

At present, the two worlds are still largely isolated from each other. Many employers see the 'mindset' of the workers as the main reason for high staff turnover and want to change the workers' attitude with incentives and special training programmes. The workers, on the other side, feel unfairly treated by superiors and complain about a lack of understanding for their situation and their needs. It could be an important step for employers and employees to start talking to each other. For the workers, the first priority is a better pay. A 26-year-old man from the group interviewed in Tafo, whose wife is a factory worker in a textile company, points out that textile work should be profitable for both sides:

"The most important thing is improving the pay. The employers know what makes them profitable and the employees also know what they deserve for their labor. I believe that they can mutually benefit each other."

3.3 Interviews with relatives of textile workers

A series of interviews conducted with relatives⁸ of textile workers express similar views like those of the communities. The relatives also weigh up the pros and cons of factory work. Overall, families support the women's decision to work in the textile industry. However, where drop-outs occur, this often has to do with disappointed expectations and in many cases it is the families who urge the women to quit their job.

When it comes to deciding how to spend their household income, couples usually make their decisions equally. From numerous interviews conducted with female textile workers (without the presence of family members), there was never any mention of a decision-making dominance of husbands or families.

Textile workers whose partners have their own income tend to be under less pressure than single workers with no family support. For the workers and their partners, the work in the textile factory is associated with the hope of modest prosperity and gradual social advancement. Despite dissatisfaction, many stay in their jobs because they hope for long-term improvements. This contrasts with the widespread view among managers that employees generally do not have long-term prospects in their jobs ("they live for the day").

8 The Interviews with relatives of textile workers were carried out in locations in Hawassa and Addis Ababa in 2020 and 2021 by Setisemhal Getashew Teshale and Gifawosen Markos Mitta as part of the JLU research.

Most of the relatives interviewed as part of the research project live relatively close to the industrial parks.⁹ For employees whose families/relatives live nearby, it is easier to reconcile their social/family life and their work than for employees whose families live in more distant areas. The following examples provide some insights into the interviews with family members of textile workers.

“Her only focus is her job and I support this”

A husband of a textile worker (he is 47 years old) considers his wife's work as an important support for the household income. He himself has a job as a broker and security guard and tries to cover the essential costs of living with his salary. He assumes that his wife is happy with her work at the factory, otherwise she would quit the job, he says. He supports his wife's decision to work in the textile factory at the Bole Lemi Industrial Park, although he would like her to find a job closer to their home not least to save on taxi fares. (This couple lived relatively far from the park.) The husband sees it as important that his wife is learning a profession. He hopes that one day she will be able to start her own business:

“She is tirelessly working, and I try to encourage her and keep her morale up. I am telling her that once upon a day God may change our life. I wish she will have her own business one day and get the best benefit out of it. But currently, she is trying to help her family with what she gets.”

Once they can afford buying a sewing machine, the woman wants to start her own business and work from home. At the time of the interview, she had been working in the textile factory for more than four years. “Since we started to live here, she goes to work in the morning and when she comes back from work, she stays at home,” the husband says. She is not involved in social activities outside the family, he tells:

“She does not have any relationship or friendship with anyone in the neighborhood. Her rest day is on Sunday. After a few hours of rest, she starts to wash the clothes or she goes to visit her family. [...] Her only focus is her job and I support this.”

Although she is often exhausted, she does not complain and fulfils her domestic duties as best she can, the husband says. He describes her as someone who doesn't

9 There were pragmatic reasons for talking to relatives of textile workers near the industrial parks: On the one hand, there was not enough time to travel to far away regions. On the other hand, there were also travel restrictions related to the safety of the research team.

like “sitting around with the neighbors and gossiping” anyway. He strongly emphasizes her focus on the job:

“She does not like missing a single day of her work. When she gets exhausted, I tell her to skip work, but then she asks me back: ‘Would you pay me the 400 birr which will be deducted from my salary?’ Her stance regarding her job is very strong.”

A domestic worker looks after their small child. If one of the partners has to stay at home for whatever reason, the man is more likely to let his wife work in the factory.

Some of her colleagues have quit their factory jobs. The husband tells he has already suggested to his wife to look for another job too, one with less travelling time. However, she responded that she plans to start her own business anyway. Overall, the husband reports, in their location there is little interest in working in the textile factories. In the past, recruitment attempts were virtually unsuccessful. The interviewee suspects that this has something to do with the distance to the park, but also with the low pay. He explains that “people look for alternative jobs even if the difference in salary is 100 or 200 birr. [...] People might work many difficult jobs, but they don't want to work in the factory.” Everyone seeks decent work and a better life, he says.

