distribution	91
9. Women's Educational Status	91
10. Respondents' Previous Occupation	95
11. Number of Sexual Partners Since Christmas (1987)..	102
12. Distribution of Day Care Centres According to Fees	109
13. Information On Ownership and Number of Employees	114
14. Convictions For Assault Common And Verbal Assault	121
15. Theft Committed In Construction Companies	122
16. Estimated Numbers of Batswana Males And Females Employed in the Mining and Quarrying Sector in 1981-1991 Period	129
17. The Employment and Recruitment of Batswanan Males by South African Mines	130
18. Males and Females' Economic Participation by Sector in 1991	132
19. Women's Expenditure on Rent and Lunch	157

ACRONYMS

BCWU	Botswana Construction Workers Union
BBS	Botswana Building Society
BHC	Botswana Housing Corporation
BOCCIM	Botswana Confederation of Commerce, Industry and Manpower
BOPA	Botswana Press Agency
CSO	Central Statistics Office
IRIR	International Research and Information Group
IDRC	International Development Research Centre
KAP	Knowledge, Attitude and Practice
NIR	National Institute of Development Research and Documentation
SADC	Southern African Development Community
WIBA	Women In Business Association

CHAPTER ONE

1.0 THE PROBLEM

1.1 Introduction

This study focuses on the subject of women and work. Specifically, it concentrates on Batswana women who are employed in the construction sector. This relatively recent phenomenon emerged in the late 1980s. The percentage of women's employment in the construction sector reached 4.7% in 1989 (Botswana National Development Plan 7:168). Women constituted 34% of the employees in the formal sector of the national economy in March 1991. In 1992 the number of female construction workers exceeded 10% (Kutlwano, November 1992, p.27).

The bulk of the women in the construction industry are rural migrants who are hired to work as general labourers in companies that are involved in the construction of houses and related projects. These women occupy the lowest stratum of women who are in industry. Put differently, they are "working destitutes".

Botswana's post-colonial development institutions are informed by a fundamentally wrong set of values and assumptions. Hence, they have dismally failed to upgrade the low status of "the disempowered multitude". Official policies and programs obscure, or are oblivious to structural

oppression that women and other disadvantaged groups experience in their daily lives. The ruling elites in this society have created and perpetuated the myth of the benevolence and neutrality of the state. This state is insensitive to the socially constructed inequalities that victimize the underprivileged women and their children. As of now, no serious efforts are being made to identify, isolate and articulate the problems and needs of women from unempowered classes. These women lack sympathetic allies who are committed to helping them to organize themselves, and confront their oppressive underdevelopment. They have experienced "benign neglect" from the intellectual elite, political parties and most non-government organizations.

The changing roles of women, as well as the crippling "poverties" that victimize them, should be seriously studied by women-led non-governmental organizations, social workers and the Women's Affairs Unit of the Ministry of Labour and Home Affairs so that appropriate intervention strategies can be developed to change and transform their situations. This study identifies and explicates societal changes that have contributed to the feminization of the construction sector. It promotes the view that Batswana women should not be treated as a homogenous category, for they come from diverse socio-economic, racial, ethnic, cultural and other structural locations.

Much as the study seeks to contribute to the development of a gender-based analysis, it also discusses the oppression of the marginal people within a theoretical framework that recognises "the ethic of domination". Women's oppression in Botswana occurs in a social, political, economic and cultural milieu in which men and women who have more power resources use them to dominate the powerless. Botswana women from privileged classes and "superior" nationalities and races oppress "weaker" women. There is ample evidence that even in developed countries, where feminism is comparatively developed, white middle and upper class women promote the oppression and exploitation of black, native and under-privileged white women. Gordon makes the following observation about women-on-women oppression in the United States,

White women have benefitted from and participated in the oppression of black women (Gordon, 1991:47).

This project demonstrates how female construction workers were oppressed in the agricultural economy, and how their oppression and exploitation is perpetuated by a non-agricultural superstructure. Thus, the employment of women in the construction sector is not a "revolution". Stated differently, if their participation in industry is not preceded by the radical restructuring of the male-dominated social institutions, the proletarianized peasant women would still not achieve quantitative and qualitative improvements in their socio-economic conditions.

It should be noted, however, that patriarchal and capitalist structures and their practices are also oppressive against powerless male workers in this and other sectors. The process of "internal colonization" that the marginal people experience is exacerbated and promotes domination by foreign capital.

The study is based on the information gathered from female and male construction workers, managers, site managers and supervisors from companies located in the Gaborone city and Mogoditshane village.

1.2 Background

The employment of female general labourers in the construction industry is a relatively new development which began in the late 1980s when Botswana was experiencing rapid urban physical growth. Although a lot of construction work is happening in many urban and peri-urban communities, the phenomenon of the female construction worker is most conspicuous in Botswana's capital city, Gaborone. It is one of the fastest growing African cities. Its population increased appreciably from 18,436 in 1971 to 133,468 in 1991.

The pauperization, migration and semi-proletarianization of peasant women is a function of, inter-alia, deep changes that have occurred in the rural and urban economy, as well as socio-cultural institutions in the post-independence era.

Botswana's post-colonial development strategies are influenced by the trickle-down theory (Nthoyiwa: 1981). The concentration of physical and social infrastructure in towns has largely contributed to serious rural unemployment and poverty.

In 1992 approximately 70% of the formal sector employment (excluding central government but including government education) was found in urban centres, of which Gaborone accounted for 42% (Statistical Brief; December 11, 1992 p.27).

The majority of the rural peasantry are women. Thus, they suffer more from the economic and social marginalization experienced by the rural dwellers. Thirty five percent of farming households are headed by women (Botswana National Development Plan 7:242). According to research these are the poorest of the poor (Central Statistics Office; 1982:667). Their poverty has been exacerbated by drought and the collapse of traditional institutions of social welfare and support. Drought significantly reduced the agricultural share of the national gross domestic product from 40% at independence to 3% in 1989 (Botswana National Development Plan 7:239). The precarious situation of the rural dwellers, who constitute 76% of Botswana's population, is neatly summed up by a youth from the Southern District:

We live very far from Kanye and even farther from Gaborone. When it rains, it is not too bad because people are busy growing crops and there is some milk from the cattle. But the drought is bad, with no crops, no milk and cattle (Campbell: 1990:45).

It should be noted, however, that although drought contributes to the disagriculturalization and impoverishment of the rural peasantry, it only serves to exacerbate social inequalities that are inherent in a capitalist economy that empowers cattle-barons, foreign investors and senior bureaucrats, who are mostly men.

The rapid development of the resource extraction economy, following the discovery of minerals, especially diamonds, helped Botswana to achieve the pinnacle of its economic growth in the 1980s (Southern African Economist; February 1993 p.19). Diamonds continue to be the major earner of foreign exchange. They account for 80% of export earnings and 50% of government revenues (Southern African Economist; February 1993 p.13).

Between 1983 and 1986, a severe drought contributed to a backlog in construction work (Mclvor; April 1990 p.40). After this period the physical expansion of Gaborone and other towns led to a critical need for more housing estates, factory shells, office blocks, new hotels, schools and roads (Mclvor; April 1990 p.40). This gave rise to the mushrooming of construction companies, some of which employ labour-intensive methods of production. The construction boom which followed attracted many peasants who are now employed at the low rungs of the job ladder, due to their lack of technological skills and values that are necessary in an urban-centred economy.

At first women were hired to sweep and clean completed buildings. In 1990 approximately 5% of the construction workers were women (Botswana National Development Plan 7:168).

Some women construction workers acquired rudimentary construction skills through participation in labour-intensive drought relief projects and training in brigades. However, formal training and employment in construction work are still dominated by men (Alexander; 1991:38).

Female enrolment in brigades and other vocational centres is lower. This situation is demonstrated by the 1992 trade and gender statistics obtained from Botswana Brigades Centre.

Table 1

Trade and Gender Statistics

<u>Trade</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>(%)</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>(%)</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(%)</u>
Building	661	87	98	13	759	100
Carpentry	412	83	82	17	494	100
Welding	74	65	13	15	87	100
Automech.	92	93	7	7	99	100
Business	17	11	143	89	160	100
Textile	5	6	73	94	78	100
Plumbing	25	81	6	19	31	100
Electrical	12	36	4	15	26	100
Agriculture	9	92	16	64	25	100
Machinery	12	92	1	8	13	100
Draughting	32	97	1	3	33	100
Total	1361	75	444	25	805	100

Source: Brigade Development Centre, 1992

The employment of female construction workers was preceded by a campaign for gender equality which was spearheaded by Emanq Basadi, a small Gaborone based women's organization, the Botswana Christian Council and some progressive individuals. The government was asked to create laws, policies and programs that would enhance women's participation in economic, social, political and other spheres of development.

The struggles for women's human rights were later complemented by the efforts of the Women's Affairs Unit, the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund and the Botswana Council of Women. However, these organizations are still very conservative. Their politics and programs are informed by the Women In Development (WID) and Women and Development (WAD) perspectives.

This means that they still support development programs that emphasize the addition and integration of women in the development process without challenging their subordination and oppression, which is based on gender, geographical location, socio-economic class, race, ethnicity and international economic order. The equal distribution of the fruit of economic development can only be realized through the empowerment of Third World women and the fundamental restructuring of the process of development (Maguire, 1984:3; Momsen, 1991:3;).

Although Emang Basadi is operating in a political environment that is structured and dominated by men, some people think it has the potential to accelerate the process of recognition of women's rights (Nengwekhulu, 1991:38). However, there are three reasons why it is difficult to link its "equal rights" campaign with the employment of women in a predominantly male dominated construction sector. First, the agenda and activities of this organization are heavily influenced by the concerns, interests and aspirations of elite women in academia and business. Financial, political and logistical barriers limits the interaction between elite, sub-elite, and peasant women (Stamp:1990). Emang Basadi's political rhetoric is couched in perspectives and concepts that were cultivated by North American and European feminists. This has significantly contributed to the marginalization of this organization.

The late president, Sir Seretse Khama suggested that Botswana's aspirations, goals and policies should be based on Botswana's values and traditions (Carter and Morgan;1980:182), and expressed in terms that are understood by Botswana. The uncritical absorption and application of western-based ideas and values by the South has resulted in the formulation of inappropriate social policies (Midgley:1981; Macpherson:1982; Macpherson and Midgley:1987; Jones:1990).

Second, Emanq Basadi's "equal rights" campaigns have not been followed by legal and programmatic measures facilitating the employment of female construction workers. Gender-sensitive and democratic policies should be developed to change women's status in the work force.

Lastly, Emanq Basadi and other organizations have not yet demonstrated any interest in the situation of female construction workers and other marginal women. For example, they have not yet devoted any attention to the working conditions and other problems that these women face daily. It is entirely possible that some professional women who want these women to provide cheap domestic labour are opposed to their employment in the construction sector.

1.3 Statement of The Problem

Botswana experienced a construction boom in the late 1980s. This boom coincided with the employment of women as wage labourers. The proportion of female construction workers increased sharply between 1989 and 1991. Formal training and employment in construction work was previously perceived as a male domain. The employment of female manual labourers in the construction sector is intriguing for the following reasons:

- a) Botswana has one of the most conservative patriarchal cultures in Africa. Cultural ideology and legislative measures serve to promote male power. At the moment there

is a widespread fear among women and those who seek to empower them that the patriarchal state in Botswana is more likely to "entrench the traditional discrimination against women (Peke, 1993:1).

Some conservative men still deny their wives a chance to further their education or seek employment. They are afraid that they might lose their power if women could achieve social and economic independence. As well, Section 115(1) of the Employment Act prohibits the employment of female manual labourers in under ground mines. The statistics of Botswana who work in the South Africa mines mention men only. All this reflects a culturally entrenched belief that men are physically stronger than women.

- b) There is a grave lack of social services, such as day care centres for children and the elderly, which can facilitate the participation of poor women in economic and social development projects. According to Galper (1980:29), writing in the context of the North, the unavailability of day care services manifests the state's insensitivity to the needs of low income women whose participation in the work force advances the interests of the capitalists.
- c) Although women are hired by construction companies there is still a large reserve army of unemployed Botswana men (Kutlwano; November 1992:27). The unemployment rate is

currently estimated at 15%. The crisis of unemployment is likely to be aggravated by the lay-offs at South African mines, which have traditionally provided employment to many Botswana men. The number of Botswana migrant mine workers has fallen from 17,200 to 14,000 (Budget Speech; 1993:6).

It should be clarified, however, that even though women have entered the construction sector there are many companies which do not hire women.

1.3.1 Social Work and the Marginalization of Female Construction Workers

Social work should place itself within an ideology of liberation. This should get its start from the deepest causes that have subjected men (and women) to oppression and underdevelopment (Alferro, 1972:80).

The abject conditions of marginal women in the construction and other sectors should be of interest to social work educators, researchers and practitioners and their colleagues who are committed to promoting true democracy, gender equality and social justice in Botswana. Social work should not only be expected to participate in the formulation and implementation of social policies and legislation that will facilitate the participation of disadvantaged women in

the labour force. There is also a dire need for it to help and support powerless proletarian women so that they can effectively confront structural forms of oppression that victimize them in and outside the work place. These include ethnicism, racism, classism, sexism, ageism and ableism. Social work's insensitivity to structural oppression emanates from the fact that the ruling classes in Botswana continue to use a well-orchestrated obscurantist rhetoric to discourage the development of serious structural analysis. The following statement illustrates this point.

Botswana come from a non-racial society in which the concept of social justice has long been one of the cardinal elements, and a country in which prejudice and discrimination on the grounds of race, colour, sex or ethnicity have no place (BOPA, 1991:3).

The effectiveness of social work will continue to be questioned by disadvantaged women and other disenfranchised groups until it re-orientates its moral and philosophical positions, and radically commits itself to their plight and the process of social change. This profession's conservatism and neglect of working and unemployed women might contribute to the accentuation of the feminization of poverty in Botswana, especially in the post-diamond era.

The escalation of material poverty in the female-headed households might generate other complex social problems which under-resourced human services agencies might not be able to overcome. Already social workers are failing to tackle the

phenomenon of street youth, parent and child abuse, teenage pregnancy, men's violence against women and declining academic performance of children from poverty-stricken families.

Besides the suggestion that social workers should seriously address women's oppression in the work place, they also need to develop an active interest in the productivity of these women. Botswana is defining the current crisis of low labour productivity as a national concern. Although Professor Melamu attributes it to the worker's "philistinism" and the emerging dangerous value of materialism (Motsokono, 1990:2) which threatens to cripple the Botswana society, this problem has a multi-factorial causation which includes the poor incentive system, culturally inappropriate supervisory apparatus and the lack of racial and gender sensitivity in the work place. As well, the process of industrialization is relatively new in Botswana, and many peasant women and men lack requisite knowledge, skills, work experience and attitudes that are essential in a modern or urban-based production system. Tony Jordan punctuated this point at the Botswana Confederation of Commerce, Industry and Manpower's (BOCCIM) Productivity seminar in 1992.

Low productivity is due to the relative inexperience of workers and lack of industrial skills in Botswana.....We must always bear in mind that we are employing first generation industrial workers (Kutlwano; November 1992:27).

The workers of this calibre will benefit from enough educational and supportive supervision. Social work managers and researchers should work with employers and resource-poor labour unions to identify other ways in which staff performance and welfare might be boosted. Research might also reveal working women's need for workshops or seminars on such topics as budgeting, smart shopping, saving and investment, stress management and assertiveness training.

In the pages that follow I account for social work's "neglect" of female construction workers. The social work profession and the welfare institutions in which it operates are a microcosm of society. They reflect and are heavily dominated by the hegemonic ideology and social, economic and political goals set by dominant groups in society. Social work which is informed by a liberating ideology, that is one which seeks to inculcate a critical and reflective consciousness among deprived classes and increase their access to and control over resources, can play the role of a progressive change agent. Social workers who are informed by such a radical ideology will identify and network with other people and organizations which seek to oppose and challenge structural inequalities.

Social work in Botswana is predominantly a state activity. Consequently, there is a lack of criticism and self-criticism among social work educators, students and practitioners which will delay the development of humanizing

and empowering social work approaches. Galper (1980:218) asserts that the majority of social workers in the Northern capitalist societies view their profession as "a caring society's response to the misery of its poor". According to this author the motives of social work should not be assessed as "benign assistance", but as class control. Social work is an integral component of the welfare apparatus that directly and indirectly serves the interests of the capitalist classes. Midgley has also identified the status quo maintenance role of social work in the peripheral nations.

Because the political elites of developing countries, have no intention of redistributing income and wealth to eradicate poverty, they use social work as a palliative, and as a means of camouflaging the real causes of deprivation (Midgley, 1981:152).

Good (1992:85) found that the policies of Botswana's post-colonial elites are not necessarily designed to eke out "the truly disadvantaged" from calamitous poverty, but to promote political quietism. Rural programs such as the Drought Relief and Remote Areas Development Programs have resulted in the creation of "welfare colonies", especially in the communities of the indigenous people. Good's view is corroborated by the works of Childers (1976), Picard (1987) and Bhuiyan (1987).

Social work's lack of dynamism and its inability to empower the poor is a function of Botswana's colonial and neo-colonial history. Social workers and social movements in this

country lack experience in political struggles because, unlike in other African countries, Batswana have never waged a liberation struggle, or challenged post-independence elite domination. The country lacks effective pressure groups to represent women and other marginalized sections of the population. Holm (Holm and Molutsi:1989) attributes this situation to the traditional political culture, partisan politics and the state's monopolization of economic decision-making.

Social workers in Botswana have not yet addressed employment and labour issues. This is not inconsistent with the ideology espoused by Malcom Brown, the first head of the Department of Social Work at the University of Botswana. In fact Brown has argued that,

Social work can not take on the responsibility for the economic state of the country, nor is it equipped to prepare the least productive for the job market (Brown, 1988:7).

This position is rebutted by Berglind (1988:21&61) who suggests that social work should confront extremely important socio-economic problems like unemployment. His sound justification for this stand-point is that employment problems cause or worsen other problems such as poverty, bad health, suicide, drug abuse and family breakdowns.

Social work's lack of interest in the question of female construction workers is symptomatic of the wrong assumption that the social and economic conditions of all working women

and men are necessarily quantitatively and qualitatively different from those of the unemployed destitutes. It operates according to the classical anti-collectivist ideology which limits the role of government to the creation and enforcement of rules that establish and enforce the free operation of the private market (George and Wilding:1985). Thus, the major limitation of the social work profession in Botswana is that it has uncritically accepted the limited role of a front-line distributor of means-tested hand-outs.

It is often wrongly assumed that "the benevolent and neutral state" also ensures that a conducive climate is created to enable all individuals who seek to upgrade the quality of their life to do so. Men and women are expected to work to meet their needs and those of their dependents. The emphasis on the "employability" of clients as one of the criteria used in determining their eligibility for welfare assistance means that social work is likely to neglect the "sturdy poor". The state intervenes if, and only if, "the unemployables" (such as the physically and mentally weak) fail to get support from relatives and friends (Wilensky and Lebeaux:1965; Friedlander:1963; Macpherson and Midgley:1987). In fact, besides Botswana's financial conservatism, which was inherited from Britain, the underdevelopment of social welfare in this country can also be explained in terms of the prevailing myth that communocratic values and extended family

systems are still alive. The residual minimalist approach to social welfare is found in The National Policy On Destitutes.

Social work agencies should not just limit their intervention to "the deserving poor". They should also contribute to the creation of policies and programs that will meaningfully address the deplorable living conditions of the working poor, such as poor female construction workers.

The ideological and philosophical positions that underpin the practice and teaching of social work are inappropriate to the Botswana context. The imposition of Western-based social work approaches that are insensitive to the culture and experiences of "the economically weakest" promotes underdevelopment. Social workers in a developing country like Botswana should invest their time and energy in promoting the economic, social, political and cultural empowerment of "people in the margins."¹ Thus, this profession should be shed of its clinicism. The preponderance of the psycho-social case work method in social work encourages the psychologization and individualization of structurally determined problems (Bailey and Brake:1975; Khinduka:1977; Midgley:1981; Resnick:1976; Macpherson and Midgley:1987).

Since this profession plays a reactive, and not proactive role in the process of social development, it is unlikely to intervene in the lives of female construction workers until

¹. A letter written to me by Professor Stephen Anderson in 1992, expressing his vision of social work in Botswana.

they experience personal crises and come for psychological counselling. Social workers' lack of interest in the problems of female construction workers and other low income workers can also be explained in terms of the class location and aspirations of educators, students, and practitioners. The negative attitudes of the African elite towards the peripheralized groups is a serious cause for concern. Chikwendu (1983) blames this problem on the education system in African societies. It transmits divisive values which cause the elite, with a predominantly peasant background, to shun and despise the rural peasantry and other disenfranchised groups. Barkan (1975:2-3) illustrates this point with a poem of a Ugandan schoolboy:

"Oh! How happy I am to be a schoolboy.
Free from grazing my Father's goats.
Free from digging in the garden.
Free from fetching firewood.
How proud I am!"

Graduates who have acquired this value orientation are less likely to be sympathetic to manual labourers such as those in the construction sector. According to Barkan (1975:3) manual labour is regarded as backward and degrading, an activity which must be avoided at all costs. Many Botswana are now worried about the consumerist tendencies and insouciant attitudes of their youth.

The Department of Social Work at the University of Botswana is a micro-version of an inherently conservative university which produces conservative graduates. Like most

students in African universities, the students in this University think being a change agent means being a member of a technocratic upper-middle class. They all see a university degree as a sesame to a comfortable life and high status. The major weakness of this university and its affiliates is that they have passively accepted to fulfil the role of certificate-producing factories without challenging the values that underpin the educational curricula.

It should be explained that some university students only enrol in the social work programs because of a shortage of places in other programs. When I enrolled in the Bachelor of Social Work program several of my classmates took social work as the last resort. Kadushin (1985) has also found that many people enter the social work profession due to, among other reasons, the shortage of employment in other sectors. This is one of the reasons why he recommends the establishment of an effective management apparatus to ensure that such people adequately and humanely serve the interests of clients. There is also another group of students who choose social work just because they think it is an "easy" means of securing a university degree.

Given that gender is an important developmental concept, and that there is a paucity of information on the different activities of men and women, social workers should develop a deep interest in research. The following reasons explain why

social workers have not studied the situation of female construction workers and other working women.

- i) Social work educators in Botswana tend to devote more time and effort to teaching and the supervision of students on field placement. Social work practitioners lack the capacity to conduct research. They depend on educators for professional leadership and guidance.
- ii) Most government-sponsored research in Botswana is geared towards the accomplishment of economic objectives. Thus, limited funds are available for academic research. Bulmer and Warwick (1983) have identified this as one of the major factors that militate against the development of social science research in the peripheral countries.
- iii) The employment of women in the construction industry is still perceived by some conservative male and female politicians and community leaders as "unacceptable adventurism".
- iv) Midgley (1981), Macpherson (1982) and Macpherson and Midgley (1987) would define the "neglect" of research by developing countries' social workers as a consequence of, inter alia, their dangerous dependence on knowledge and conceptions of social welfare developed by their counterparts in the metropolitan countries. The recent statement by Professor Miriam Hutton, the head of the Department of Social Work at the University of Botswana, buttresses this view-point.

It is very difficult to identify the specific ways in which social services and social work education should be different for Africa.²

Hutton also notes that many of the professors in the department and the textbooks are foreign.

1.4 The Objectives of the Study

- i) To identify and account for the specific factors that contributed to the employment of female general labourers in the construction industry.
- ii) To initiate research and discussion on societal changes that have affected women construction workers and the social problems and needs that are generated by these changes.
- iii) To provide a structural analysis of female marginalization.

In conclusion, social work agencies, planning divisions in government ministries, women and political organizations lack information about structural changes that have influenced women to enter the construction industry. The Botswana government and non-governmental organizations can only create effective policies and social delivery programs to enhance the

². From a letter written in August 25, 1992 to Dr. Vera of the International Association of Schools of Social Work by Professor Miriam Hutton, the Chair of the Department of Social Work at the University of Botswana.

status of female construction workers and other poor women if and when they fully understand their social and working conditions as well as their diverse needs. O'Barr (1976) rightly argues that rapid changes in the role of women in developing countries necessitates research that will sensitize governments to the problems, experiences, feelings and vision of women. John (1985) also points out that working women's special needs and responsibility should be adequately addressed.

Hopefully, this research undertaking will contribute to the broadening of the scope of social work in Botswana by pinpointing multiple structural variables that interact to create and perpetuate female marginalization. It will sensitize policy elites, women's organizations, employers in the construction industry, social work educators, students and practitioners to the poor living and working conditions of women construction workers, as well as the problems that arise from their participation in the labour force. It may also pave the way for other studies in the area of women and work.

CHAPTER TWO

2.0 INDUSTRIALIZATION AND "WOMEN IN POVERTY" IN BOTSWANA

2.1 Research and Poverty-Afflicted Women

The dearth of information about the phenomenon of women construction workers is one form of female marginalization. In fact, the neglect of downtrodden peasant women by researchers and policy elites in Botswana corroborates Chikwendu's assertion that the welfare of the preponderant masses is persistently ignored by the elites who attach no value to the contribution of the peasant classes to the national well-being (Chikwendu: 1983).

The skimpy information about these women was gleaned from newspaper articles and seminar and workshop reports that reflect the abject conditions of marginal women in Botswana. Female construction workers occupy a sub-sector of the exploited urban proletariat. They have been effectively disempowered and peripheralized by post-independence development strategies. Like all the oppressed in the country, they are helpless victims of an electoral dictatorship. They have been confined to a life of perpetual social and economic deprivation by a conservative capitalist patriarchy.

The bulk of development research in Botswana is insensitive to their predicament. As a matter of fact, development and academic research in Botswana is dominated by

elite "experts" who have not defined social transformation as their objective. In particular, development-oriented research, in large measure, serves to promote techno-bureaucratic domination. Academic researchers also employ research methodologies and processes that fail to address the questions and needs of the neglected poor. Hall has identified the economic underpinnings of conservative academic research.

For a man working in a University or a research institution, knowledge is the only commodity available to sell. It is necessary to gather or "mine" ideas and information in order to survive economically. Priorities must be given to collecting data in a central point, summarising it and then packaging it in such a way that journals, books, seminars, international conferences can make the use of it (Hall; 1978:2).

Galper (1980:216) rightly points out that research questions are influenced by the theories that researchers hold about the nature of reality. He firmly asserts that conservative politics can not reflect a working class perspective since they are overly concerned with the needs and preservation of the status quo. This statement is applicable to social work in Botswana. Its methods of intervention, including research, are informed by a philosophy that is undemocratic. They promote a top-down interaction between researchers and the oppressed. Thus, they are alienating, dominating and oppressive.

Bulmer and Warwick (1983) have critically discussed the use of positivist research methods in poor communities where participatory approaches have higher chances of success. Research is a political process and it should involve the poor, not as passive providers of data, but as active co-producers of knowledge. This will help them to identify and define their needs and act individually and collectively to change and transform their deplorable conditions (Freire:1974; Hall:1978; Maguire:1987).

The major achilles heel of the few "gender-conscious" studies and development projects that have been undertaken in Botswana is that they were geared towards the needs of business women, some of whom are wives of the political, bureaucratic and economic elites. The interests and aspirations of educated and privileged women have effectively overshadowed those of the powerless peasant and proletarian women. Thus, the lack of "sisterhood" among Botswana women weakens their "struggle" and should be urgently considered by women leaders.

The widespread tendency among Botswana politicians, social workers and researchers to lump the poor in one big "homogenous" category when discussing their situation has tended to emphasize socio-economic class at the expense of other important structural variables. Traditional Marxism's defence for its narrow class analysis is that socio-economic class is a crucial factor and other positions only serve to

promote sectional interests which have the potential of weakening the solidarity of the oppressed (Oakley and Marsden:1987; Nzongola-Ntalaja:1987). The former also explain that "gender-blindness" in policies, programs and development literature is reflective of a widespread erroneous thinking that women's interests are taken care of by their fathers, husbands and men-friends.

It should be emphasized that poverty is a multidimensional reality. Policy elites and the agents of the dispossessed in Botswana will not adequately understand their clients' appalling situation if they turn a blind eye to other important structural factors like age, physical and mental ability, ethnicity, race and geographical location of these clients. As well, they should realize that even though economic and social development has a negative impact on the status and self-image of women, Botswana men's power does not only emanate from economic resources. Conservative cultural ideologies and customs disadvantage women from all class backgrounds, albeit privileged women's better status which gives them leverage over powerless women and men. Even in depressed communities poor men abuse and exploit women. Aka Ojinnaka's argument buttresses this position:

When we speak of the 'poor of the poorest' we are...always speaking about women. Poor men in the developing world have even poorer wives and children (Ojinnaka; 1992:46-47).

2.2 Peasant Women and Rural Poverty

...the benefits from capitalist development, both economic and political, are likely to be long delayed for the mass of people in the Third World. Their standard of living may even get worse (Heatley, 1979:33).

Development literature shows that, like most of developing countries, Botswana's capitalist development is heavily influenced by the trickle-down theory (Nthoyiwa:1988). Development infrastructure and projects have been concentrated in major towns on the basis of the assumption that rural communities would eventually benefit from the "spin-off" effects of industrial and technological development. Chikwendu (1983) strongly argues in favour of ambitious rural development because the majority of the African people are peasants. Even in Botswana the agricultural sector is still the main source of livelihood for the majority of Batswana (Alexander; 1991:60). Nevertheless, Perrings (1988:9) warns that the absence of any structural change in the rural economy might contribute to economic depression in the rural sector.

The failures of rural programs that are meant to alleviate women's poverty can be explained in terms of the following factors. First, these programs have turned a blind eye to the existing socially constructed barriers which promote female marginalization. Second, some development institutions are inappropriate. They are not based on the

experiences and understanding of the most marginalized women, especially those living in the remote areas. Although many poor women might benefit from state-supported self-help or cooperative capitalism, the new institutions tend to promote individualism. Midgley has written elaborately in his Professional Imperialism about the way in which the superimposition of alien values on poor communities may reinforce, rather than overcome underdevelopment.

Third, the training of extension agents is faulty. It promotes classicism. Too often they present themselves as experts with complete answers to the poor's problems. Hence, they invalidate their experiences and vision, and even deny them a chance to participate in the development and evaluation of program services. The philosophy of people-based development from below is a sine qua non for successful development strategy (Batten:1965,1967; Midgley:1981; Hall:1978; Oakley and Marsden:1987; Midgley et al:1986; Clark:1991). Nevertheless, training institutions seem to emphasize the equipment of working knowledge and skills at the expense of subjects such as interpersonal communication, human relations and the study of "rural cultures". Examples abound of complaints raised by communities and politicians about extension staff who neglect their duties and abuse service consumers.

Picard (1987) and Gulhati (1990) firmly state that rural underdevelopment is not an historical accident. They explain this problem in terms of the lack of political commitment and the state's preference for obtaining revenue from the exploitation of minerals. This argument is corroborated by the Member of Parliament, Mr. Victor Moruti, who argued that rural areas are underdeveloped because government's promises to the people are never fulfilled (BOPA, 1993:3).

Professor Good (1992) posits that Botswana's rural development plans are mostly geared towards preventing a severe and often recurring drought from causing famine that can ravage the poor.

Botswana's urban-centred economy has accentuated the poverty of peasant women who constitute a significant proportion of the rural poor. The rate of unemployment for women is higher both in the rural and urban areas (Alexander; 1991:52). Cattle in Botswana are a source of economic and social power. Nevertheless, men own more cattle than women (Brown:1980; Alexander:1991). In 1988 the percentage of men and women who owned between twenty and thirty cattle were 84 percent and 16 percent respectively (Alexander; 1991:62).

Research also reveals that the economic, social and political marginalization of the rural areas has seriously undermined the rights of Botswana's indigenous people (Basarwa) who constitute the most wretched of the wretched of the earth. In 1976 Childers found out that the unemployed

Basarwa were dependent for 53 percent of their subsistence on begging and gathering. Thirty five percent had been pushed out of their land. The 4,500 Basarwa who were hired as farm labourers by Ghanzi cattle-barons were paid slave-wages (P2-P6). Some were paid with meagre hand-outs (Good, 1992:75).

The benefits of government programs designed to improve the quality of life of the rural poor have been captured by the rural elites (Good:1992), who are mostly men. They have a better access to credit and information. They also have better connections in the state bureaucracy. The 1992 Women In Business Association (WIBA) study has revealed how Batswana women are despised and harassed by people who are supposed to serve them.

Several women believed that they were taken less seriously...by government officials, employees, suppliers, banks, and sometimes customers...because they were women (Nkwe and Raile; 1992:17).

The report of the study quotes a frustrated woman complaining that,

it is easier to have my husband deal with them even though I am the one who is really involved (Nkwe and Raile; 1992:17).

Rural women's poverty has been exacerbated by drought, the breakdown of the traditional welfare systems and men's failure to provide financial support for their children. Many newspaper articles that discuss the situation of women construction workers show that most of them migrated to

Gaborone to find jobs so that they could support their children. Thus, in a country like Botswana where the fertility rate is relatively high (about six), and men are "irresponsible", women's reproductive role is likely to lock them in a vicious cycle of poverty. The state has failed to implement the Maintenance Act. It has also failed to develop social programs for poor mothers. The National Policy on Destitutes offers a meagre allowance, and it emphasizes the employability of the service recipients.

Many women and their children cannot subsist on the skimpy drought relief wage (P90). In fact, drought relief projects provide means-tested service, and they only "employ" a limited number of people on a monthly basis.

There is an important correlation between the feminization of poverty and the development of the phenomenon of "street boys" (Bobashi). However, there are other crucial factors, such as ineffective parenting skills, confusion that emanates from the "urban cultural mosaic", family break-down and spousal and child abuse which have contributed to the emergence of this phenomenon. Although no major study has been conducted about this social problem it has certainly grown rapidly. A rough estimate of "visible" "street boys" in Francistown was between 80 and 90 in 1990 (Machokoto, 1991). According to this journalist the number of juvenile cases dealt with in 1986-1987, 1988-1989 and 1989-1990 periods were 150, 90 and 110 respectively. In 1991 juvenile prisoners

constituted 9.7 percent of a total of 4495 prisoners in Botswana jails (Botswana Prisons Service Report, 1991).

Female-headed households constitute 33 percent of the households in Botswana (Machokoto, 1991). Most of them are materially too poor to meaningfully support their children (National Migration Study Report; Vol.3, 1982:667). Therefore, if the situation of poor working and unemployed women is not addressed the magnitude of their problems will increase.

According to Momsen (19:21) many poor married women who join their husbands in developing countries' cities are more likely to work as housewives, and look after their children and working husbands. Unmarried women who are illiterate and poor tend to work as domestic workers and prostitutes. They may also accept other "low-status" jobs. There is already a concern about the increasing rate of prostitution in Gaborone (Botswana Guardian; 1993:3; Mooketsi, 1993:7; Malema, 1993:1,4). The statistics of women who are employed in the domestic sector are unreliable.

The women who are working in the domestic sector have been neglected by both the state and feminists. They have no minimum wage policy (BOPA; 1993:3). They also lack an association or union that can represent their interests. The oppressive working conditions in this sector, as well as the fact that the supply of migrant women exceeds the demand for domestic workers, explain why there was a large reserve army of unemployed women in Gaborone in the late 1980s. Some of

these women were hired in the rapidly growing construction sector. Newspaper articles suggest that the construction companies' decision to employ women was motivated by their reliability and high productivity. There is also the suggestion that the number of males who were looking for employment at that time was low (Botswana Guardian; February 10, 1989).

It should be clarified that the participation of poor women in the modern construction sector has been seriously misconceived by some journalists and other Batswana. Although it is crystal clear that these illiterate and powerless women were pushed into this sector by dire economic straits and lack of suitable alternative employment, some people have linked it with the idea of women's liberation. In fact, this social phenomenon has been largely attributed to the "gender equality" campaigns waged by Emanq Basadi. The Chairperson of the Botswana House of Chiefs has dubbed it "the modern woman's thinking".

Kgengwenyane (1990:4) of The Botswana Guardian wrote an article entitled "Women Take Over", which incorrectly notes that women in construction are competing with men for jobs. Several other newspapers also mispresent the situation of female construction workers by suggesting that their employment has significantly altered their socio-economic position.

2.3 The Construction Sector

Botswana operates a dependent capitalist economy. It still requires a significant amount of foreign aid, expertise and investment to diversify its economy. The Trade and Investment Promotion Agency (TIPA) of the Ministry of Commerce and Industry is charged with the responsibility of identifying and attracting foreign investors. The need for investment capital is likely to increase in the post-diamond era (Perrings:1988).

The ownership and control of the construction companies in Botswana provides a clear case of the "compradorization" of a developing country by imperial capitalism. Although there is a multiplicity of infant citizen-owned companies they are experiencing debilitating competition from mature companies which enjoy economies of scale. The latter are engaged in multi-Pula construction contracts, and are owned by South African-based and other foreign capitalists. The 1992 Botswana Confederation of Commerce, Industry and Manpower's (BOCCIM) study notes that,

The local building industry is generally uncompetitive compared to the equivalent sector in South Africa. It is approximately five percent the size of its South African counterpart.

The Botswana Housing Corporation (BHC) is a parastatal organization which accepts construction projects from government and other parastatals. Resource-poor local

companies hardly ever win tenders issued by this corporation. They are mostly employed by private individuals. Big companies also engage them as sub-contractors. The share of foreign-based companies of the 90 percent of construction work that emanates from the government and parastatal bodies is 60 percent (BOCCIM Construction Study; 1992:4).

It should be clarified that these companies are not only employed in the construction of BHC houses. They also win tenders for big projects like roads, bridges, dams, schools and offices that emanate from local government councils and other public and private organizations.

Intimate relationships that have developed between foreign-based companies and the indigenous elites in the government, parastatal and private sectors facilitate the exploitation of Botswana by foreign capital. This collaboration became much clearer in the recent corruption scandals which resulted in the resignation of some cabinet ministers, the dismissal of senior bureaucrats and the cancellation and postponement of several contracts by the BHC. These local elites received kickbacks for assisting the companies to win lucrative building contracts (Facts and Reports: International Press Cuttings On South Africa; March 3, 1992 Vol. 22).

Although Botswana is self-sufficient in the production of face and cement bricks, paint, timber trusses and window and door frames, the government continues to import foreign

products (BOCCIM Construction Study, p.3). Besides the P140,000,000 that went into the pockets of foreign contractors, in 1991 approximately P521,000,000 was expended on foreign-sourced raw materials and supplies.

Table 2 below show units of houses that were built for BHC in the period between 1981/82 and 1990/91. The next table provides information about BHC project costs for 1990/91. The latter shows that Foreign Contractors accounted for 86.6% of the corporation's project cost.

Table 2

BHC Houses Built in A Ten Year Period

Year	Industrial class	Low cost	Medium cost	High cost	Medium flats	High cost flat	Total
1981/82		159	289	45	-	24	517
1982/83		-	170	63	-	-	233
1983/84	183	-	21	49	-	-	253
1984/85		487	194	233	-	-	914
1985/86	65	114	50	97	-	-	328
1986/87	10	306	96	19	-	-	531
1987/88		661	307	263	-	-	1231
1988/89		475	133	80	480	100	1268
1989/90		604	554	217	-	222	1597
1990/91		1051	528	192	-	701	2472
Total	260	3857	2342	1258	480	1047	9344

Source: BHC Annual Report, 1990/91

Table 3BHC Project Costs During 1990/91

<u>Description</u>	<u>Contractor</u>	<u>Ownership</u>	<u>Tender Price</u>	<u>Total</u>
34 houses	Tlhoraboroko	Local	P1000	P1500
357 "	Crusader Constr.	Foreign	P17654	P20755
23 "	Stocks Housing	Local	P2257	P2821
52 "	CSC & EC	Foreign	P3566	P4477
39 "	Keystone	Local	P2680	P3365
31 "	SLR Investments	Dual	P3184	P3979
1375 "	Wade Adams/Mak	Foreign	P134502	P167410
241 flats	CSC and EC	Foreign	P20360	P25195
19 houses	SP Construction	Local	P2635	P3289
215 "	SLR Investments	Dual	P10850	P13453
33 "	Tlhoraboroko	Local	P1278	P1579
53 "	Complant	Foreign	P10282	P12450
2472			210248	260273

Source: BHC Annual Report, 1990/91

Hadjor (1987:49-50) rightly points out that the greatest crime of African leaders has been their betrayal of the masses by directing African economies to serve foreign interests. The overwhelming dominance of metropolitan-based interests in international economic activity severely restricts the economic base of the peripheral bourgeoisie. Hence, they collaborate with the metropolitan bourgeoisie in the hope that they would constitute a solid base for themselves. Unfortunately, this relationship of domination has contributed to the formulation of policies and legislative enactments that disempower the peasant and proletarian classes in the peripheral nations.

2.4 Labour Legislation

The rights of workers in Botswana are protected under the Employment Act. Part XII of this Act deals with the rights of

working women. These include the absence from work in connection with confinement. It provides for maternity allowance. Section 22 of the Act renders Null abinitio any employer's termination of the contract of employment on the grounds of, inter-alia, the employee's membership in a registered trade union, or participation in the activities of such a union outside working hours, or with the consent of the employer, within working hours.