“It is her family who is trying to help her”

The 27-year-old sister of a textile worker reports that ten people live in her family's household. All adults (except the sister, who works in the textile factory) live from day laborer jobs. In the family, they support each other. The woman reports that (at the time of the interview) her sister has been working in the textile factory since nine months. Before that, she had worked as a waitress. At first, she was happy to have finally found a permanent job, the sister says. She even moved in to a rental house in an area nearby the Bole Lemi Industrial Park. However, when she realized the salary was not enough to cover all costs, she returned back to the family who lives further away from the park. The sister draws a sobering conclusion about the textile work:

“It is like a 24-hour job. The work and the salary do not match. The only good thing about this job is learning the profession of sewing. If somebody wants to start a personal business, it could help. Apart from that, there is nothing one can profit from the job.”

The woman is not happy that her sister works in the textile factory because she believes that the job only incurs costs and that the family has to cover the transportation costs because the factory is further away. “She is not able to be independent.

It is her family who is trying to help her.” Besides, the sister is not happy in her job. The interviewee reports that she would be permanently exhausted and sick from the factory work. Poor working conditions, poor pay that you can’t live on. That is her conclusion.

Since the family supports her sister, she tries to repay them by working overtime at the factory and doing housework on Sundays. Nevertheless, according to her sister, the situation is very difficult and only bearable because the family members help each other. The interviewee reports that neighbors encourage her sister to work at the factory. They say it is better than just sitting at home, as at least she can learn a profession. The woman disagrees. She believes that “at present, it is only a personal business that could enable a person to earn money with their work.” She reports that she has friends who used to work in the factory but gave up their jobs and now work in small private businesses in their immediate vicinity, where they earn better.

Her sister sometimes misses work because she is exhausted. “She comes home very late and might not even eat her dinner. She has also some health problems.” When it’s vacation time, she’s happy that her sister can be home. But sometimes, she explains, you have to work at the factory even during vacation, and you get paid overtime for that. At least this helps her sister buy a few basic things. However, she finds the work underpaid and exhausting. That is why everyone is looking for alternatives. She also criticizes the fact that breaks and toilet times are not sufficient. Her recommendations to management are clear, although she does not believe that the company has any interest in its employees:

“It would be great if they could increase the wages for the workers and give them more time to eat their lunch properly. But I think they are only trying to achieve their own goals. They do not care about the workers.”

As proof, she cites the fact that her sister has 400 birr deducted from her salary for one day of absence per month, which she believes is disproportionate to her salary. She expresses her anger about this: “Is it not a shame? How much are they paying them at the beginning while they deduct 400 birr for one day of absence? This has to be changed!”

“Although she is suffering, her income is helping us to survive”

Another husband of a textile worker (he is 26 years old) considers his wife’s salary to be the main source of income and therefore supports her in continuing to work in the factory – although “she is not happy at all.” With her salary, they cover the house rent. The couple used to have their own shop selling coffee and tea. How-

ever, after the business failed, they couldn't afford to start over. He helps his wife with the housework because she comes home late from work, sometimes as late as 8 p.m. He also burns charcoal for her so she can cook. He greatly appreciates that his wife manages the household chores even though she has little time to rest. She even goes to work on holidays to avoid pay cuts and dismissal. His dream is to open a small kiosk or café. He says he would have no problem if his wife earned only half her current salary, but spent more time at home with him. He mentions two acquaintances who also work in the textile factory in the Bole Lemi Industrial Park. They do not rent an apartment, but have their own house, yet have not been able to improve their standard of living, he says.

From his wife he knows that many female workers quit their job in the textile factory because of the long working hours: "they argue why would we suffer by working from morning to the evening." He is confident that his wife will give up her job as soon as they can start their own business again, that could be maybe in four or five years. The couple tries to save 100 to 200 birr of their monthly income (he earns 2,000 birr a month). He would appreciate it if the textile company would reduce working hours for its employees. He doesn't want his wife to come home late at night, partly because "there are gangsters in the neighborhood." He usually picks her up at the bus stop on the paved road and brings her home safely.

"People here are talking both bad and good
about the work in the park"

A 40-year-old mother of a textile worker (she is a housewife and visually impaired) says that her daughter works as a quality controller in a textile factory at Hawassa Industrial Park. Mother and daughter live in the same village, and the mother looks after her grandchildren while her daughter is at work. The daughter only misses work when her children are ill and need to go to the doctor, which her mother cannot do. Since her workplace is nearby, her daughter can usually attend family celebrations without this causing any conflicts with her work.