The Botswana Construction Workers Union (BCWU) has been formed to help in the protection of the rights of the workers. However, illiteracy among the workers and the weaknesses of this union and other structures account for the exploitation and oppression of the workers.

In 1989 J. Mbonini, a trade unionist, recommended the development of good labour legislation, the reduction of exploitation of the workers and the removal of restrictions that prevent free collective bargaining in Botswana (Mbonini; 1988:139-144). It is against this background that one may argue that the employment of women in the construction industry would not necessarily help them to achieve economic and social advancement, and a heightened sense of self-esteem. Armstrong (1990) also suggests that even in developed societies women's participation in the urban industrial labour force has not necessarily freed them from patriarchal and capitalist domination.

2.5 Women-Owned Construction Companies

There is inadequate information on women-owned income generating ventures in Botswana. There are even no available statistics on construction businesses that are owned by women. The 1992 WIBA study, which was funded by the United States Agency for International Development and the Botswana government, revealed that the majority of women-owned enterprises are in the low-income traditional sub-sector. These include beer-brewing, dressmaking, knitting and vending. The information on women-owned businesses is, however, deceiving because some men, especially civil servants, register their businesses under their wives' names.

The United Nations Representative in Botswana has just recently observed that even though women's participation in operating and working in small-scale business enterprises has increased few women actually own these businesses (Botswana Guardian; July 31, 1992). Social, economic, legal and other structural impediments account for this situation. Other constraints are the lack of access to information on available opportunities and benefits. As well, many women lack requisite knowledge, skills and experience in, inter-alia, trade information, market research, sales promotion, export procedures and documentation. Home and child-care responsibilities also militate against women's economic, social and political participation (Nkwe and Raile; 1992:9).

CHAPTER THREE

3.0 Theoretical Framework

3.1 Internal Colonization Thesis

My conceptualization and discussion of the oppressive conditions of peasant and semi-proletarianized women in Botswana is informed by the "internal colonization" thesis. My choice of this theoretical perspective is based on the works of, inter-alia, Oakley and Marsden (1987), Chikwendu (1983) and Momsen (1991). However, it is only Oakley and Marsden who actually use this paradigm in their work to account for the inequalities and abject poverty that are experienced by the poor in the peripheralized communities in developing societies. The other authors only present discussions that are consistent with this perspective.

The "internal colonization" thesis recognizes the multiple structural locations which the economically, socially and politically marginalized groups occupy, and explains how these locations contribute to their oppression.

Social workers who adopt this perspective will not perceive a community or society as a homogenous and stable entity. The perspective acknowledges the existence of a multiplicity of conflictual "communities of interest" in a community. Oakley and Marsden have stated the usefulness of this theoretical approach:

It enables people to identify particular groups with conflicting interests and points towards an alternative analysis of society in which different groups struggle for control of available assets and enrichment which characterizes existing relationships of inequality and sees both processes as obstacles to the development process (Oakley and Marsden, 1987:9).

In particular this perspective posits that structurally-based inequalities are a consequence of and promote the subordination of certain regions in a country to the capital, of rural areas to urban communities, of the disempowered masses to the power elite, of peasant farmers to the agricultural bourgeoisie, of racial or ethnic minorities to dominant racial groups, and of women to men (Oakley and Marsden, 1987).

It should be noted, though, that the process of "internal colonization" in developing countries is accentuated by the operation of imperial capitalism. Thus, Walter Rodney (1972) attributes the peripheralization of Africa to the role of European robber capitalism. The major limitation of his contention, though, is that it obscures the internal dynamics that obtain in African societies. Hadjor (1987) and Nzongola-Ntalaja (1987) assert that African leaders and intellectual elites should be held accountable for their oppression and pauperization of the masses.

Although Chikwendu's work is "gender-silent" it illuminates the precarious situation of the African peasantry and the semi-proletarianized poor. According to him, the peasantry are the most exploited of the African people.

He clearly accounts for their disagriculturalization, and attributes their ghettoisation in the industrial labour force to, among other factors, their lack of an equipment of technological skills and values. He explains their neglect by the privileged classes in terms of the latter's acquisition of divisive western values. The urban dwellers despise and shun them because they are said to retain conservative world views and anachronistic institutions and customs. Like Hadjor (1987) and Nzongola-Ntalaja (1987), Chikwendu situates the calamitous "poverties" that afflict the dispossessed within the discussion of the process of wealth accumulation which has supported the establishment of the ruling and intellectual elite in Africa and the metropolitan bourgeoisie.

Even in Botswana the peasants, who are mostly women, have been seriously abused and exploited by a capitalist patriarchy. They have been accused of "laziness", "risk-aversion" and the resultant failure to capitalize on government "poverty-focused" programs. Thus, the national economy is geared towards the needs of "ambitious" Batswana and foreigners who are "willing" to achieve self-improvement and contribute to the accomplishment of Botswana's development objectives. However, the Panos Institute found out that as long as the poor are taken into confidence, motivated and helped to organize themselves and to access resources they can make an immense contribution to national development (Bakhoum et al: 1989).

The internal colonization thesis also helps us to explain the exclusion of many women from development programs, and the marginalization of important issues which affect their social, economic and political lives. As well, it helps us to appreciate why women who actively participate in such programs would not necessarily achieve significant improvements in different spheres of their lives. Oakley and Marsden (1987:2) found out that rural women in many countries in the South have a limited chance to participate in development programs, despite political leaders' rhetoric that such programs are meant to upgrade their socio-economic status. The following impediments were identified by these authors' research (1987:11) as some of the crucial reasons that limit the dispossessed's chances of self and collective improvements. In particular, these roadblocks to participation perpetuate the subordination of resource-poor women. They include:

- i. Lack of free access to and control over economic resources;
- ii. Lack of viable pressure groups to articulate the problems and needs of the poor;
- iii. The economic, social and political domination of the dispossessed by local elites;
- iv. The dependent and margin sized nature of the lives of the oppressed;
- v. The air of despondency and despair which characterized their lives.

According to these authors, participation is concerned with the distribution of power in society. They point out that influential groups in society determine the distribution of resources. Although political leaders in Africa usually attributed their countries' poverty of resources, Sambona (1983:24) asserts that overseas development aid which could be used to create resources, services and opportunities for the African poor has benefited corrupt leaders. The "male bias" which is prevalent in development endeavour of many developing societies emanates from the pervasive erroneous thinking that women would automatically benefit from such development by virtue of being appendages of male-dominated house-holds (Oakley and Marsden, 1987:2). Rogers (1980) also defines the bias against women in most development programs as a function of structural sexism of planning agencies. Palmer (1980) has pointed out that even a basic needs approach will fail to ameliorate women's poverty if the fundamental issue of women's powerlessness is neglected.

Oakley and Marsden's discussion of the impact of internal colonization on women in the South is also applicable to the Botswana context. The political and economic hegemony of urban centres in Botswana has resulted in limited opportunities for rural women. However, this does not imply that the situation of all urban women has significantly improved. The available resources have accumulated in the

hands of fewer and fewer people (McIvor, 1940:40). Women's economic, social and political participation is restricted by structural and cultural barriers (Oakley and Marsden, 1987:2-3). Thus, even though cattle are a vital source of personal wealth and production in Botswana (Brown, 1980:14), a huge proportion of cattle are owned by male farmer (Alexander, 1991:62).

This situation has a long history, and has become one of the entrenched aspects of Botswana's economic culture. For instance, Peters' (1984) work shows that in 1932 approximately 25% of all the cattle in Mochudi tribe were owned and controlled by only five men. The chief and his uncle had 5,500 and 2,500 cattle respectively.

Brown argues that the monopolization of cattle by Batswana men enhances their economic independence and power. She points out that many Batswana women are prevented from owning cattle by both the cash economy and inheritance practices which are biased in favour of males. She recommends the formulation of class and gender-sensitive agricultural policies and programs.

One of the most serious forms of dispossession that rural women are experiencing is the monopolization of fertile land by cattle and other farming barons (Nthoyiwa: 1981; Picard:1987). This has been facilitated by the introduction of agricultural policies such as the Tribal Land grazing Policy (TLGP). Nthoyiwa discusses two important consequences

of the elites' selfishness. First, it has led to the acceleration of rural-urban migration, which exacerbates rural poverty. Second, it has given the farming elites more power to determine farming activities of the peasantry, especially the indigenous people, whose communities are the poorest of the poor.

Arable farming involves some of the poorest Batswana who have no means of helping themselves. In fact, much of these people's farming activities are determined by the cattle-barons to whom they often align themselves in the hope to gain access to their cattle needed for draught power (nthoyiwa; 1981:50).

There are indications that tribalism in Botswana is one of the structural factors that disadvantages Batswana women from marginal nationalities. They experience harassment and economic exploitation perpetuated by employers who belong to "the super-tribes". For instance, in August 1989 Botswana Craft dismissed some of its female staff from the Bakalanga community on the grounds that "if we wanted to keep our jobs we must desist from speaking Inkalanga (Matumo; 1989:1,7). A social work professor, S. Anderson, has also observed that the policies of Botswana are prejudicial towards women and members of minority tribes.³

³. Professor Anderson's letter.

The penetration of foreign capital, especially from South Africa, has also exposed Batswana workers to racial and class oppression in the work place. Hence during the 1976 BCL mine strike outraged workers accused the government.

You find the money to pay foreigners over one thousand rands a month. So you can find the money to pay the ordinary workers who get less than one hundred rands a month (International Research and Information Group; 1984:14).

Momsen's (1991:68) discussion of the oppression experienced by women in the South is premised upon three structural variables; namely gender, class and international capitalism. She demonstrates how women suffer under rural and urban capitalism. She identifies three forms of "female marginalization". These are the exclusion of women from certain types of occupations on account of physical strength, moral danger and the absence of facilities for women in the work place, and the concentration of women in the periphery of the labour market. The third form of marginalization is based on culture and ideology.

The "internal colonization" thesis accounts for the changes that gave rise to the rapid growth of the "urban enclaves" in Botswana, "person-power flight" to the cities, the employment of women as general labourers in the construction industry, and the deterioration of the quality of life in the rural areas and poverty-afflicted urban slums such as Old Naledi, Mmasemenyenga and Botshabelo. These changes

are, by all manner of means, not unrelated to the influential role of foreign capital in the national economy. They have important social policy implications.

Chikwendu (1983) and Macpherson (1987) note that urban communities in developing countries are centres for capitalist production. Put differently, they are local service stations for international monopoly capital. They command economic, social and political power which enables them to determine the pattern of distribution of resources and social welfare services. They are, however, dominated by privileged classes which use their considerable political power to appropriate all the amenities produced under the modern sector of the economy.

The subordination of the rural sector to the "economic enclaves" has generated multiple social problems which aggravate rural underdevelopment and poverty. Jones (1990:196) found out that rural-to-urban migration creates a welfare vacuum which severely affects the welfare of children and women. He notes that women suffer in two ways. They experience social undervaluation, and are also forced to deprive themselves of food and other necessities in order to supply their families.

Migration to the cities also results in population imbalance. Many rural communities in Botswana have a truncated population structure. This means that young and old people predominate in the rural areas, a factor which contributes to

a decline in agricultural or rural productivity. As well, old people are illiterate and politically inactive, and as such are incapable of pressuring the government to create effective rural programs. Thus, rural Botswana is not only experiencing material poverty, but also the poverty of development ideas.

Urban areas also serve as fertile grounds for cultural imperialism. They are a source of values that promote materialism and conspicuous consumption, all of which contribute to the development of a host of social problems including crime, elder and child neglect, prostitution, teenage pregnancy, alcohol and drug abuse, homelessness, squalid living conditions, men's violence against women and marital breakdown.

Although these social conditions reinforce social and economic underdevelopment in the South. Many governments are incapacitated by economic and political corruption, huge military spending, debt and structural adjustment problems to create effective social service infrastructure to address them. Elite deviance and other forms of corruption are threatening to engulf Botswana's society. The country's growing military budget during these harsh economic times also accounts for meagre social expenditures (Facts and Reports: International Press Cuttings On Southern Africa: May 28, 1993).

3.2 Resource Extraction Economy

The afore-mentioned societal changes are a function of the development of a resource extraction economy which is inspired by Western models of development. The neo-colonial state could not successfully fulfil its extractive, regulative and distributive functions without required material resources. The process of resource extraction began in the 1970s and was enhanced by the discovery of large diamond deposits at Jwaneng. The revenue generated through the exportation of diamonds, beef, copper-nickel and other resources were responsible for Botswana's impressive economic success in the 1980s. The country's natural resources, political tranquillity, good human rights record and cheap labour which is free from political agitation, and a policy which effectively permits the free repatriation of dividends and profits, attracted foreign capital.

However, the following crucial points should be noted. First, the development of a resource extraction economy was not preceded by an effective blue-print on human resource development, and as such the high rate of illiteracy and lack of technological skills hindered the full participation of Botswana in the modern urban-oriented economy. This is a common problem in neo-colonial Africa.

The critical situation of unemployment was exacerbated by the importation of expensive capital intensive mining technology and skilled person-power. There seems to be a lack

of commitment on the part of the government to localize most of the posts that are occupied by the expatriate personnel, a factor which also contributes to the low productivity of Botswana workers.

Second, Botswana's economic prosperity has, in effect, resulted in "growth without distribution". As a matter of fact, the urban confined economic growth has also contributed to the pauperization of rural Botswana. The urban-rural and elite-mass gaps are still widening rather than narrowing (Southern African Economist; February 1993:19). Thus, Chris Mclvor has critically commented about Botswana's 1980s "economic miracle".

The Botswana economy...has helped to exaggerate divisions between an increasingly rich elite and the majority of citizens who have not shared in this new found wealth (Mclvor; August/September, 1990:4).

Professor Jeffris (1991:31) of the Department of Economics at the University of Botswana also points out that Botswana has not utilized its economic prosperity to solve starvation wages, the escalating prices of essential goods and services and other problems faced by the vast majority of its workers.

In the late 1980s there was a reserve army of the economically, socially and politically frustrated youth, the bulk of whom were peasant women. There is evidence that more women than men were looking for employment during this period. The rate of unemployment was estimated to reach 25 percent by

the end of 1990. Professor Charles Perrings (1988) warns that youth unemployment will continue to be a pressing socio-economic problem, especially because the mineral sector, which has been the linchpin of the national economy, is declining.

The unprofitability and consequent decline of the agricultural industry, as well as the low demand for domestic workers, left many peasant women without any viable alternative employment opportunities. Some illiterate and unskilled women in Gaborone and its vicinity could only find employment in the booming construction sector. The appreciable increase of the population of Gaborone from 20,000 in 1980 to 160,000 in 1990 (Mclvor; April 1990:40) and the increase in the demand for housing significantly contributed to the rapid expansion of the construction sector.

3.3 The Impact of Internal Colonization on the Tswana Family.

The widely held view that Batswana women benefit from the resources of their husband, fathers or men-friends has three obvious flaws. First, it assumes that all male-headed households have resources to support their members. Botswana's dependent capitalist economy also exploits and impoverishes many men. As a matter of fact, many studies demonstrate that many men and women in the South are victims of capitalist development, though not equally (Macpherson and Midgley, 1987:190).

Second, this position ignores the marginal position that women occupy in many male-headed house-holds. Third, it turns a blind eye to the fact that the process of industrialization, urbanization and modernization, and the resultant internal colonization have contributed to the dislocation of some of the institutions which used to be important sources of welfare and support for women and children. Thus, this view does not even account for the emergence of the growing phenomenon of "the female breadwinner". Brown rightly points out that;

With 30% of the households in Eastern Botswana, and 35% of those in Kgatleng headed by women, and with so many unmarried mothers, the problem of employment should not be brushed aside with the hope that ... jobs for men automatically mean better lives for women (Brown, 1980:15).

The emergence of the phenomenon of "the female breadwinner" can be explained in terms of the increase in the rates of increasing unmarried parenthood and divorce, men's promiscuity and heavy drinking, the degeneration of the extended family system and the decline of mutual assistance pattern, the depletion of more productive person-power in the rural areas, and the rising crime rate which results in the imprisonment of more males. The rising rate of crime is seen as a result of, inter alia, the increasing number of school drop-outs who are roaming the streets (Ngwako; 1993:3). As well, the national economy is dominated by foreign and the local power elite (McIvor, 1990:40). Brown found out that

industrialization and urbanization have significantly affected the family institution and the lives of Batswana women. She views this situation as a consequence of the periperalization of the rural sector by both the South African economy and Botswana's urban-centred development efforts. She makes the following remarks about the impact of the migrant labour system on Botswana's economy and the status of women.

The benefits to South Africa from this system have been costs of Botswana, with rural development in particular affected. Women have been hurt differently. Their economic position has been undermined. Migrant labour has also taken part of the blame for serious social problems which burden Botswana. Chief among this is the breakdown of the family (Brown, 1980:13).

The migration of Batswana men to urban Botswana and South Africa, and the diffusion of foreign culture into Botswana society has undermined tradition values. In a traditional Tswana society men and women participate in the raising of children. Society expected adult men and women to marry and support their families and relatives. However, the proportion of unmarried mothers is now increasing (Alexander *et al*, 1992: 89-90). According to these authors seduction-maintenance cases as a percentage of total civil cases were 23.3, 25.6 and 18 per cent for the years 1987 to 1989 respectively. In the same period the totals of divorce cases dealt with by the High Court were 21.5, 22.9 and 23.4 per cent respectively. Brown's study led her to the following conclusion:

Women are not only heading households today, many are also raising children without the help of these children's fathers, though most are still young and living with their parents, or working in towns and considering their parents' home as their own (Brown, 1980:11).

This author found out that 85% of the female workers who participate in her study were single mothers. Sixty-seven per cent of them had children who were below the age of 15 years. Brown's study also indicates that single mothers encounter serious problems which make the raising of children single-handedly an onerous duty. These include the fact that Botswana "men can find jobs where women cannot, and the jobs that men do are better paying" (Brown, 1980:4). As well, some migrants do not remit money to the mothers of their children. Those who do, do not remit it regularly. Most of the women who took part in Brown's study were doing low-paying dead-end jobs, such as household duties and working as shop assistants. They were earning between P15.00 and P45.00 per month.

Brown's work also identifies some of the factors that contribute to the feminization of poverty in Botswana. These include the breakdown of communalistic practices such as the lending of cattle to poor families by well-to-do relative and friends which the former could milk and use for ploughing, as well as the decline of other ways of sharing wealth such as the payment of dowry to women's parents. The author also mentions an important point which finds support in the work of Barkan (1975), Koma (1976) and Chikwendu (1983). This relates

to counter-productive values that the modern youth in Botswana and many African societies have imbibed, which make them shun agricultural work and other economic activities that are undertaken by peasant classes. The author clearly explains this phenomenon in relation to young Botswana women.

Young women today are not as interested in farming as old people. Some seem reluctant to farm even when they have no immediate employment, arguing that the work is hard (Brown, 1990:10).

Nthoyiwa (1981) would argue that the declining participation in agricultural production is a function of Botswana's changing political economy, which has subordinated rural communities to urban Botswana. It is clear that the Botswana government cannot effectively stimulate agricultural development if other forms of socio-economic and cultural development are neglected. These include education, banking health services, transport, the creation of effective community organizations such as agricultural cooperatives, the preservation of positive aspects of Tswana culture and the development of agro-based and other industries. Nthoyiwa's work clearly demonstrates that as long as the prevailing pattern of development which enriches the centre is not discontinued, the periphery will get poorer and poorer. This situation might culminate in serious political, economic and social crises in the future (Parson:1984).

3.4 Maintenance of Children and Wives

The failure of social policy to respond effectively to the oppressive conditions experienced by marginal women and their children can be partly explained in terms of the underdevelopment of the fields of women and child welfare. Although many Batswana women and children are afflicted by poverty the country's programs are "gender neutral" and insensitive to the degenerative conditions of deprived children. Thus more work needs to be done to enhance the status of women and children. However, the success of any programs in this area can only be guaranteed if women can be given a chance to participate in their formulation, implementation and evaluation.

As of now the state lacks a proactive policy to assist poor single mothers. There are no social programs to address the growing phenomenon of "street-boys". Although the Children's Act was promulgated in 1981 to respond to the needs of neglected children and to rehabilitate juvenile offenders, the conservative state is reluctant to commit resources to its full implementation. The dominant thinking that the family should/will take care of women and children is still operating in this society.

Children can benefit from maintenance provided under the Affiliation Proceedings Act and the Deserted Wives and Children Protection Act. Section 25(1) of the Matrimonial Causes Act confers a general power on the High Court, in any

action for divorce or nullity of marriage to make "such interim orders for the payment of alimony to the wife as the court thinks just and equitable." However, this Act discriminates against women married under customary law. The Affiliation Proceedings Act requires that men pay a minimum of P40 per month towards the maintenance of their children. However, the Act does not stipulate that women should pay this money if the children are living with their fathers. As well, the state does not provide an allowance for children whose fathers are unable to maintain them. The National Policy on Destitutes Provides a minimum assistance of P45 and P60 for "deserving destitute" in urban and rural areas respectively. However, social welfare departments that implement this policy have limited funds even to cater for all bona fide cases of destitution. They are more likely to insist that women should report "irresponsible" men to the District Commission's Office.

I will briefly outline the factors that affect the implementation of the above-mentioned maintenance legislation. But first I should state the point that in a male-dominated society men do not only have the power to exploit and oppress women, but also entrenched patriarchal culture and practices militate against the implementation of any legislations or programs that seek to promote the welfare of women and their children. I adopt the position that the

state serves the interests and aspirations of the ruling classes. These classes are predominantly male.

In Botswana, families, customary courts, District Commissioner's office and Magistrate court handle matters relating to the maintenance of children and/or wives. However, the first two institutions have lost the crucial role that they used to play. In particular, modern people have lost respect for the customary court and chieftaincy. This explains why when the executive of the Botswana Telecommunications Corporation requested the members of the Botswana House of Chief to help in combating the problem of telephone vandalism, which cost his company huge amounts of money, they replied that they were incapacitated to help by the fact that "chiefs no longer have powers" (Botswana Daily News January 8, 1993).

Research findings indicate that institutional and enforcement problems hamper the administration of maintenance laws in Botswana (Alexander et al, 1992:69-71). According to these authors single women seeking maintenance for their children experience the following frustrating difficulties:

- i. Delays in getting a date set down for the hearing of the case due to the overcrowded court calendar and shortage of magistrates.
- ii. Delays in the issue of summons emanating from difficulties in tracing the alleged father mainly because

of his unemployment or employment mobility, and the trivialization of maintenance summons by the police who devote priority to criminal summons.

- iii. In the event that maintenance orders are granted, their enforcement is rendered inefficient by men's failure to pay and the courts' failure to invoke future earning and civil imprisonment.
- iv. Even where the father does pay, the payments are generally irregular.

Several problems account for some women's reluctance to report men who refuse to support their children. These include legal illiteracy, lack of moral support from parents or relatives and the fear that men might retaliate by assaulting them. Some women also "fear that the fathers might bewitch the children causing them to die in order to evade payment" (Alexander et al, 1992: 160). The authors were also told by magistrates that some single mothers do not seek maintenance for subsequent children because of the negative attitudes towards single mothers and their own internalized traditional values.

It should be noted that although many people think that Batswana men who fail to support their children are just irresponsible, this problem also has a structural explanation. In particular cultural colonialism has effectively destroyed the forces of morality among many Batswana men. Andreski

(1968: 79-84) has long identified the impact of cultural imperialism on the different sphere of the life of the African people, including politics. He argues that the conflict between the African and foreign culture has engendered "moral disorientation" in African societies. Brown's position regarding the problem of Batswana men who do not support their children is also instructive.

While many of the men who father these children can be considered financially irresponsible in not supporting them, the problem should be seen in its proper socio-economic context of oscillating migration and the breakdown of authority in the family which might otherwise have brought pressure to bear on its irresponsible members (Brown, 1980:13).

The difficulties associated with the implementation of maintenance laws show that there is an urgent need for social workers and members of other pressure groups to work hard so that the laws can better serve single mothers. One of the explanations for the underdevelopment and ineffectiveness of legislations and programs that are meant for women and children is that social work agencies, non-governmental organizations, the Women's Affairs Unit and other women's groups do not communicate with one another and coordinate their intervention. As well, the social work profession in Botswana is unassertive. It is still preoccupied with textbook approaches that are irrelevant to the needs of women and children. As long as social workers in Botswana lack

interest in gender concerns, social policy will continue to marginalize women's issues.

Khinduka has clearly stressed the need for social workers in the South to develop active interest in the fields of women and child welfare. Social workers in Botswana should seriously consider the following recommendation:

Social workers in the third world should organize and mobilize women and try to emancipate them from the shackles of backwardness - perpetuating customs so that they can play an increasingly constructive part in their society, and what is equally important, take the message of modernity to their families, especially to their children (Khinduka, 1971:71).

This author also recommends that industrial social work be introduced in the South to help the workers to contribute to the national economy by increased productivity, and to ensure that they are not exploited by unscrupulous industrialists. As I have shown previously women are more likely to be abused by employers because of their generally low status in society. The 1991 Southern African Development Community (SADC) report, entitled Human Resource: Primary Factor In Development, also reveals that the appreciable increase of women's participation in the formal sector in the SADC region has not obliterated the tradition social sub-culture that discriminates against and downgrades women (BOPA, 1991).

However, the employment of women as general labourers in this sector was, and is still, "opposed" by ultra-conservative

people who perceive it as a culturally unacceptable development. Just recently the Chairperson of the Botswana House of Chiefs heavily criticized this new phenomenon.

He could not come to terms with the modern woman's thinking which sees her working in the construction companies, doing jobs mostly reserved for men, sweating and doing hard labour (Botswana Guardian; March 27, 1992).

3.5 Hypotheses

The independent variables that correlate with women's employment in the construction industry (dependent variable) are rural poverty, drought, the breakdown of traditional welfare institutions, decline in employment in the household sector, women's cooperative attitude and higher productivity, and the construction companies demand for cheap unskilled person-power. Thus, this study seeks to test the following hypotheses:

- i) The exacerbation of rural poverty by drought and the breakdown of traditional welfare institutions, as well as the decline in employment in the house-hold sector, influenced peasant women to seek employment in the construction sectors.
- ii) The shortage of cheap unskilled labour influenced construction companies to hire peasant women.
- iii) Female workers are more responsible and compliant labourers.

CHAPTER FOUR

4.0 Research Methodology

4.1 Sample Population

The respondents of this study were drawn from the Gaborone city and Mogoditshane village. The latter is situated approximately three kilometres west of Gaborone. The population of these communities can be broken down according to gender as follows:

Table 4

Distribution of population of Gaborone and Mogoditshane
By Gender

<u>Area</u>	<u>Male</u>	<u>Female</u>	<u>Total</u>
Gaborone	68,248(51%)	65,220(49%)	133,468
Mogoditshane	<u>7,028(49%)</u>	<u>7,220(59%)</u>	<u>14,246</u>
Total	<u>75,274(51%)</u>	<u>72,449(51%)</u>	<u>147,714</u>

Source: Population and Housing Census, 1991

A total of 66 female and 20 male construction workers were selected. The statistics of all construction workers in these communities are not available. In 1992, 15 percent (33,800) of formal sector employees were in the construction

sector. The Central Statistics Office (CSO) provided a list of 528 companies which 29 percent were operating in Gaborone. A list prepared on October 21, 1992 by Botswana Confederation of Commerce, Industry and Manpower (BOCCIM), an organization which represents the interests of the private sector employers, reflected only 65 construction companies. However, many companies are not registered with this organization.

The workers were mostly rural migrants employed as general labourers. The companies were represented by managers, general foremen and supervisors. Although some individual companies were contracted for different types of construction work, such as electrical construction, the construction of roads, bridges and dams, all the workers who participated in the study were only involved in the construction of houses, office blocks and similar projects.

In every one of the eight companies, a small group of between five and eight women was chosen to answer research questions. Nineteen male workers were conveniently chosen from three companies, although the original proposal did not include males. They were included specifically to help me to gain more insight into the problem of a high turnover of male workers, which was mentioned by both female workers and the companies. The 13 "opinion leaders" in the original proposal

were excluded on account of time constraints and my observation that the feminization of the construction sector has not yet attracted the attention of community and political leaders.

A simple random sampling design was mostly used to select female and male workers and the companies. The lists of names of the workers was prepared by the companies. The lists of companies were obtained from BOCCIM and the CSO. However, the sample of these companies was obtained from the BOCCIM list.

4.2 Data Collection Instruments

The data for this project were gathered through the use of "methodological marriages". This approach has been suggested by Bulmer and Warwick (1983:77) to researchers studying poor communities in developing societies. These authors are cognizant of the point that the use of one approach or method may not necessarily help the researcher to effectively capture social reality in these communities. This approach enhances the quality of research data through the integration of different research instruments. The following methods were applied: interviews, structured forums, observation at construction sites and newspaper articles. As well, information was gathered from government departments and other organizations.

The data on forums and interviews are presented in the following table.

Table 5

Summary Data On Forums and Interviews

Data Collec.	Managers	Supervisors	Female	Male	Total	
<u>Method</u>			<u>Labourers</u>	<u>Labourers</u>	<u>Other</u>	
Forum	-	-	66	21	-	87
Interview	9	9	66	-	7	84
Total	9	9	66	21	7	112

This table reflects a total of 112 people who participated in both forums and interviews. The 66 female workers participated in both processes. The figure nine for managers includes directors and personnel and site managers. In some companies busy managers referred me to site managers and direct supervisors. The latter are accountable to the former. However, in some companies the two positions are combined. In some sole proprietorships, like Come Again and Makemma, companies' managers had an important supervisory role. The 66 females and 21 males were selected from eight and three companies in which both managers and the workers participated in the study. "Others" on the table refers to

members of other organizations such as the representatives of the Construction Workers Union, Department of Mines, the Police and Department of Transport.

All representatives of the sixteen companies were interviewed. Male construction workers were asked a few open-ended questions. My combination of survey approach (interviews) and a participatory approach (structured forums) in collecting data from the female workers is a recognition of the fact that the former approach is inconsistent with the principles of adult education and progressive social work. As a matter of fact, most of this data was collected by means of forums. Hall (1978:8) Maguire (1987) and Galper (1980) have adequately discussed the ineffectiveness of traditional research paradigms. The former makes the following assertion.

Dominant research paradigms are alienating, inaccurate as a means of identifying needs, and see some adults as marginal or incapable of articulating their own needs (Hall, 1978:8).

I should emphasize the point that even though the purpose of this research undertaking was not to organize the women for a political and revolutionary action, I made sure that they participated actively in the process of generating knowledge. They freely expressed their feelings, needs and lived experiences. They also offered their own perspectives regarding the feminization of the construction sector.

4.3 Summary of Research Questions

The interview instrument was only meant to elicit basic quantitative information such as biographical data and the socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds of the female workers. During the forums and group discussions they talked about their previous occupation, societal changes and circumstances that influenced them to migrate and seek employment in the construction sector, their job descriptions and working experiences. They were also asked to account for their employer's decision to hire them. They discussed industrial relations; that is their relationship with the management and the male workers, and the latter's relationship with the management. Similar questions were put to the three groups of 19 male workers who also accounted for the high turnover of male employees.

The sixteen construction companies were asked to explain, interalia, their hiring criteria, the racial composition of their workforce and their reasons for employing women. They were also asked about gender relations in the work place and the common problems that their businesses were encountering.

A thorough discussion of the purpose of the research and the questions preceded the interviews and forums in order that the women could understand their role in this research, approve or modify the questions and think out the answers beforehand. This approach is based on three arguments.

First, researchers spend time thinking about research topics and questions, but have a tendency to impose their questions on the respondents expecting them to generate on-the-spot answers to them. Second, Hall (1978:5) rightly contends that research instruments designed in a university office may be inherently one-sided.

Third, Bulmer and Warwick (1983) provide cogent arguments against research projects conducted in developing countries in which researchers asked questions that were irrelevant to the poor. Conyers (1982) also amply demonstrates how respondents in poor communities in developing societies fail to answer research question due to communication barriers emanating from the differences in socio-economic class, cultural background and the experiences of researchers and respondents. Other sources of communication failure are age, racial, ethnic and gender differences. Carr-Hill (1974:30) posits that the social milieu in which research projects are implemented is a crucial determinant of the utilization and interpretation of research data.

At the end of the interviews and forums I gave the respondents a chance to ask me questions. The workers inquired about the potential benefits of this study. They have been discussed in chapter one. They also wanted to be advised on how they could influence the management so that it would

augment their skimpy wages and improve their working conditions. Some workers requested me to help them find better jobs. I advised them to continue to negotiate with their employers for better conditions. I also explained the role of the Botswana Construction Workers Union (BCWU) which advocates for construction sector employees, and advised the women to go to its office to get more detailed information. I suggested to them that they could also apprise their political representatives of their difficult situation. It should be noted that a lot of work needs to be done to sensitize employers, politicians and even labour unions to the exploitation and oppression of working women.

Some managers in foreign companies asked how what is generally called "the insouciant attitude, idleness and indolence" of Botswana workers could be overcome. As suggested previously, industrialization is a recent development in Botswana. Ambitious educational, training and industrial relations programs should be mounted to enhance labour productivity.

Some Botswana-owned companies complained about the unfair tendering procedures which give an "undue advantage" to foreign companies. This concern is supposed to be addressed by BOCCIM, the proposed National Productivity Centre and labour unions.

4.4 Process and Ethical Considerations

I conducted two meetings with each of the eight groups of female workers and one brief meeting with each of the three groups of men. Nevertheless, I will only outline the preparation and implementation of the women's forums since women are the main target of this study.

I requested that the companies give the respondents time off so that they could participate in this research. Some companies were very busy and I could only meet their female workers when they finished work in the afternoon. This inconvenienced especially women who stayed a considerable distance away from their work place. I offered them taxi and bus fares. Warwick and Lininger (1975:6) justify "cash payments" to respondents on the grounds that at times they are put to a considerable inconvenience.

During the first meeting I introduced myself and talked briefly about the role of social work in Botswana. I briefed the women about the purpose of this study, its limits, their role in it and how its findings would be disseminated or utilized. Some women expressed the point that the research would give them a rare opportunity to make their problems and needs known. They strongly recommended that the report of the study be submitted to the government.

We discussed the process and questions for the forums. This was meant to make the women feel comfortable with this research, and help them to prepare for the forums beforehand.

I informed them that I would use a micro-cassette tape recorder to record the proceedings of the forums. At first some women felt uncomfortable with this idea. They thought I was a Radio Botswana journalist, and asked me not to broadcast the discussion, lest their employers victimized them. I assured them that the recording would help me to accurately reflect their views in the research report. I promised them that the tapes would be kept confidential and destroyed later.

After the women had indicated that they understood the purpose of this research undertaking, and were comfortable with the proposed process for the forums, I read the consent forms to them and requested them to sign them. The "illiterates" put "x" for "yes". This exercise was ensured by brief interviews, the purpose of which was to gather biographical data and other basic information about the socio-economic background of the women. The first meeting lasted for 48 minutes.

In the second meeting I summarized the discussion of the previous meeting and asked the women to ask questions and make comments. Prior to the commencement of the forums we discussed and adopted the following basic rules.

- i) Every participant's views are welcome. Ideas should not be labelled right or wrong, they are simply different.
- ii) Listen attentively. Don't interrupt other speakers.
- iii) Discussants should be time-conscious. Don't monopolize the discussion.

- iv) Avoid arguments and negative comments. Show sensitivity to the feelings and beliefs of other participants.
- v) The views and personal experiences shared in the forum should be kept strictly confidential.

The afore-listed ideas emanate from the following sources:

Geeting B. (1976)	<u>How To Listen Assertively.</u>
Auvine, B. (1977)	<u>A Manual For Group Facilities.</u>
Michel, A. (1981)	<u>Building United Judgement: A Handbook For Consensus Decision-making.</u>
Batten, T. (1965)	<u>The Human Factor In Community Work.</u>
Batten, T. (1967)	<u>The Non-Directive Approach In Group And Community Work.</u>

At the end of every forum I summarized the discussion so that the women could correct or validate them. This helped me to check if I comprehended the views that the women presented. Siegel et al (Cox:1987), Conyers (1982) and other authors, quoted previously, have pointed out that class, gender, cultural and linguistic differences contribute to ineffective communication between researchers and the respondents.

This last meeting took one hour. At the end of the forums I offered each group of women a small token(P20.00) of appreciation of the gracious support they gave me.

4.5 Helping Factors

The following factors facilitated the forums. First, the participants shared a common class background. They were all semi-proletarianized women, who were economically distressed. They strongly felt alienated and abandoned by their own political system. They faced precariousness because they might

be retrenched when their companies completed their projects. The women who were hired by local infant industries would suffer if these companies got eliminated by a stiff competition from mature foreign companies.

Secondly, in some companies the women came from the same villages or districts. All the women I selected at Trucon happened to come from Lotlhakane West and they all lived at Old Naledi Suburb. Four women in Lenong Company were from Lentsweletau village. Therefore, there was no language problem. As well, most of the women were in the same age-cohort.

I was struck by a strong sense of "esprit de corps" which obtained among the women in many companies. They generously shared food among themselves. It seems to me that apart from the women's same class background, this group cohesiveness was partly promoted by the hiring practices of the companies. For example, one group of women said they came from the same village as did the general foremen who helped the company to recruit labour.

Third, most of the women were cooperative because they hoped that this research might contribute to the amelioration of their unsatisfactory working conditions and living situations. This throws light on why they were quick to ask me how they would benefit from this project. They pointed out that they had never had the chance to express their economic misery.

The respondents' "poverty syndrome" emanates from the fact that the dispossessed are mostly preoccupied with the satisfaction of the basic needs, and they are more likely to believe that research would help confront their underdevelopment and perpetual starvation. This expectation finds support from Hall (1978:10) who argues that research should not just be geared towards intellectual and career building, but poor communities should also benefit from both its process and results.

Finally, I sensed that some women derived "psychological gratification" from the fact that they were chosen to participate in this research. They felt they were chosen because they were "special". At T&P construction a couple of women who were not selected remarked that "we also want to articulate our viewpoints".

4.6 Limitations

Several problems affected the implementation of this study and therefore reduced the quality of research data. The study was carried out between January and March, a period in which the police were conducting investigations relating to corruption scandals which afflicted the Botswana government, the BHC and construction companies which were employed by this parastatal body. These investigations eventuated in the cancellation and postponement of some major building

contracts. There were also some companies which had ceased to operate due to financial difficulties. However, all these developments were not reflected in the list of the construction companies that was issued by the CSO. This posed sampling problems. Although most of the companies were randomly selected three were selected through a snow-ball method.

The construction sector is characterized by illegal practices including the abuse of powerless workers and the illegal employment of foreign blacks from other SADC countries. Thus, some company managers were reluctant to answer the questions, for fear that their delinquent practices might be exposed. For example, whereas some managers in foreign companies stated that they employed Botswana only, the local workers in these companies complained about the gradual increase of, especially the Zimbabweans in the construction sector.

Some managers refused to participate in the study on the grounds that they were too busy, or had been interviewed by many researchers in the past. When I informed one white manager that I had his company in my sample he gave a quick retort:

We have been asked too many questions. Yesterday a researcher from the Botswana polytechnic was here.

At GIEC Company there was a diffusion-of-responsibility as to who would answer the questions. I ended up leaving out this company as I was losing time. Some managers did not honour their appointments. I defined this as resistance to take part in this research. Although some companies agreed to participate in this study they preferred a questionnaire to an interview method. However, they returned the questionnaires with some questions unanswered.

Some companies were ultimately excluded from the sample on the basis of the following reasons: the managers and workers in several Chinese companies claimed they could not speak English. Some people think this is an excuse fabricated so as to exclude Batswana from these companies. A representative of Multi Construction company, who is an English-speaking South African, revealed that:

The Chinese are not here to play. They won't even teach your people industrial skills if you are not serious. They are here to make money.

I also excluded a Zimbabwean company from the study because its Bakalanga workers claimed they could not understand English and Setswana. They said they had just arrived from the North-east. There were many other companies which did not employ women at all. There were also eight companies in which only company representatives were

interviewed because of time constraints on my part and most women in these companies. The sites were far from their homes.

Another setback relates to the underdevelopment of research capacity of most organizations in Botswana. During the data collection process the representatives of the companies and the workers highlighted important issues and problems. I visited several organizations to solicit statistical information so that I could verify the views of the respondents. These organizations were the Botswana Police, BOCCIM, the Ministries of Commerce and Industry, Labour and Home Affairs and Transport and Communication as well as CSO, the Botswana Construction Workers Union (BCWU) and the Department of Mines.

Although some of these organizations buttressed the views expressed by the respondents they lacked statistical information. For example, a representative of the Ministry of Transport and Communication explained that nearly all taxi drivers, bus drivers and conductors in Botswana are men. However, he admitted that his department did not keep statistics reflecting this evidence. Some organizations had "gender-blind" statistics. I take it as axiomatic that in many male supremacist cultures women are generally rendered invisible in almost all spheres. There is a dire need for gender-specific statistics in all sectors in Botswana.