Because of her disability, the mother doesn't leave the house, but she says she does notice people talking good and bad about the work in the textile factories: "they say the work is hard and the pay isn't good. But people work there anyway because it is available work." She also hears that workers occasionally complain that their salaries are paid late.

The mother supports her daughter's decision to work in the textile factory. However, the daughter is not satisfied with her job, as she says. She would like a better job for her daughter nearby. According to the mother, the daughter's and her husband's income supports the family – at least they have something to eat. Some time ago, the daughter had started studying, but when her mother had the accident and lost her eyesight, the daughter wanted to support her, so she dropped

out of college and took a job at the textile factory. The mother says: "I am not able to help her to find a better job or to finish her study, but I wish a better life for my daughter." Overall, she believes that textile workers would not give up their jobs so easily, as there are hardly any alternatives.

"If it is not for the money, the job helps her to
improve herself"

"I appreciate the work opportunity in the park," says a 50-year-old woman whose daughter has a job in a textile factory. It reduces the worries and responsibilities of us parents, she says, and it helps her daughter to be more independent. She believes without the industrial jobs, the communities would experience more theft, drug addiction and prostitution. On the other hand, the mother is concerned about the working conditions in the factory: "they [the workers] are not allowed to take a rest while working, which exposes them to different illnesses." She also claims that the time and energy the workers invest is disproportionate to the pay. Despite of these conditions she supports her daughter's decision to work in the factory. She says: "If it is not for the money, the job helps her to improve herself and maximize her social capital." When the daughter decided to work in the textile factory, she as the mother gave her permission simply "because there was no better opportunity." The mother sees it as an advantage that her daughter lives at home and therefore does not have to spend money on rent and food, so she can cover her expenses from her income, including the fees for her college studies, which the daughter attends alongside her work. "I am happy because covering the costs would be my duty if she was still jobless," the mother notes.

The household consists of eleven people: "in addition to our children, their cousins, their aunt, and their grandparents also live with us." The mother runs a small business. She sells injera and other market products in front of her house. The father works as a security guard. The daughter works shifts in a textile factory. The family accompanies their daughter to the bus stop when she goes to work or comes home from work. Overall, the mother believes that her daughter is happy because she is acquiring skills. She remarks: "I see her keeping her beauty while going out for work." However, the mother also states clearly that this job does not help her daughter "change her life, but only secure her livelihood." The mother hopes that her daughter will find a better job after graduating from college.

The mother sees no conflict between her daughter's job and family life: "since she lives with us, we spend holidays and family activities together. Unless there is something special going on, she gives priority to her job, and we are happy with that." Many textile workers who have come to Hawassa from other regions live in her village. The village community benefits from this by renting rooms to the

workers. However, the community also notes that the workers are unable to improve their standard of living despite their work.

In conversations with relatives of textile workers, the hopes and wishes of the families become clear once again: an improvement in their standard of living through gainful employment and job opportunities that are compatible with family life. However, their experiences and observations suggest that working in a textile factory is hardly enough to ensure survival, let alone improve their standard of living over time. Work in the textile industry is seen as a temporary solution – because there are no alternatives, because better career and earning opportunities only arise after a university degree, and because the profession must first be learned before self-employment can be established on this basis. There is agreement that the high workload and difficult working conditions are out of proportion to the pay.

3.4 Ethiopia's Great Transformation: between community orientation and striving for modernization

The Ethiopian government is striving to transform the country's economy from an agrarian to an industrial one in order to create jobs for the younger generation. Against the backdrop of problematic developments such as those in Bangladesh's textile industry (where the Rana Plaza textile factory collapsed in 2013, bringing the precarious conditions there to public attention), the Ethiopian state presents itself as a model for positive development. However, the interviews show that there is still a long way to go before fair and humane working conditions are implemented in practice. Therefore, in this relatively early phase of Ethiopia's industrial development, it seems important to ask who actually benefits. The argument often put forward by stakeholders that the efforts will pay off in an advanced stage of industrial development is understandably unsatisfactory for workers in the current situation. In interviews, textile workers emphatically stress that they feel underpaid. However, social and cultural factors also play a role in the unstable work situation.

The question of social transformation (or social change) in newly emerging industrial economies has been researched in numerous studies and different disciplines. In the analysis of industrializing countries in the Global South, for example, the underlying assumption is often linked to the origins in Western models of industrialization and nation-state formation. Khondker & Schuerkens (2014) for example present various theoretical approaches to the study of social transformation and sociology of development since the emergence of this sub-field in sociology. By discussing different paradigms of social change and social transformation, they challenge eurocentric assumptions about a seemingly linear trajectory. However, while a linear trajectory can be questioned, there seems to be a clear relation-