Some departments had a terribly poor system of record keeping. They lacked computers and only kept their records in notebooks, some of which were torn, or had missing pages. The BCWU had missing information on the cases that were reported to it by its clients. It also lacked up-to-date information on the size of its membership.

The information about the ownership of construction companies was not readily available at the Ministry of Commerce. Skimpy information had to be eked out from files, some of which were incomplete. Some files could not be located. I could not find the statistics of companies that had closed down or the actual number of men and women who were retrenched due to the decline of the construction sector.

The afore-stated problems have been adequately considered by Bulmer and Warwick (1983). These authors explain the poverty of social statistics in developing countries in the following terms: These countries are overly concerned with the provision of basic development infrastructure and social amenities. Thus, they only have meagre wherewithal which can be committed to the collection and storage of social statistics. The authors also suggest that the cultural milieu in these societies accounts for the low value that is assigned to social science research. Macpherson (1982) would contend that, like all aspects of social development, the underdevelopment of social science research is a function of

development policies and philosophy which devote overriding emphasis to the achievement of economic development objectives.

Another limitation of this study is that even though I employed a research approach that the women were comfortable with we did not really know each other. We met for only a brief time. It is entirely possible that this might have inhibited some respondents to express certain views. Some women kept on asking me if their ideas were correct. The social structure erodes the poor's self-confidence. This problem is also discussed by Reeves (Bailey and Brake, 1975:65-68). The author provides several examples of the way in which chronic poverty renders social workers' clients unassertive or submissive.

Lastly, the forums were conducted in the evening, except for a few groups of women whose (Botswana) employers released them to participate in the study during working hours. Some women looked tired. This might have limited their participation. It was not possible for them to attend group discussions during the weekend.

CHAPTER FIVE

5.0 Factors Influencing Women To Seek Employment In The Construction Sector

5.1 Women's Origins

A total of 66 semi-proletarianized women participated in this study. They were all employed as general labourers, occupying the lowest rungs of the job ladder. Thirty six percent of them were employed in Mogoditshane village. All these women, except three who were residents of this village, were rural migrants who came specifically to seek employment in these communities. Sixty four percent of the women rented rooms in Gaborone. Twelve percent commuted from Metsimotlhabe, which is located approximately 10 kilometres from Mogoditshane. Three women were forced to cohabit with men by her lack of accommodation. The rest were accommodated by their relatives.

The women are distributed according to the districts that they come from in table 6.

Table 6

Women's Origin

<u>District</u>	<u>No. of Women</u>
Central	8 (12.1%)
Kgatleng	3 (4.6%)
Kweneng	47 (71.2%)
<u>South East</u>	<u>8 (12.1%)</u>
Total	66 (100%)

These women had heard about the feminization of the construction sector prior to their migration. However, they were in dire economic straits, and could have accepted any available job that they could do.

Most of these rural migrants were new-comers. They had spent between one and twenty-four months in their employment. The high preponderance of new workers in the companies can be attributed to the relatively high rate of retrenchment in the construction sector, unfair dismissals, and a high turn-over of staff due to, inter alia, stress, slave wages and the generally unhealthy employer-employee relationship.

Seventy-one percent of the female workers migrated from communities in the Kweneng District. Eleven percent came from the Central District, which is the biggest district in Botswana. A host of factors can be used to account for the over-representation of the rural migrants from the Kweneng District. The first reason is the proximity of this district to Gaborone and Mogoditshane. Second, forty-five percent of the women from this district came for Letlhakeng and its periphery. Fifty-seven per cent (1991 Population and Housing Census Report) of the population of this community are women it is also inhabited by some indigenous people. The communities that are occupied by these people are the most economically, socially, politically and culturally marginalized in rural Botswana. A Mosarwa representative has complained that:

Basarwa...are the most exploited and dehumanized minority in this country (Saugestad; 1992:7).

The women in two of the companies explained that they were specifically recruited by their companies. As a matter of fact, one company sent a truck into their community to fetch them. The most poverty-stricken workers are both economically and psychologically dependent on their employers. They are more likely to accept starvation wages and still be more productive.

This research reveals that the phenomenon of "the disappearing father" has contributed to the emergence of "the female breadwinner". Sixty-three (95 percent) of the women and their children had been abandoned by their men-friends and husbands. The Maintenance Act requires that men contribute a minimum of P40.00 towards the support of their children. The women gave the following reasons to explain why they did not report the men who violate this social legislation:

1. The cost of living has risen and the skimpy P40.00 can not support a child.
- 2 The District Commissioner has a limited capacity to enforce the legislation.
3. Women fear that if they report men the latter might bewitch their children.

2 of/de 2

MICROCOPY RESOLUTION TEST CHART
NATIONAL BUREAU OF STANDARDS
STANDARD REFERENCE MATERIAL 1010a
(ANSI and ISO TEST CHART No. 2)

4. Men are generally promiscuous and extravagant. They impregnate many women and end up with no money to maintain themselves and their children.
5. If women report men the latter can assault them, and they may be imprisoned. Women don't gain anything.
6. Women are under constant pressure to eke out an existence for themselves and their children. They cannot find time to keep on going to the District Commissioner's office.
7. Some women don't want to depend on men.

The table that follows provides the information about the women's sources of child support.

Table 7

Women's Source of Child Support

<u>Number of Women</u>	<u>Source of Child Support</u>
33 (50%)	My parents (especially mother)
24 (36%)	Myself
6 (9%)	Cohabiter
3 (5%)	My husband
Total 66 (100%)	

Most of the children who were supported by these women and their parents are in the rural areas. There are basically two crucial factors that explain why they are there. There is a critical shortage of housing in Gaborone and its vicinity. As well, the exorbitant and ever sky-rocketing rent means the

exploited urban proletariat can only afford to pay for small multiple-purpose rooms. That is, they are used as living, kitchen, bath and bedrooms. In 1990 over 50,000 families were on the waiting list for stands in the peri-Gaborone suburbs (Mclvor; August/September 1990).

The female construction workers also keep their children in their rural homes where they are looked after by their grandmothers because of a dearth of child day care services for the underprivileged urban women. In 1992 the Gaborone City Social Welfare Department compiled a list of day care centres whose average fee was P335,00. This is over and above the meagre wages that are earned by the female wage labourers in the construction sector.

It is vitally important to note that the reproductive role of women in society like Botswana, where there are no proactive social policies to promote the welfare of unemployed and destitute working women, could contribute to the accentuation of the feminization of poverty. Momsen (1991:1) also warns that governments in developing countries should abandon the erroneous assumption that policies and programs that create employment and other opportunities for men would translate into the enhancement of the welfare of their wives and children.

Paradoxically, when some of the women (9 percent) who said they were married were asked who helped them to maintain

their children, they answered, "No one, myself" or "my parents". There are three plausible interpretations of this response. First, it is entirely possible that they were not married, but were shy to disclose this to a stranger. In a society where marriage is still valued, and unmarried women are perceived as a failure, some women would, feel uncomfortable or stigmatised if everybody knows that they are celibate. Warwick (Bulmer and Warwick, 1993:353) shows how adults in KAP studies would only say they used contraceptives just because they would feel embarrassed if they did not say so, especially if researchers and policy makers expect them to apply family planning ideas.

Second, if they were married there is a possibility that their husbands did not provide child support as it has been argued previously. Third, the phenomenon of "Women With Multiple Out-of-Wedlock Children" is increasing in Botswana. Some men who marry these women refuse to look after the "children of other men".

5.2 Education and Economic Participation

Appropriate education and training are indispensable for a meaningful and lasting economic, social, cultural, and political development. In a developing country like Botswana, where the broad periphery of the society occupy marginal positions, educational curriculum and syllabus should be aimed

at enhancing the creative potential and vision of the "economically weakest".

Research shows that a large proportion of the population of Botswana are youth. Many Batswana including their leaders, have now accepted the fact that the education that their youth receive is colonial and, therefore, irrelevant to the needs of the masses. Koma stated in his Education In Black Africa that:

The major problem and inadequacy in the present system of education is that it is not adopted to the present needs and requirements of the problems and tasks in developing countries (Koma, 1976:4).

Rodney (1974:234-40) has argued that education in Africa was only calculated to engender subordination, exploitation, the creation of mental confusion and the development of underdevelopment.

The female construction workers occupy a sub-sector of "the abandoned majority". Although sixty-seven percent of the women who participated in this study had received basic education, they were functionally illiterate. Expressed differently, their education did not empower them. It was not meant to promote their active participation in the development of their country. They were not fundamentally different from their illiterate colleagues. The following tables present the information about their age and educational status respectively.

Table 8Age Distribution

<u>Age</u>	<u>Number</u>
<20	3(4.5%)
20-24	15(22.7%)
25-29	17(25.7%)
30-34	7(22.7%)
35-39	5(10.6%)
40-44	3(7.6%)
45-49	66(100%)

Table 9Educational Status

<u>Level of Educ.</u>	<u>Number</u>
No education	22(33.3%)
Primary	39(59.1%)
Junior sec.	5(7.6%)
<u>Others</u>	<u>0</u>
<u>Total</u>	<u>66(100%)</u>

Among the 22 "illiterates" were women in the lower age-cohorts. The explanation for this situation is that many poor children from disadvantaged families could not afford to pay school fees in the 1970s (National Institute of Research; 1988:23). Free (but not compulsory education) was only introduced in 1980. However, even when education is free the poverty-stricken families still can not afford to buy school uniforms. Their lack of cultural capital, which is needed to compete at school, and the deplorable quality of their life, distort the academic performance of their children.

Some of the women who had attained primary education had either dropped out of school due to teenage pregnancy, or failed the Primary Schools leaving examinations. These women were prevented from furthering their education by limited spaces in schools, calamitous poverty and the demands of child care. The same is true for women who had achieved Junior Secondary education.

The issue of teenage pregnancy deserves urgent attention. According to 1981 population census data, 22.6 percent of girls in the 15-19 age bracket had experienced at least one pregnancy (National Institute of Research; 1988:1). Over 7000 teenagers became pregnant in 1987 (National Institute of Research; 1988:9). In 1985 and 1986 the percentages for female students who dropped out of school due to pregnancy were 64 percent and 56 percent respectively (National Institute of Research; 1988:24). This social problem is likely to be aggravated by the emerging phenomenon of "inter-generational sexual relationships".

Teenage pregnancy does not only reduce women's chances to further their education. It also seriously retards their social and economic participation. Those who manage to find employment end up maintaining children whose fathers refuse to support, thus denying women a chance to use most of their hard-earned income to upgrade the quality of their lives. All mothers who took part in this study explained that they were forced to accept low paying and debilitating construction work by the dire needs of their children and parents. A journalist, Outsa Mokone, also interviewed some female construction workers. One Standard Seven drop-out explained her predicament:

...if I had a way out I would not be here, but because of the beloved ones I have to work the whole day through the noise, heat and dust, retiring home late in the evening, too exhausted even to have a plate of soft porridge, the only supper I can afford (Mokone, March 17, 1993:8).

Therefore, social workers, women's leaders and their colleagues in government and non-governmental organizations should seriously address teenage pregnancy and the women's poverty of industrial skills as a way of alleviating female marginalization, and the crisis of declining capital formation caused by, inter alia, the increasing youth dependency burden.

One of the most obvious limitations of the current efforts aimed at tackling teenage pregnancy is that they target young women without acknowledging and confronting the obvious fact that young women are powerless victims of economic, political, social and cultural milieux that create and perpetuate male power and privilege. Fako (1985:38) asserts that sex education continues to be taboo among the more conservative Batswana, including some members of parliament. Another shortcoming is that current measures focus more on school-going teenagers and devote minimal attention to the out-of-school youth, particularly those who live in rural areas.

It would appear that policy elites in Botswana have been oblivious of the fact that the disenfranchisement of the rural peasantry would, of necessity, increase the rate of rural-to-urban migration. The government has failed to establish a sound economic base in most rural communities as it assumed that the poor's illiteracy and deficiency in industrial skills, as well as their attachment to their land, would prevent them from moving urbanwards. Government Ministers are

now insisting that the unemployed and unhoused urban poor should return to their rural homes. Between 1989 and 1990 an effort was made to repatriate some Gaborone "street-boys" to their rural homes. All these reactions are symptomatic of a wrong diagnosis and understanding of the situation of the rural and urban poor. As long as resources are not pushed to rural Botswana, and urban communities continue to be the determinant of social and economic change, the economic stagnation in the rural sector will not be overcome.

The evidence presented by the female and male construction workers shows that most rural areas have abysmally lost the capacity to retain poor able-bodied peasants. The respondents explained that they were forced to migrate by rural unemployment and the general destitution of resources in their communities. Women who came from peripheral villages mentioned the difficulties they experienced in fetching drinking water and finding other basic services. It is worth noting that rural peasants are often accused of failing to organize themselves so that they could be provided with basic services like water. Urban dwellers get these services not because they are organized. They simply benefit from the economic, political and social power that urban areas have over the rural areas.

The women explained, though, that hundreds of poor women in their respective communities could not migrate because they cared for small children, the elderly and the sick; their

conservative husbands would not allow them to seek employment; they lived far from Gaborone, and could not afford a bus or train fare; they were pessimistic about finding jobs and accommodation and some were simply scared of a "dangerous" city life. It is also possible that a sizeable number of Batswana women and men do not migrate due to disability. The disabled are among the most marginalized Botswana.

The table below shows the female migrants' previous occupations. Some women had participated in more than one occupation. It is clear from this table that the women are devoid of a cultural capital that is required for full and meaningful participation in a new capitalist mode of production.

Table 10

Respondents' Previous Occupation

<u>Occupation</u>	<u>Number</u>
Drought relief projects	29 (43.9%)
Household sector	24 (36.4%)
Subsistence agriculture	54 (81.8%)
Never worked	2 (3.0%)

Drought relief projects are temporary measure to prevent the occurrence of death in drought-afflicted communities. These projects are only meant for the poorest of "sturdy destitutes". "The unemployable destitutes", mostly children

and the seniors, receive food handouts worth P45.00 and P60.00 in urban and rural areas respectively.

The wage paid to men and women in drought relief projects is the same (P90.00). However, these projects are mostly supervised by men who get a slightly higher wage. It should be clarified that drought relief measures are a part of a petty welfare program which has effectively promoted "welfare colonialism" in dependent rural communities. These projects are designed and implemented by people who wrongly assume that the poor are unambitious. One respondent made the following remark:

Myself and my mother have worked in drought relief projects for a couple of months, but this has not altered our intolerable home circumstances.

Cattle are a vital agricultural resource. Apart from other economic benefits, they are a source of draught power for farmers who can not afford to rent tractors. Although a significant proportion of cattle have been decimated by a severe drought, the majority of Botswana's cattle are still owned and controlled by men. It is important to note, though, that since many men are in the cities and South African mines, it is mostly rural women who actually look after their cattle. The under-representation of women among cattle-owners clearly shows that women are seriously marginalized even in a traditional economy.

Momsen (1991:25) has also noted that in the 1970s male farmers in Botswana were twice as likely to own cattle as women, and their crop yield was generally four times that of female farmers. Women are treated unfairly in other SADC nations. Even Lesotho, where women are the mainstream of economic and social development, they have been effectively forced into occupying the role of de facto heads of households without being granted de jure rights and access to economic resources (Nelson, 1981:59-60).

Only six women said they once owned small herds of cattle which were ravaged by a severe drought. One woman said some of her cattle were stolen. Livestock theft is one of the serious problems faced by farmers. Although some women had never owned cattle or land they used to help their parents and relatives to plough. All the respondents came from families that used to practise subsistence agriculture. It is interesting to note that, whereas in some Southern countries peasant women are forced to gravitate to the cities by the mechanization or industrialization of agriculture, in Botswana this is happening because the agricultural sector has been dangerously neglected.

The assumption that peasant women derive personal satisfaction from agricultural work is not supported by this research. Many of them, especially the youth, had already acquired a different attitude to agricultural or peasant life before their migration from their respective villages. They

pointed out that even during periods of good rains subsistence agriculture did not alter their intolerable circumstances.

Rural women's horizons expand when they interact with returnees from the cities. Some women in this research indicated that they needed more money to buy themselves and their children clothes, food and "nice things". Christine Obbo (1980:1981:22) has observed that young African peasant women believe that their urban counterparts are enjoying themselves. She realised that many of them would tolerate long hours of back-breaking work in the cities in order to earn an independent income. Beneira (Nelson, 1981:22) has also found out that many African peasant women seek refuge in subsistence and domestic production just because of the unavailability of viable alternative forms of employment.

5.3 Cultural Colonialism And The Collapse of Traditional Institutions of Welfare.

Although the government's neglect of peasant women is a crucial factor in explaining their predicament, their oppressive conditions should also be situated within a discussion of Botswana society. The "modernising" elites and coopted sub-elites in this society have uncritically played an active role in establishing fertile milieux for the spread of

European and North American cultural imperialism; a tendency which is progressively destroying the socio-cultural base which used to cushion the peasant classes.

The female construction workers and some Batswana managers and supervisors who took part in this study attributed the increasing collapse of marital relationships and the phenomenon of "the disappearing father" to the rapid destruction of traditional law and culture without the appearance of an adequate alternative. In particular, "senior women" explained that the "irresponsibility" of the new generation of men and women emanates from a dearth of role models. Feminists in the South should seriously confront this issue. The women observed that prior to the advent of western influence, the youth received vital cultural education in traditional schools (Bogwera and Bojale) before they could marry. These youth were taught by older mentors who had accumulated a wealth of knowledge and experience.

Marriage was treated as a family and community affair. Married couples were accountable to their families and communities. Men who neglected their spouses and children were reprimanded or disciplined by their uncles and chiefs. However, the absence of a cultural and youth policy in Botswana has promoted the decline of these institutions. No effort is being made to resuscitate or find appropriate

alternative for them. The "modernizing" foreign and local elites, including the intellectual elite, perceive them as anachronistic and antithetical to "civilization".

The extended family institution used to be an important source of welfare and support for its members. If a man died or divorced his wife the latter and her children would still get support from parents, in-laws and other relatives. During group discussions the women indicated that extended family ties and communocratic values and principles in their villages are very weak. They stated that the diffusion of Western culture into Botswana has significantly destroyed community consciousness, respect for parents, accountability to the family, generosity and mutual support which underpinned traditional welfare institutions.

The women explained that the lack of mutual support in most families was due to the fact that people are too poor to share anything. However, they noted that their communities had been seriously afflicted by intolerable greed for money and material possession so much that even the "have-plenty" are no longer willing to help the "have-nothing". A few women said they had worked as unpaid nannies for their relatives. Thus, the disenfranchised women are not poor because of indolence or lack of ambition, but because some of them spend a lot of time helping their relatives and unscrupulous employers to create and augment their wealth. This is particularly true for the "colonized" families of the indigenous people who loyally

serve agricultural and other business elites only for old clothes, tobacco and other cheap handouts. The state's reluctance to establish a minimum wage for the agricultural proletariat serves to promote exploitation and abuse by their masters.

In 1970 Morris Fox conducted a study of the impact of social change on the indigenous welfare institutions in the Gilbert and Ellis Islands and found problems that were similar to those that were identified by these female construction workers. The collapse of mutual support systems in a society like Botswana in which some poor families invested their hard-earned meagre resources on the education of a few of their members, especially men, in the hope that they would "pay their dues" is a tragedy. It is common knowledge that many successful Batswana, including government ministers, senior bureaucrats, teachers and students were raised in peasant families. Many of these privileged elites have, however, "deserted" the rural areas and the peasantry because they perceive them as a "pre-industrial entity" that must be avoided. Their "village-phobia" contributes to the underdevelopment and marginalization of the rural areas.

Most of the female respondents explained that they have lost faith in men. They indicated that they were not prepared to get married because they had been exploited and cheated by "clever men" who promised them marriage, impregnated them and

abandoned them with small children. The average number of their children was three. A woman who has three children of different fathers claimed that:

men are liars, they take advantage of the fact that women are poor. They will tell you that they want to marry you and once you become pregnant they abandon you and look for other women.

Mathews (1983:181) also says a lot of men don't mean everything they say. According to these women, men are irresponsible, extravagant and promiscuous. They were convinced that the core values that used to sustain marriage in Botswana have declined considerably. Further, men's promiscuity and infidelity should be defined as one form of woman abuse. It is a function of a new consumerist culture which allows a man who has money to quench his sexual appetite with as many economically marginalized women as he can afford to pay. Table 11 corroborates the women's assertion that men are in general more promiscuous.

Table 11

Number of Sexual Partners Since Christmas (1987)

<u>No. of Partners</u>	<u>No. of Males</u>	<u>No. of Females</u>
0	18 (4.0%)	58 (5.6%)
1	17 (39.5%)	760 (73.9%)
2-3	145 (32.4%)	192 (18.7%)
4	108 (24.0%)	19 (1.8%)
Total	448 (100%)	1029 (100%)

Source: Kebabonye, K. et al (1989:17)

The women explained that promiscuity and extravagance impoverish Botswana males and make it difficult for them to maintain their wives and children. They also identified promiscuity as one of the factors that contributes to the increase in marital conflicts and unmarried parenthood. I should note that the causes of women and men's poverty in Botswana are different. Apart from the housewification of women, which emanates from limited employment opportunities for women and patriarchal domination, many Botswana women are also impoverished by the heavy burden of child care. Momsen (1991:75) also states that women are impoverished by the fact that they contribute more than their brothers to the income of their families.

According to the women interviewed, many Botswana men squander their money on women and beer. In fact there is a growing concern that heavy drinking contributes significantly to a decline in labour productivity and road accidents in Botswana. Hence public officers have been frequently advised not to drink while on duty (Mahehe, February 8, 1993:3). The rejection of traditional beer by "modern" youth in favour of modern beer, which is expensive, accentuates men's poverty. As well there is an increasing number of the urban youth who have uncritically imbibed new costly habits such as smoking, entertaining friends (to prove that one has money), buying expensive food from take-away restaurants instead of cooking

one's meals and travelling for fun. These working youth do not save and invest to help boost the rate of capital formation. The Minister of Finance and Development Planning advised the nation in the 1993/94 budget session that,

The tendency to spend incomes earned in the good years on the comforts of life, without making provision for the more trying times that lie ahead, must be resisted (Budget Speech; 1993:2).

The breakdown of traditional institutions of welfare has not led to the creation of appropriate and effective alternative social programs. Although a multiplicity of rural assistance programs exist such as the Arable Land Development Program, Financial Assistance Policy, Local Government Fund for small community projects (LG 17), Service to Livestock Owners In Communal Areas and the Accelerated Rainfed Agriculture Program, the truly disadvantaged have not yet meaningfully benefitted from them. Politicians frequently blame the poor for not capitalising on these programs without making an endeavour to confront structural impediments that militate against their effective implementation. Warnapala and Woodsworth (1987) studied welfare programs in Sri Lanka. The reasons that accounted for their ineffectiveness are essentially the same as those that prevail in Botswana and other Southern countries. These authors make the following observation:

The poorest people seldom receive much, because the conditions of access to many benefits require the person to have something to start with: land to cultivate or to build on, money with which to build or repair, or at least influential friends or relatives (Warnapala and Woodsworth, 1987:128-129).

In Botswana other factors which affect poor women's participation are illiteracy, and patriarchal oppression as well as poor program implementation capacity in rural areas. Although all these problems have long been identified and widely discussed in seminars, village and district meetings, national district conferences and the national assembly, most of them remain unaddressed.

5.4 Poverty and Public Policy

The major shortcomings of Botswana's "poverty-oriented" programs are not only their lack of class, gender and ethnic sensitivity, but also their obvious lack of ambition or vision. They were by no means designed to transform poor peasants into active economic actors. In effect, they confine them to the status of dependent subsistence producers. This accounts for the state's reluctance to create subsidies for poor peasants.

Pootschi (1986:457) states that if the rural peasantry are to increase agricultural production, and enhance their economic and social well-being, they should be motivated and

provided with information, effective leadership, more health facilities, water, technology and other vital resources.

The disenfranchised women who participated in this study are some of the peasants whose lives have not been touched by social work. The profession has not yet defined the marginal peasant classes as its clients. It has focused too narrowly on the psychopathological conditions that are generated within an urban-based economy. Unlike their counterparts in the North, who deal mostly with problems emanating from post-industrialization, social workers in Botswana should be confronting the problems of underdevelopment. Thus, Macpherson and Midgley (1987) suggest a broader focus for social policy in the Southern countries. Such an approach should encompass problems of hunger, disease, illiteracy, homelessness, landlessness, shortage of water and environmental degradation and other basic problems which seriously diminish the quality of life of the majority of the people.

Social work has not yet participated in the formulation, evaluation and modification of the afore-mentioned rural welfare policies to ensure that they effectively and humanely meet the felt and expressed needs of the poor. The profession should actively play the role of a midwife of social change and not passively wait for the "casualties" of state policies to come for "psychological panel-beating".

The failure of rural welfare programs to better the oppressive social and economic conditions of marginal classes has contributed to the migration of rural women, some of whom are semi-proletarianized. Their illiteracy and destitution of industrial skills have relegated them to the lowest positions where they are subjected to gross exploitation and oppression.

5.5 Domestic Sector Employment

As it was shown in table 10, 36% of the women interviewed were previously employed in the household sector prior to their employment as general labourers in the construction sector. They worked as nannies, cooks and cleaners for elite and sub-elite families. Notwithstanding the starvation wages and the back-breaking work they perform in the construction companies, they still "prefer" to work in this sector rather than in the household sector. Some women explained that they entered the domestic sector because of the scarcity of employment opportunities for illiterate, unskilled and under-skilled women.

There are basically three sets of factors that have contributed to a decline in employment in the household sector. These are the over-supply of domestic labour, low labour productivity which emanates from, especially, "cultural illiteracy" on the part of urban peasant women and the generally unhealthy employer-employee relationship.

Rural unemployment and under-employment has accelerated the migration of peasant women, and thus contributed to the over-supply of domestic labour. Some women in this study had looked for employment in this sector, and were unsuccessful. The stratum of elite and sub-elite families who can employ domestic workers is relatively small. Many working families are too poor to afford even a meagre domestic work wage. Although the 1984/85 labour force survey (Alexander: 1991:49) indicates that over 75 percent of employed women aged 12 years and above were employed in the domestic sector, it is doubtful that all of them were gainfully employed. The evidence from the female construction workers shows that some poor and middle-class families do not hire domestic workers because their female relatives work for them without payment. A critical shortage of accommodation in towns and peri-urban areas also means that many families can not afford to accommodate domestic workers.

The increase in child day care facilities, especially in Gaborone, has also contributed to a small reduction in the demand for domestic workers. In 1992, 39 privately owned day care centres with a population of 2475 children were registered with the Gaborone City Council. Most of them charge high fees which can only be afforded by middle-class parents.

Table 12 below classifies these centres according to the range of fees they charge.

Table 12

Distribution of Day Care Centres According to Fees

Fee Range Per Term	No. of Day Care Centres	No. of Children
less than P100	3 (7.7%)	372 (15.0%)
P100 - P200	7 (17.9%)	665 (26.9%)
P201 - P301	4 (10.3%)	252 (10.2%)
P302 - P402	7 (17.9%)	293 (11.8%)
P403 - P503	15 (38.5%)	702 (28.4%)
P504 - P604	3 (7.7%)	191 (7.7%)
Total	39 (100%)	2475 (100%)

Source: Gaborone City Council Social Welfare Department, 1993

The figures for the period before 1992 are not available. However, it is entirely possible that the increase in child day care centres was influenced by a high turn over of domestic workers, especially in the late 1980s when the construction boom started.

The low productivity of domestic workers also contributes to a decline in the demand of domestic sector employees. It influences employers in this sector to dismiss the workers or not to employ them at all. This problem can be attributed to the domestic workers "cultural illiteracy". Most of the workers in this sector have a "rural orientation" and have not yet unlearned their culture. Their ideas about child care, house-keeping, cooking and washing are different from those of

their elite and urbanized employers. There is no domestic workers association or union which can provide training on the use of electric appliances such as electric stoves, washing machines, vacuum cleaners, bread toasters and microwaves. Some illiterate domestic workers cannot do shopping effectively as they do not know some of the names of foods and other items that urban people use. Women lacking a smattering of English cannot be effective workers if they are hired by non-Setswana speaking employees.

The domestic sector is one of the areas where the phenomenon of "female-on-female abuse" is more pronounced. In both female and male-headed households domestic workers are mostly supervised and harassed by other women. Some of the women in this research who quit their employment in this sector complained of economic and verbal abuse that was perpetuated against them by elite and sub-elite female employers. They also explained that they were subjected to "cultural and class oppression". A woman in one of the groups who quit her job because she did not want to be abused by her former employer remarked,

She always advised me to look presentable. Eventually I reached the limit of my patience and quit without even asking for my wage. She also refused to eat the food that I served her, claiming that it was unappetizing. It was not the first time she said this.

Complaints like these were raised by other former domestic workers, some of whom said they would rather work for white employers because they treat employees decently. The major problem that domestic workers in Botswana are facing is starvation wages (Magama and Kgathi:1986). The former domestic workers said they had no specified job description. They performed general duties. One of them complained of having been treated like a "security guard".

I was never allowed to leave my employer's home when she and her family were out. She said thieves would break into the house and steal their possessions.

They are not paid a double rate if they worked during the weekends or holidays. They were also expected to cook for and serve their employers' visitors and extended relatives. Some women also said they were prohibited to stay with their children on the grounds that they would interfere with their work. They were also denied the freedom to invite their men-friends to the employers' homes. Some also said their employers threatened to dismiss them if they asked for permission to visit their children and parents at their rural homes.

The exploitation and oppression that employers perpetuate against powerless women and agricultural labourers is facilitated by the absence of legislation and organizations that can protect their human rights. In 1988 the Commissioner

of Labour promised to take steps that would stop the exploitation of domestic workers. At that time some domestic workers earned as low as P30.00 (Nare, 1988:4). However, the Department of Labour is now silent about their plight. The simple explanation for this attitude is that domestic workers in Botswana are not yet treated like a part of the labour force, even by progressive Batswana who are supposed to be struggling for gender equality and genuine democracy. Nzongola-Ntalaja has studied the attitudes of African elites towards the disempowered classes. He states the following observation about the degrading treatment of domestic sector employees:

The extent to which social-class differences are significant in the daily lives of African intellectuals can be seen in their master-slave relationship towards their domestic servants who actually offer far better working for expatriates than their own nationals (Nzongola-Ntalaja, 1987:125-126).

Even in the context of Botswana, rich men and women exploit domestic workers. This explains why some of the women interviewed stated that they would prefer to work for white employees.

As long as wage policies and labour laws are insensitive to the exploitation and oppression of the lower stratum of working women, the feminization of the labour force will not abate the feminization of poverty. McClelland has identified

the full emancipation of women in all spheres of life as one of the desirable conditions that facilitate social and economic progress (Harrison, 1985:26). The marginalization of "female breadwinners" also creates and accentuates child poverty. The 1992 report of the Food Resources Department shows, among persons in its vulnerable category receiving food rations, 42,300 and 85,000 malnourished and starvation-stricken pre-school children respectively (Mokaedi Vol.2 February 1993:3).

5.6 Female Employment In The Construction Sector

The pages that follow will present a detailed discussion of the factors that influenced construction companies to hire peasant women. This discussion draws from the views that were presented by the three different groups of respondents and the evidence that was gathered from the Botswana Construction Workers Union and other organizations.

The companies that had been in operation for a longer time started to employ female construction workers at the beginning of the construction boom in the late 1980s. This practice was adopted by new companies. Table 13 presents the information about the ownership and the numbers of construction workers that were employed at the time of the study. The representatives of all companies were interviewed.

However, the 66 female and 21 male construction workers were drawn only from the first eight companies.

Table 13

Information on Ownership and Number of Employees

<u>Company Name</u>	<u>Ownership</u>	<u>No. of Females</u>	<u>No. of Males</u>	<u>Total</u>
Come Again	Botswana	10	13	23
Makemma	Botswana	8	5	13
Lenong Construct.	Botswana	5	10	15
TNP Construction	Bots. & India	15	45	60
Trucon	South Africa	20	80	100
Meetswana	Botswana	4	8	12
Ceremel	South Africa	8	4	12
Tswana	Dual Ownership	50	200	250
Tlhoraboroko	Botswana	10	90	100
Pan African Cement Products	Foreign	28	18	46
Bond Concrete Con.	Botswana	20	80	100
Mak	Kuwait Bank	27	13	40
Village Construct.	Zimbabwe	5	8	13
Tholo Brick Co.	Botswana	-	8	8
Multi Construction	Multinational	-	65	65
SP Construction	Botswana	-	75	75
Total		210	654	982

Some of the figures are inaccurate as the managers at the companies' head offices could only give rough estimates of the workers at the construction sites. As well, in some sites some workers had been absent for a couple of days and there was no guarantee that they would come back to work. Although site

managers were supposed to have correct figures, it was not possible to contact all of them due to lack of telephones at the sites and time constraints on my part.

The managers and supervisors gave several factors that account for the low numbers of construction workers at the time of this research. First, the postponement and cancellation of some construction contracts following the Botswana Housing Corporation Scandals mentioned elsewhere in this report eventuated the retrenchment of many workers. Although some of these companies were not implicated in these scandals, they were sub-contractors of affected companies. Those that manufactured and sold bricks and other building materials to affected companies ended up stepping down their production.

The report of the Ministry of Labour and Home Affairs shows that in five months alone, that is between August 1992 and January 1993, 64 companies laid off approximately 3915 workers(BOPA, 1993:2). The bulk of these workers were from the construction, textile and manufacturing sectors. The BOCCIM Construction Sector Study reveals that the cancellation and postponement of contracts resulted in P300 million decline in the output of Botswana's construction sector and a direct and indirect loss of between 12369 and 13452 local jobs (BOCCIM Construction Study; 1992:3-5).

Other reasons that contributed to the retrenchment of the workers relate to the flattening of the construction boom, the current international economic recession, drought and the use of expensive technology and machinery by multinational companies.

A manager at Pan African Cement Products attributed the preponderance of males in the construction sector to the breakdown of the extended family ties and the deterioration of the economic situation in rural Botswana. His experience is that the two factors influence men to take their work seriously. He also explained that most companies including his tend to have a relatively high number of men at the beginning of the year. After some time they complain about the wages and quit, thus creating a vacuum to be filled by women.

Both the women and the managers interviewed explained the high turnover of men and the increase in the employment of women construction workers in terms of men's "irresponsibility", "laziness" and "uncooperative behaviour". Whereas the 21 male workers admitted that some of their colleagues who had quit their jobs were uncooperative, they identified the oppressive social relations in this sector as the main factor that push men out of their jobs. According to them, women are generally submissive. All these observations need to be seriously examined if labour productivity is to be enhanced in this sector.

The "shortage" of male labourers in the construction sector in the period between the late 1980s and 1992 is a crucial factor in this study. However, it will be argued later that it cannot be attributed only to the oppressive working conditions in this sector. The common argument that Batswana men are lazy is also simplistic in that it is oblivious of the complex structural factors that reduce the productivity of labour. It is also implausible that female construction workers are employed because they are submissive. Men who leave their jobs because of the oppressive employers are not necessarily assertive.

The general supervisor at Trucon gave a brief history pertaining to the employment of women, which was corroborated by other companies. He explained that the rapid development of the construction boom in the late 1980s gave rise to a sudden increase in the demand for skilled labourers. A stiff competition developed among construction companies, each working hard so that it could finish its work and be engaged for other projects. The mushrooming of construction companies increased the mobility of men between companies, thus affecting their employers' building schedules. These men were in search of companies that could offer better wages and good labour relations.

Even after many men had been absorbed in the construction sector there was still a shortage of labour. At the same time the number of unemployed migrant women was increasing in Gaborone and other towns. In fact, there is evidence that in the early part of the late 1980s there were more females than males who were looking for employment (Botswana Guardian, February 10, 1989). The 1984/85 Labour Survey Report demonstrates that the percentages of unemployed females and males in the 20-24 age bracket were 34.4 percent and 24.5 percent respectively (Alexander; 1991:51). Most of these women, like women construction workers who participated in this research, said they were looking for employment so that they could support their families.

The general supervisor at Trucon intimated that scores of unemployed females went to the construction sites of the Ridgeway Construction Company, which he was working for then, to "beg" the company to hire them. They claimed that they could do construction work. At first this company was reluctant to hire them on the grounds that only men can do heavy and strenuous construction work. Many companies including some which currently employ women still think like this. As suggested earlier Momsen (1990) defines this as a sexist orientation which serves to promote female marginalization.

The delay in the completion of projects which was caused by a shortage of person-power, and exacerbated by a high turnover of males, influenced the company to hire a few women on an experimental basis. When these women proved to be industrious and cooperative the company decided to employ more women and deployed them to its numerous construction sites. Other companies noticed this development and followed suit.

The companies that employ women construction workers have identified essential personal attributes that make women an asset. These include reliability, punctuality, honesty, patience and maximum concentration on the job. According to the companies, these personal characteristics compensate for women's lesser physical strength. Men fritter away their time by playing, arguing and engaging in negative tendencies such as malingering, tardiness, absenteeism and quitting the job without serving notice. As well, when supervisors are not at the sites some men stop working. Some abscond to buy beer, cigarettes and food. The supervisor said male workers believe that beer alleviates job stress and fatigue. Most of the companies that were interviewed have indicated that they lack personnel departments which can address these problems. This situation is reflective of, inter alia, a generally conservative management practice which attaches overriding emphasis on the results and ignores the needs, problems and cultural orientation of the workers.

The Construction Workers' Union has found out that instead of training, educating and motivating low performers, many companies dismiss them and hire skilled foreigners or other people from the ever increasing reserve army of the unemployed. A union representative has observed that some employers' preoccupation with profit maximization accounts for the absence of a staff training program. The union official explained that such employers fear that trained staff would demand a wage increase. However, the high turnover or "circulation" of staff who are looking for better wages and better treatment, as well as uncertainties that affect the construction sector also account for the lack of training programs in the companies.

The implications of these problems are serious. Botswana might experience a dire destitution of industrial skills when foreign companies pull out of the country. The result would be low output and poorer standard of living. Hopefully, the proposed National Productivity Centre would help organizations to overcome issues and problems relating to the crisis of low labour productivity.

The managers and frontline supervisors also complained about men's aggressive and abusive behaviour. A few cases of men's violence against women were reported at Makemma, Come Again and SP Construction companies. Reports from the police demonstrate that more Batswana men are convicted for physical

and verbal assault than women. Table 14 below provides statistics of men and women who were convicted for physical and verbal abuse in 1988 and 1989.

Table 14

Convictions for Assault Common and Verbal Assault

<u>Year</u>	<u>Offence</u>	<u>No.of Males</u>	<u>No. of Females</u>	<u>Total</u>
1988	Use of insulting language	655	340	998
1988	Assault common	3705	402	4107
1989	Use of insulting language	882	351	1296
1989	Assault Common	<u>3927</u>	<u>414</u>	<u>4341</u>
Total		9169	1507	10676

Source: Annual Report of the Commissioner of Police, 1988 and 1989

Whereas the workers in some companies claimed they were subjected to economic and racial oppression, the managers also explained that some workers were victims of ethnicism and prejudice that was perpetrated against them by their colleagues. A trained and experienced artisan from one of the communities of the indigenous people quit his job because his male colleagues from the major nationalities could not cooperate with him. A representative of Multi Construction Company also said his company lost two tradespeople from Malawi because their Batswana male colleagues said they "did not want to be bossed by foreigners". He explained that

Batswana are frustrated because they are lowly paid while their trained colleagues from the neighbouring countries earn better wages.

Lastly, some company managers explained that some men steal and sell companies' equipment and materials to augment their wages. In 1992 and the early part of 1993, equipment and materials valued at P247,948 were stolen from construction companies that were doing business within the jurisdiction of the Broadhurst (BBS) Police station. Table 15 below presents information relating to these theft cases. The police explained that many other cases had been reported but the culprits were not arrested.

Table 15

<u>Theft Committed In Construction Companies</u>						
Year	No. of Cases	Accused M.	F.	Items	Value	Companies
1992	1	1	-	2 generators	P16,260	Boswe Const.
	1	1	-	cables	P10,000	F.M. Kent Const
	1	1	-	Wire rolls & gate poles 3 corner poles & scap rolls	P80,800	Whitacon Co.
	1	1	-	Wheelbarrows	P?	Suncon Const.
	1	1	-	5 litres oil	P?	Turbo Const.
	1	1	-	Yamaha generator	P1,500	US Builders Cons.
	1	1	-	mixture	?	SP Const. Co.
	1	1	-	window frame	P230	K.J.L. Const.
	1	1	-	gravel & sand	P82,000	Condotte Const.
	1	1	-	cheques	P211,973	Boswe Const.
1993	1	1	-	cheques	P5,997	Boswe Const.
	1	1	-	40 bags of cement	P36,000	Tainlac Const.
				cement	P36,000	Tainlac Cosnt.
Total 12		12	0		P247,948	

Source: Broadhurst (BBS) Police Station, 1993

The desirable characteristics of women construction workers can be explained in the following terms: the women who seek employment in male-dominated sectors like construction are fully cognizant of the fact that men in these sectors have fundamentally wrong assumptions about women's potential and abilities. To give an illustration, some women indicated that employers hired them only after they had promised that they would work hard and not quit their employment before the completion of projects. Thus, women construction workers find themselves under perpetual pressure to convince their employers, male counterparts and the community that they are as capable as, or even more industrious than males.

The women in this sector come from poverty-stricken families. The fathers of their children aggravate their dire economic straits by refusing to support them and their children. The country's rudimentary welfare policies have not alleviated their misery. Besides trying to meet personal needs they are constantly under pressure to find and keep jobs so that they can meet their children's needs. Batswana have a proverb to the effect that a woman gets pushed into a difficult situation by the love of her children. Apart from the degeneration of the extended family regime and the men's abandonment of their traditional roles, women find themselves shouldering a heavy dependency burden of poor parents and immediate relatives.

Women are aware of the scarcity of employment opportunities for people of their social and economic background. They are also aware that some companies are likely to retrench less cooperative and lazy employees. They also think that hard work and self-discipline would earn them a good reference from employers in the event that they are retrenched.

The reason less supervisory time is spent on women, and they work hard even in the absence of their supervisors, has a lot to do with the fact that they are more conscientious and are generally used to working on the farms and their homes without being supervised. Thus, women apply themselves in the work place according to their childhood socialization and material experiences.

Lastly, even though the conditions in the construction industry are oppressive more women are generally patient. Unlike most men, they do not expect quick solutions to difficult situations. This partly explains why some abused women would stay with an assaultive partner for a long time hoping that the latter would one day stop abusing her.

It is important, however, to account for the fact that some construction companies do not employ female labourers. Some feminists would argue that the reasons that account for this situation are motivated by entrenched sexist attitudes towards women. These reasons can be summarized as follows: some "males only" companies explained that they have ceased

employing women because young men sexually harass them. This situation lowers the productivity of the entire work force. It also requires supervisors to spend more time on instituting disciplinary measures. A site manager and supervisor at SP Construction explained that since they stopped employing women their male employees are more productive. This situation provides a typical example of deeply entrenched sexism and the lack of gender awareness and sensitivity in the work place. Women as victims of men's behaviour are blamed and excluded while no action is taken against male offenders.

These companies also prefer males to females because the latter need time off for maternity leave, breast-feeding and taking children to the clinic. Construction companies are under pressure to complete projects on time and apply for other contracts. Some companies also stated that some women are physically assaulted by their husbands and men friends. Sometimes they do not come to work when they have been assaulted, or even if they come to work their productivity becomes low because of emotional pain.

The exclusion of females in some companies has also been justified on "moral grounds". The male supervisors felt that heavy manual labour performed under the hot sun debilitates women. This view has been corroborated by female labourers. In fact these women observed that men could only afford to quit this heavy job because they did not maintain children. When asked if they liked their work all of them explained that they

did it only because of a lack of alternative employment. The women also explained that they could not do this job continually for a long time because it destroys their bodies. Some said it affects the menstruation cycle. One female labourer at Mak experienced a miscarriage. However, the supervisor could not confirm if this was due to her strenuous job because the women did not see a doctor. Some companies also exclude women on the grounds that they suffer from acrophobia. Men can work both on the ground as well as at the top of the building.

There is evidence that many companies might stop employing women if they can improve their relationship with their male employees. As a matter of fact, supervisors at Village Construction Company and SP Construction said they have overcome this problem through the institution of team work and effective interpersonal communication between supervisors and the workers. Both the site manager and direct supervisor at SP argued that good leadership does not only enhance labour productivity, but also increases a company's labour retention capacity. The direct supervisor said he had a vast experience in leadership. He make the following comments:

The workers here do not want a domineering supervisor. Even young men expect to be treated like adults. Some white people who don't understand them get impatient. If you use abusive language, they will simply quit the job.

Similar views were expressed by two supervisors at Village Construction Company who have learned that Batswana men are cooperative and productive if you treat them like comrades. The two also participated in the work of their supervisees. However, they explained that their workers could become even more productive if their company could increase their wages.

The abolition of the apartheid system and the subsequent installation of a black government in South Africa is also likely to contribute to the exclusion of women in the construction and related sectors. A black government in South Africa will be pressurized to create employment for the disenfranchised youth. This is likely to result in the repatriation of most of the over 16000 Batswana mine workers and other foreign migrant workers from South Africa's periphery.

An analysis that attributes the shortage of male labourers, especially in the late 1980s solely to men's "laziness", their delinquent and criminal tendencies which cause employers to dismiss them, as well as men's high turnover which emanates from, inter alia, class, racial and cultural oppression in the work place is inadequate. If only these factors are considered they obscure the fact that cultural traditions and ideological factors have given Batswana men a leverage over women in Botswana's political economy. The confinement of peasant women to rural areas

where they look after children, the elderly and livestock belonging to their husbands and fathers gives the latter a chance to migrate to South Africa and urban Botswana (Alexander, 1991:14). Momsen's following statement about male and female mobility in the Southern countries is applicable to the Botswana context.

Male mobility is higher than female mobility, both between places and between jobs, and more women are being left alone to support children" (Momsen, 1990:11).

This situation creates an opportunity for Batswana men, including those who come from the same socio-economic location as the female construction workers who participated in this research, to get most of the jobs that are created in urban communities. As I demonstrated previously, female unemployment is higher both in rural and urban Botswana. When peasant women moved urbanwards in the late 1980s, many Batswana men had already been absorbed into employment. The representatives of the Department of Mines explained that the mining industry employs more men than women. Physical fitness, and not academic credentials, is a major requirement for most of the unskilled jobs in this industry. This is also true in South Africa where many Batswana migrant workers are employed. Formal employment statistics obtained from the

Central Statistics Office for the period 1989/1991 show a preponderance of males over females in the mining and quarrying sector in Botswana. This information is presented in Table 16.

Table 16

Estimated Numbers of Botswana Males and Females Employed in
The Mining and Quarrying Sector in 1981-1991 Period

<u>Year</u>	<u>No. of Males</u>	<u>No. of Females</u>	<u>Total</u>
September 1989	6 847 (94.1%)	431 (5.9%)	7277 (100%)
March 1990	7 005 (93.8%)	464 (6.2%)	7469 (100%)
September 1990	7 296 (93.9%)	477 (6.1%)	7773 (100%)
March 1991	7 977 (93.7%)	470 (6.3%)	7447 (100%)

Source: Labour Statistics, 1990/1991

The under-representation of females in the mining sector can be attributed to, among other barriers, the discriminatory Section 115(1) of the Employment Act which prohibits the employment of women in underground mines. Mining, like other economic activities, is still perceived as a male domain. Table 17 provides statistics of Botswana men who were employed in the South African mining industry, as well as those who were recruited to the mines between 1983 and 1991.

Table 17

The Employment and Recruitment of Batswana
Males by South African Mines

<u>Year</u>	<u>No. of Male Employees</u>	<u>No. of Male Recruits</u>
1983	18 691	12 862
1984	18 916	19 075
1985	20 128	19 648
1986	20 994	19 223
1987	20 112	17 848
1988	19 320	16 470
1989	17 874	16 464
1990	16 983	14 627
1991	15 614	14 263

Source: Labour Statistics, 1990/1991

Botswana's conservative patriarchal culture also militates against the employment of women in other sectors. These include the army, the police force and the booming transport business where minimum levels of education like Primary School leaving Examination and Junior Certificates are required for positions in the lower strata of the job hierarchy. In fact one official of the Division of Transport has confirmed that the transport business employs many illiterate and semi-literate Batswana males as taxi and bus drivers and bus conductors. I have seen very few female bus conductors in Botswana.

The booming security companies in towns also employ many uneducated males at the low rungs of the job ladder. They employ few women as typists, cleaners, messengers and day watch-women. In March 1993 Westhynd Security Company had 700 employees of whom 10 were females. Wayward Security and Urban Security Companies also indicated that they had more males than females. The Vigilante Security Company had 263 males and one female respectively. The major explanation given by these companies for the under-representation of females is that their clients have preference for male security guards because they can pre-empt and catch dangerous thieves. The companies deploy women to shops because male security guards are not allowed to search suspected female thieves.

It is evident that if the myth that men are physically stronger than women is not deconstructed and laws and policies are created to facilitate women's entry in jobs that are mainly reserved for members of "the stronger sex", many Batswana women will continue to be marginalized by law makers and employers who sustain this myth. Many female and male construction workers and some employers confirmed that some women workers were stronger than male colleagues. Males in Botswana also dominate other sectors of the economy as Table 18 illustrates.

Table 18Males and Females Economic Participation by Sector in 1991

<u>Economic Activity</u>	<u>No. of Males</u>	<u>No. of Females</u>	<u>Total</u>
Agriculture	4717 (72.6%)	1782 (27.4%)	6499(100%)
Manufacturing	15301 (61.7%)	9502 (38.3%)	24803(100%)
Electricity & Water	2173 (90.7%)	224 (9.3%)	2397(100%)
Construction	27688 (88.5%)	3584 (11.5%)	31272(100%)
Commerce	19336 (48.6%)	20421 (51.4%)	39751(100%)
Transport And Construction	6921 (79.6%)	1777 (20.4%)	8698(100%)
Finance & Business Services	9584 (67.5%)	4768 (32.5%)	14352(100%)
Community and Personal Services	5047 (63.6%)	2884 (36.4%)	7931(100%)
Education	835 (43.4%)	1090 (56.6%)	1925(100%)

Source: Labour Statistics, 1990/1991

The shortage of male labourers in the construction sector can also be attributed to the fact that many men in Botswana are no longer prepared to do low paying and back-breaking jobs. The youth in this country are experiencing a revolution of rising expectations. Many of them also want more money so that they can buy European goods that are flooding the market and boost their self-esteem. A representative of Multi-Construction Company remarked that:

The youth in your country want to live like kings. They are not interested in acquiring industrial skills. They only want big money.

The youth's high expectations emanate from Botswana's widely advertised "economic and political successes" and the recent corruption scandals in which government ministers and senior bureaucrats were implicated. In one of the groups a woman complained that,

It does not make sense at all. Why should we toil for these meagre wages when our rich leaders are also stealing?.

I should explain that in nearly all the groups the workers were very concerned about this corruption. I define this as one of the factors that are responsible for the demoralization of Botswana workers who have been expecting a better share from the national cake. Most general workers in this research indicated that they would need between P400 and 600 to meet their basic needs.

Some men have resorted to stealing as a form of "lucrative self-employment". In February 1993, Councillor Jonathan Saboi observed that criminal activities of Botswana Youth who collaborate with foreigners weaken the economy (Rathari, 1993:5). The booming crime industry has also been seen by some Botswana as a consequence of the fact that "most foreigners are in high positions leaving citizens languishing in poverty (Ngwako, 1993:3). According to the afore-mentioned

Councillor the Botswana education system also frustrates the youth and contributes to their economic, social and political marginalization.

The BOCCIM Deputy Director has revealed that between January and November, 1990 an average of two robberies were committed every month in Gaborone (Siso, 1990:12-13). Over P500,000 was lost to armed robbers in the same year.

Some of the male workers at Come Again Company believed that they could make more money than what they earn if they were to resort to theft. Crimes have reduced the pool of Botswana men who could work in the construction and other sectors that need unskilled labourers. According to the Botswana Prison Service Statistics, out of the 2783 criminals who were convicted in 1987 1636 (58.8%) convictions involved theft. The percentage of male and female thieves were 88.5 percent and 11.5 percent respectively. The crisis of crime which coincided with Botswana's economic boom is likely to escalate in the post-diamond era. It is a function of "economic growth without distribution".

The last two factors that are important in explaining the shortage of male labourers are what I call "station-syndrome" and "village mentality". The Gaborone station is a hubbub of social and economic activities. It is always full of buyers, sellers and travellers from morning to late at night. Most of the new migrants are "initiated" here. Thus some of the young men who get jobs use them only as a means of raising a small

capital which they use to buy products like sweets, ice-cream, pop ice, fruits, music tapes, watches, magazines and other items which they sell at the station and other places. Most of the managers in the companies do not understand these youth. They conclude that they quit their jobs because of laziness. It should be clarified that some of the illiterate urban youth were free cattle herders. The loss of cattle, which used to be their main source of economic power, has forced them to migrate to work for capitalists before they unlearned their cultural orientation. Some of them cannot withstand cultural and class oppression that obtains in the work place. They want to be free "to run their lives". Hence, they resort to petty trading.

I use the concept "village mentality" to refer to ways of thinking, tendencies and behaviour which emanate from one's strong attachment or identity to his or her village where most of his or her friends and relatives live. People with this mentality would work for a few months and buy gifts and other "nice things of the city" and return to the village to share them with relatives and friends. This tendency is traceable to the days before the processes of industrialization and urbanization started in Botswana when male returnees from South African mines, farms and other industries brought gifts and money which earned them popularity and a "special status" in the community.

Immature youth who are victims of this village influence become extravagant. Their "present-time" orientation causes them to squander their money and return to towns to look for new jobs only when their money runs out. However, female construction workers take their work seriously because they support themselves, their children, parents and close relatives. They know that they have slim chances of getting new jobs.

It is important to clarify and emphasize some of the major ideas raised previously, as well as explain why the women who participated in this study could not enter other sectors of the economy, which are dominated by males. Of all the above-stated factors the strongest one that accounts for the feminization of the construction sector is the shortage of compliant male general labourers. The point also needs to be elaborated.

The rapid construction boom that Botswana experience in the 1980s coincided with a slightly low rate of male unemployment. Besides the fact that many men had been absorbed into employment, the problem of shortage of labour in the construction sector also emanated from the fact that some unemployed men were , and are still not yet ready to participate in full-time formal employment. As well, the revolution of rising expectations that Botswana youth are experiencing has rendered construction work unattractive,

especially to males. Most of them, as this study reveals, need better paying jobs so that they can afford European goods that are flooding the local market.

The obvious implication of the major argument raised above is that if employers has enough compliant male labourers the hiring of peasant women might not have occurred. I should explain, though that the shortage of male workers did not automatically give rise to the employment of females. They were only hired after they had demonstrated that they could do jobs which were hitherto performed by males only. The interesting aspect of this research is that it reveals that, to the extent that industrialists experience a dire need for labour, women may enter occupations that are traditionally thought of as male preserves. However, this research also shows that even now companies still have preference for male labourers.

Although most of the representatives of the companies and women construction workers claimed that men quit their employment due to their indolence and irresponsibility, this is not a convincing explanation for the employment of females. In fact, the widespread view that Batswana workers are lazy is inconsistent with Mill's (1961) position that when a social situation affects a significant sector of a society its genesis can be largely attributed to the structures and institutions of that society, and not just the individuals who are affected.

There is no evidence that demonstrates that women's productivity preponderates that of males who remain on their jobs. As a matter of fact, the companies have not yet instituted a procedure for measuring and comparing the output of females against that of males. But even if women were to produce more work than their male counterparts, it would still be implausible to attribute men's low production to laziness because both men and women in the local and foreign companies complain of gross economic exploitation and other forms of abuse which worry and demoralize men, and cause them not to take their work seriously or quit their employment. As I argued in the forgoing pages, women cannot respond in this way because they are struggling to support children who have been abandoned by their fathers. The implication of this situation is that if the number of females were to be increased further, their subordination and powerlessness might cause the wages in this sector to remain low.

Lastly, another factor which further corroborates the argument that the shortage of male labourers is a key factor in explaining the feminization of the construction sector is the evidence which shows that if construction companies can find and retain more complaint men, the number of females may drop drastically. Construction companies are profit-conscious. They have explained that even though women are cooperative and industrious, their employment involves some costs which they could not incur if they had loyal males.

Already some companies have stopped employing women because they have improved their relationship with their male labourers. In some companies the workers claimed that illegal male immigrants from the neighbouring countries were hired. Lastly, the construction sector is still dominated by men. The fact that companies have not yet restructured their personnel policies to create conditions that are propitious for gender-sensitive supervision and counselling means their employment of women is not influenced by feminist concerns.

A number of reasons can be used to explain why peasant women who took part in this study have succeeded in entering the construction sector, and not other male-dominated sectors. These explanations are premised upon, inter alia, the impact of labour legislation on women, the practices of sexist employers, "work experience and skills-gap" between men and women, reasons that are peculiar to the construction sector and socio-cultural impediments that thwart women's chances to improve their social and economic lives.

The prevailing political subservience which emanates from the absence of effective women and gender-sensitive political organizations has left all forms of structural oppression that women and other deprived sectors of the population experience unchallenged. Thus, even though Botswana has been showered with accolades for its democratic rule, many women have not yet experienced this democracy. Some of the country's conservative laws will perpetuate entrenched negative

stereotypes that society has about women. These includes sections 115 of the Employment Act Section 116(1) is also sexist. It states that,

No female employee shall be employed in any industrial or agricultural undertaking during the night without her express consent.

Momsen (1991) has argued that sexist and exclusionist laws and tendencies like this emanate from what a male-dominated society calls "moral grounds". However a small sector of Batswana women have entered the construction because there are no laws that prohibit employers from hiring them. Although the exclusion or underrepresentation of women in the mining and quarrying industry, security companies and the army are justified on the grounds that women are physically weak, the employment of women in the male-dominated construction sector clearly reveals that when the interests of capital are at stake some of the socially constructed practices can be easily abandoned. Thus, there is no cogency in the argument based on the physical strength of women, especially because unlike in the construction sector, women's physical ability has not been tested in other sectors.

It is important to note that there are limited employment opportunities for men and women in Botswana. Even the construction sector absorbs a very limited number of workers. This unacceptable unemployment situation is also exacerbated by the fact that Botswana has one of the highest expatriates

communities in Africa (Mclvor, 1990:40). This journalist quotes a graduate of the University of Botswana expressing a measure of frustration about these situation.

Expatriates may have skills that we lack, but we have seen little replacement of these people by our own nationals. It seems that there are few attempts to train our people to take over from these "experts" when they complete their contracts (Mclovvr, 1990:40).

There are other factors which explain why many peasant women cannot get employment in other male-dominated sectors. These factors reduce poor women's ability to compete for jobs and other opportunities with their male counterparts. These women explained that unlike men, when they were in their rural homes they were burdened with unpaid duties of caring for children, the elderly, the sick and the homes. Some said they served other women who were "in confinement"; that is women who had just given birth. Their lived experiences corroborate Nengwekhulu's arguments about the social domestication of women.

Domestication is used here to mean the generally held view that the place of women is at home. Implied in this notion is that attendance to all the domestic courses is the responsibility and domain of women. Thus housekeeping an all its routine, repetitive responsibility and uninteresting attendant duties, care of children, including teaching, nursing and others are therefore considered the only legitimate occupations for women in the male-dominated society (Nengwekhulu, 1987:9).

Batswana men are not constrained by their parents to travel and look for employment and other opportunities. Women who try to do likewise may be accused by their parents and other members of the village of "neglecting children", or "going around looking for men". It is only during harsh times like the current drought period that some women may be given permission by parents or husbands to go and look for employment in urban areas. During an interview at Come Again Company one women explained that,

When poverty attacks a family, men forget the belief that a woman's place is at her home. They even encourage women to go and find a job to feed them and the children.

The female construction workers explained that before they got their jobs they searched high and low for employment. Some indicated that the only unskilled jobs that were available were only in the household sector which they quit because construction companies pay "slightly higher wages".

Men's free movement expose them to information about available opportunities in the country. Their free time also enables them to participate in activities that expose them to rudimentary skills which women lack. Thus partly explains what I call "work experience and skills-gap". To give an illustration, the companies that I interviewed explained that some of the males that they employed as carpenters and

bricklayers did not acquire their skills through formal training. They learned through trial-and-error while they were working as labourers in several companies. They were eventually issued references which enable them a slightly higher wage than women. It is also interesting to realize that when men and women are employed as labourers, the former also get exposed to tasks and skills which they can use elsewhere if they quit their employment or are dismissed. These include basic skills such as learning how to operate machines, drive a car or truck, how to paint and fix some equipment. Several companies explained that cooperative men who are keen to learn their jobs quickly are promoted. However, women are confined to marginal duties and their chances of upward mobility and mobility between jobs is restricted. This situation also explains why women stay longer in construction companies than men.

The duties that women perform in construction, such as digging, lifting, carrying and (un)loading need no training. Peasant women perform all these on their land and drought relief projects, and their land. However, others sectors demand some skills which can be acquired through some basic teaching or training.

Batswana women are also disadvantaged by cultural beliefs and expectations. It was intriguing to hear some managers, male and female construction workers attributing the employment of women in the construction sector to what they

called "the unavailability of suitable employment for women in Botswana". A woman leader Elsie Alexander also buttresses this sexist thinking.

Given the nature of available employment opportunities women tend to have limited opportunities in the formal sector. Most jobs are in the traditional male fields, for example, in construction (Alexander, 1991:46).

This author should not passively accept the social construction of "traditional male fields" which contributes to the higher rate of female unemployment and poverty. It is a commonplace that many Batswana still think of a soldier, police officer, security guard or night watch person, cobbler, barber, miner, hunter, mechanic, gardener truck and train driver as males only. There is also a socially entrenched assumption that illiterate and unskilled women can or should only work as house-women. Nenqvekhulu (1987:9) also defines this stereotyped perception and belief about women as a direct function of the social domestication of women.

If all oppressive stereotypes and values are not challenged and changed many Batswana women are unlikely to develop ambitious life goals or venture into occupations that are wrongly classified as men's territories. Meena (1991:39) suggests that the mass media and various forms of adult and formal education campaigns should be used widely to revolutionize the attitudes of Southern African societies to women. John (1989) argues for the exposure of women to all

kinds of skills and knowledge so that they can serve as role models for young girls. This author like Harrison (1985), strongly believes that the empowerment of women in the South can pave the way for big social progress.

The empowerment of females in the construction sector might also have been facilitated by the fact that this sector is private, and dominated by foreign companies whose views and attitudes towards women may be slightly different from Batswana males. The representative of Multi-Constructive Company's explanation seems plausible.

This development might have been encouraged by South African and other foreign companies. There are some companies in South Africa which resort to hiring women because men are uncooperative or violent. You know that many practices in Botswana are based on South Africa's experience.

One of the first companies to employ women construction workers, Ridgeway, is a foreign company. It is unlikely that Batswana employers would have imitated this development without foreign influence. Earlier I quoted the current chairperson of the Botswana House of Chiefs who openly decreed the feminization of the construction sector on the grounds that strenuous job will debilitate them. This view seems to be held by many Batswana. When I asked the women to state society's attitudes towards female construction workers many of them stated that some people pitied them while some blamed

them for destroying their bodies. The following statements were repeated by nearly all women:

people scoff at us. They say we are aging too quickly and we are not attractive. Some also say we will not give birth because the job we are doing destroys our bodies. Some women say we deserve this hardship because we refuse to work for them as domestics.

Although many Batswana women have been excluded from formal employment on account of their physical ability and their undervaluation, which is culturally determined, there are other important factors that promote discrimination against them. For instance, it is possible that the exclusion of women from the Botswana defence force and their conspicuous under-representation in the police and prison forces, and other male-dominated state departments is also motivated by the need for social and political control. Botswana's growing unemployment problem is exacerbated by its relatively young population (Somolekae; 1992:iii). Thus the increasing social, economic and political frustration that Batswana youth are experiencing might culminate in male radicalism. Parson makes a remark about Botswana's political economy that has been echoed by other writers.

Given the nature of mining and Botswana's position, it is not likely that an autonomous national economy can be created. On the other hand, there are signs that the present policy may not last. There are no guarantees that revenues will continue to increase, and even if they do, the petty bourgeoisie has shown a remarkable ability to consume increased resources (Parson;1984:117).

Macpherson and Midgley (1987:126-127) point out that when the state is threatened by violent groups it manipulates social policy to mollify their revolutionary fervour and maintain the status quo.

I should explain that although the state's employment police in the afore-mentioned departments disadvantages women, it is unlikely to affect the employment of women in construction. This is so because the state encourages the private sector to help it to de-escalate the unemployment situation (Somolekae, 1992:iii). It is unlikely to criticize the feminization of the construction sector even though many conservative men and women still consider it morally unacceptable because it has failed to create employment for them. As well, it lacks an adequate policy to cater for the unemployed poor.

5.7 The Exploitation And Oppression Of Labour In The Construction Sector

Female construction workers have experienced structural oppression at three different levels; namely the rural, domestic and construction sectors. The exploitation and oppression that these women and their male colleagues are experiencing stem from several sources. First, they lack effective organizations which can study their working conditions and help in the enforcement of labour legislation

that relates to their employment. Most of the women, except five women at Tswana Construction Company, did not belong to the Construction Workers Union. Many were unaware of its existence or role. Other women explained that they did not have time to participate in the activities of community organizations or even the union. This problem was clearly explained by one of the women:

I can't successfully combine this work with other activities. When I finish work I walk home to rest so that I can wake up early and get to work on time.

Some women explained that they did not participate in any community groups because they knew very few people. Others said they could not afford to pay membership fees or taxi fares to attend meetings. Although 7.6 percent and 34.8 percent of the women identified themselves with some community organizations and churches respectively, time constraints limited their participation.

Union representatives explained that their organization is experiencing a serious poverty of material resources and skilled person-power to perform its functions effectively.

Second, peasant women and men lack legal literacy. Their ignorance renders them susceptible to exploitation and abuse by unscrupulous employers. Third, Botswana is, in effect "a beggar state" whose burgeoning power elites have a vested interest in foreign capital. They are less likely to

influence foreign companies to modify their negative practices against the workers. These parasitic neophyte elites do not want to be seen to be complaining too much by foreign investors. Thus, they play the role of "cooling agents" of capital by discouraging the workers from fighting for better wages. The following statement directed to the BCL mine workers in 1976 by the late Minister of House Affairs, Bakwena Kgari illustrates this point:

The borrowed or attracted capital to Botswana..... must assist us to develop ourselves.... a strike endangers people's lives, and the mining machinery, but it could have quite easily have frightened people who have risked their money in Botswana to the point of withdrawing (Kgari; 1976:3-4).

Fourth, Botswana companies claim that they cannot afford to pay their workers a minimum wage because they cannot compete effectively with foreign companies.. The representatives of Lenong and Makemma companies admitted that minimum wages (P1.15 and P2.50 per hour for labourers and tradespersons respectively) are meagre, but explained that they were financially weak to pay this amount, or a little more to motivate their employers.

Lastly, the oppressive situation that the construction workers are experiencing is a function of "a culture of abuse" in which powerless men, women, races and tribes are subordinated to dominant classes. In particular, Botswana's

reserve army of unskilled and semi-skilled labour and dwindling employment opportunities predispose the workers to economic exploitation and oppression.

Most of the complaints that female and male construction workers raised during group discussions, and those that appeared in the grievance forms that I perused at the Construction Workers Union office were about illegal dismissals and unfair wages. The grievances about the wages included below-minimum wage payments, late payment, incorrect calculation of wages and employer's refusal to pay for days in which they failed to provide employees with work and employers refusal to pay double rate for work done during the weekends. Many employees also complained about Batswana and foreign employer's refusal to discuss matters pertaining to wages. At one South African company a male worker indicated that:

Sir we are treated like slaves here. The Boers do not want to hear any questions about wages. They simply tell you to quit if you don't want to work. Is this a fair treatment?

A group of women who are working for a business venture owned by a Motswana man and his white business colleagues presented similar complaints. They corroborated a remark made by their colleagues:

Our employers are cunning. When we raise the issue of wages the Motswana man says we should talk to the white men, who always claim that they are very busy.

In 1992 the union recorded 40 cases involving employer's refusal to pay their employers as per the terms of their working contract. These included the denial of employers benefits of resignation, that is severance pay.

It should be explained that the complaints that are lodged with the union are the tip of the ice-berg since a small percentage of the workers are unionised. Union representatives said the Gaborone Branch has 200 members. Their statistics are gender-blind. However, most of the Union's members are men. Even when I was gathering data at the Union's office it was only men who were coming to present grievances. Union leaders attributed men's higher participation in the activities of the Union to their political consciousness. This view was also expressed by some managers. A Motswana sole proprietor explained that;

I prefer women to men, Men bring party politics in the work place. They try to influence other workers to go on strike for no good reason.

One may argue, however, that the under-representation of Botswana women in trade unions and other organization is not reflective of their lack of political awareness. Women's time is consumed by domestic duties. Some women are also prevented from attending meetings and activities of organizations by their husbands, men-friends or parents. Sexist, classist and other exclusionist tendencies that obtain in male-dominated

unions also hinder women's participation. I have observed that the construction workers union lacks gender awareness and sensitivity. It has seriously ignored important issues like sexual harassment in the work place. It tends to be reactive in its intervention, despite widespread reports that construction companies abuse and exploit their employees. It also narrowly focuses on complaints relating to wages and unfair dismissals. Issues like racism, ethnicism, classism and sexism should be addressed in Botswana. As far as gender issues are concerned, the Union needs to network with other organizations and individuals who are striving to improve the conditions of working women.

The prevalent practice of unfair dismissal of employees in the construction sector, which mostly takes the form of dismissing the workers without giving them notice and unfair retrenchment are ultra vires Sections 18(5) and 25 (1, 2, and 3) of the Employment Act respectively. The latter stipulates that the retrenchment of workers should be based on the principle first-in-last-out, and that a formal notice of the employers' intention to retrench employees be submitted to the Commissioner of Labour. This Section also requires that if retrenched workers seek employment again in the occupation which is related to their previous occupation they should be given priority of engagement if it is reasonably practicable.

The former section requires that employers be given a sufficient written or oral notice before their contract of employment is terminated.

The Union had received approximately 98 cases involving unfair dismissal of employees, of which 18 were about employers' failure to give their workers notice. According to Union representatives, most of the cases that employees report to the Union emanate from the contravention of the above-mentioned sections of the Employment Act.

Although Section 18 of this Act provides for the payment of maternity allowance, many women in different companies said this right was violated. However, during the interviews, company managers said that whereas they do not employ pregnant women, they pay maternity benefits to women who get pregnant while they are already employed.

The employees of foreign companies complained about racism in the work place. At one South African company male and female workers explained that South African workers were given preferential treatment. They were issued with protective clothing whereas Batswana workers bought their own. Apartheid capitalism has used the racial factor to retard the development of class consciousness and solidarity among the workers in South Africa. The same divisive strategy is, however, used by Batswana who deliberately hire the members of oppressed ethnic minorities, especially the indigenous people, to neutralize the opposition of militant workers from other

nationalities. When I asked one supervisor about the racial composition of his supervisees he explained that "we have only employed Batswana and Bakalanga". Thus, as far as he is concerned Bakalanga are not Batswana.

The workers not only suffer economic abuse from their South African employers, but also verbal assault. A few cases of verbal abuse also appeared in the grievance forms of the Construction Workers Union office. One case of this nature involved six women construction workers who also lodged a complaint about their unfair dismissal by a South African company. The employer had insulted the six women because they complained about the poor car that they were supposed to be transported with. He had responded angrily; "My kaar is nien taxi vir kaffirs"

This literally means "my car is not a taxi for kaffirs". Kaffirs is a derogatory Afrikaner reference to Africans. Insults like this should not be taken lightly as they erode the morale of the workers and result in low productivity.

During group discussions some women talked about the abuse that their male colleagues perpetrate against them. Some also said men steal their food. As well, when they ask men to help them with their work they refuse on the grounds that "you said you are as tough as men". The women explained that other members of their communities also abused them for having been influenced by Emang Basadi to compete for "men's jobs". However, the women in all eight groups explained that

they were forced into doing construction work by their dire economic straits. None of them wanted to be associated with Emang Basadi's politics.

The Managing Director of Tlhoraboroka said he had to counsel his male employees to stop sexist remarks made against female workers. He also explained that some males used to refuse to assist women on the grounds that they were earning equal wages.

This study not only reveals structural sources of oppression in the construction sector, it also presents them as stumbling blocks that prevent the workers from challenging their oppression. Racism and ethnicity have already been cited as examples. It was also interesting to see how the gender variable and the different experiences of male and female workers divide the workers. Whereas some male workers perceive women as "weaklings" who promote the status quo, women also despise and mistrust men on the grounds that they can afford to "rock the boat" and quit their employment any time because they do not maintain any children. The women mentioned examples of men who left their jobs without even demanding their wages. Thus, women's reproductive role and the part they play in poverty-stricken female-headed households influence them to approach oppressive employers with caution. To simply view them as submissive and men as assertive and tough is to turn a blind eye to their serious predicament.

5.8 Wages and Cost of Living

The starvation wages and sky-rocketing cost of living have made it difficult for the female workers who took part in this study to achieve quantitative and qualitative changes in their lives. They are trapped in a vicious cycle of poverty. In one of the groups a woman whose statement was buttressed by her colleagues summarized this problem as follows:

The wages that we earn are too small. They are not meant to support a family. After paying rent and buying food we are left with nothing.

This meant that these women cannot save or invest any money to elevate their terribly low status. Two of the women interviewed have been forced to work by their parents. One of these women explained that:

My father is too strict. I hand out my full pay packet to him every month.

Table 19 presents the women's average monthly expenditure on rent and lunch only. They explained that their work is strenuous and forces them to eat a lot. Most of them walk to work because they cannot afford to pay bus fare. Walking long distances to and from work increases their fatigue and affects their productivity.

Table 19Women's Expenditure on Rent and Lunch

<u>Company</u>	<u>Monthly</u>	<u>Average Monthly</u>	<u>Average Monthly</u>	<u>Total</u>
	Wage	Rent	Expenditure on Lunch	
Makemma	P198.00	P76.00	P24.00	P100.00
Tswana	P207.00	P81.00	P30.00	P111.00
T & P	P207.00	P55.00	P40.00	P 95.00
Meetswana	P207.00	P68.00	P40.35	P100.95
Trucon	P207.00	P51.00	P36.00	P 87.00
Lenong	P198.00	P70.00	P50.00	P120.00
Ceremel	P207.00	P64.00	P24.00	P88.00
Come Again	P207.00	-	P25.00	P25.00

A total of 53 women rented small rooms in Gaborone, Mogoditshane and Tlokweng. The women at Come Again Company commuted from their village, Metsimotlhabe.

The economic stagnation experienced by female construction workers and other poor women has important implications. If their situation is not changed it would eventually lead to an increase in prostitution, cohabitation and child poverty. Feminists in Botswana who seek to assist disadvantaged women should not only campaign for more employment opportunities and equal pay, because the pay may as well be starvation wages. There is an urgent need for education and training for peasant women so that they can upgrade their social and economic status and child support arrangements.

CHAPTER SIX

6.0 CONCLUSION

The major purpose of this study was to account for the feminization of the construction sector which began in the late 1980s. It has found out that these peasant women are semi-proletarianized. They might be retrenched any time their employers complete their projects or get driven out of stiff competition by big companies. As well, the improvement of companies' management apparatus might attract and retain more males. The possibility of the repatriation of Batswana mine workers from South Africa in a post-apartheid era might also contribute to the displacement of women construction workers. It is also possible that some might quit their employment during times of good rains to go and plough. Some quit their jobs because of the stress emanating from hard labour.

The exacerbation of rural poverty by drought, the collapse of traditional institutions of welfare, as well as a critical shortage of employment opportunities for unskilled women influenced them to seek employment in the construction sector. Employers in this sector only hired them because they were experiencing a shortage of unskilled and compliant general male labourers.

This study has found out that the construction sector is still dominated by men. Although women are more cooperative it is clear that their employment is secondary to that of men. It does not signal a fundamental change in society's or companies' attitude towards women. The employers in the construction sector would still prefer cooperative and reliable men to women because they still believe that men are physically stronger than women. As well, they are reluctant to pay women maternity allowance. Most of the supervisors in the construction companies that were interviewed have not been educated and trained to address problems. The precarious situation of female construction workers necessitates the creation of appropriate employment opportunities for poor women. It is important that they should be offered education and training so that they can occupy positions which do not only require manual labour, where many men seem to have a comparative advantage.

The shortage of male labourers has been attributed to the oppressive conditions in the construction sector and the absorption of men in other sectors of the Botswana and South African economies. Many Botswana men are also languishing in prisons and others are "self-employed" as thieves. As well, many Botswana men who have not yet acquired technological skills and values are not yet ready to work full time. They work briefly to raise money for specific purposes and quit their jobs.

The prevalence of racism, ethnicism, classism and cultural oppression in some companies also contribute to a high male turnover. Women have a big child care responsibilities and cannot simply quit these oppressive conditions. Thus, men who abandon their wives and women friends with children indirectly contribute to their oppression.

This study has presented important lessons to be learnt by women leaders, politicians, union leaders, social workers and their colleagues in other professions. First, the feminization of the labour force which is not preceded by the fundamental restructuring of gender relations in the home, work place and other spheres does not guarantee that working women's lives will improve. Second, the failure of unions and women's organizations to assist in promoting gender awareness in the work place results in both companies and male workers abusing female workers. Male workers undermine their female colleagues. This divisive attitude makes it difficult for the workers to cooperate and collectively address their oppression.

Third, the prevailing conservative management practice which attaches overriding emphasis on the goals and needs of organizations and sees workers as passive servants of their employers cannot enhance labour productivity. Many companies are likely to benefit from a participatory management

approach. There is also a dire need for companies to establish personnel departments and institute a program that will combat racism, ethnicism and sexism in the work environment. A cultural interpretation program should be instituted by the Ministry of Labour and Home Affairs to help foreign companies and their Batswana workers to understand each other.

Fourth, the lack of effective employee education and structures that can assist in the enforcement and evaluation of labour legislation means that the conditions of marginal workers are unlikely to improve. It is also important to note that even though economic incentives alone will not step up the productivity of labour, there is an urgent need to raise minimum wages and ensure that construction companies implement them. The prevailing situation whereby local and foreign companies are not strictly supervised to conform to labour legislation encourages them to abuse and exploit powerless workers.

This study has helped "women in abject poverty" to articulate circumstances that contributed to their economic, social, political and cultural marginalization. Their predicament emanates from the operation and practices of Botswana's traditional patriarchal and emerging market systems. Their disenfranchisement is a function of internal colonization which is being exacerbated by the growing role of international capital. These women construction workers were

powerless in the agricultural and household sectors. They still occupy peripheral positions in the construction industry.

The study has shown that the process of industrialization and urbanization in towns that serve as centres for "modernization" or capitalist development has subjected these women's communities to cultural colonialism which is continuing to destroy a cultural base which used to sustain traditional systems of social welfare and support. Urban-centred developments have not translated into changes that can boost the status of these women. Although drought has exacerbated the unemployment and poverty of peasant classes in rural and urban Botswana, elite classes are, as usual, wallowing in riches while these women and their children and other unempowered classes are languishing in calamitous poverty. Thus, poor Botswana are victims of "economic growth without distribution".

The state in Botswana has attempted to confine the poor, most of whom are women, to the rural society where they are made to depend on unreliable rainfed agriculture and means-tested food handouts which promote political acquiescence. The state's neglect of rural communities is based on the assumption that communocratic principles and extended family ties are stronger in rural Botswana. However, these poor

women's urbanward migration is indicative of, inter alia, the fact that traditional structures and the rural economy are losing the capacity to support and retain them.

Although this study recognises that men contribute to women's poverty it has also demonstrated that in the Botswana context men are also victims of cultural colonialism which engenders an "identity crisis" and "role confusion". As well, it has shown that poor Botswana men are also oppressed by patriarchal capitalism. The study has also found out that whereas the poverty of female construction workers and marginal women emanates from low wages and support for children, parents and relatives, many working men's poverty is due to, among other causes, their use of alcohol and their lack of moral discipline.

The proletarian women who participated in this study have not only been abandoned by policy elites. They have also suffered "benign neglect" from individuals and organizations that one might expect to respond effectively to their plight. These include social work organizations, women's wings of political parties, women's pressure groups and non-governmental organizations. It has been argued in this report that two interrelated factors account for this situation. They are classist tendencies that prevail in these organizations as well as the inadequacies of their ideologies or perspectives that underpin their interventive approaches.

It has been suggested that all groups that seek to confront the "poverties" that victimize the dispossessed should attempt to comprehend diverse sources of their oppression so that they can re-orientate their philosophies and program goals to the felt and expressed needs of their clientele. This also implies that the poor should be taken into confidence and be encouraged to participate maximally in the development, implementation and evaluation of service delivery programs.

Professional elitism that prevails in social work agencies should be overcome. Social work educators, practitioners and students should concentrate more on the empowerment of marginal women and youth. Their profession should de-emphasize psychological treatment because, unlike in developed countries where social workers are mostly addressing "the psycho-social consequences" of industrial and urban development, social workers in Botswana are expected to assist their clientele to overcome problems of underdevelopment and abject poverty.

It is suggested that social workers should network with other organizations and increase society's awareness and sensitivity to women's oppression. This also means that the social work curriculum at the University of Botswana should incorporate and promote gender-sensitive analysis.

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