The Relationship between Jobs and Social Cohesion: Some examples from Ethnography

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Abstract

This paper uses selected case studies to illustrate some of the complex relationships that link employment and social cohesion. For example, despite harsh working conditions, retail garment manufacturing contributed to the transformation of gender relationship in Bangladesh by giving women the opportunity to acquire skills, control over resources, and greater independence. Conversely, the downsizing of industries in the US, Argentina, Bulgaria, and Guyana not only hurt households financially; it undermined their sense of dignity, self-worth, and trust in institutions, and severely weakened social ties within their communities. Chronic unemployment and underemployment does more than erode social cohesion—in the Arab Spring, it helped catalyze a broad-based social movement that overturned regimes; in the UK, a pervasive sense of exclusion from economic life provoked a disorganized and violent reaction. Since the relationship between jobs and social cohesion is mediated by institutions and policies, policy makers should be more proactive in considering policies to help cushion the impacts of changing labor markets and/or joblessness in the interests of maintain social stability and cohesion.

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I. Introduction

Probably no one disagrees that jobs are not just about earning a living. It may not be easy to specify the mechanisms, but most people understand intuitively that a strong, if not always straightforward connection links identity, status, social relationships with the health of the community. The World Development Report 2013 (WDR) and other background papers address this relationship by examining some of the pathways between jobs and social cohesion. This paper contributes to the discussion by drawing on ethnographic and sociological explorations of employment and unemployment in different community and national contexts. The aim of this paper is not to present an exhaustive exploration of all the links and possible trajectories between employment and cohesion but to use selected case studies to illustrate the complexity of this relationship and its dependence on many intervening institutions and enabling conditions.

In the following discussion, a “job” signifies any waged or unwaged, formal or informal earning activity associated with the use of labor. Jobs, as the WDR points out, have multiple outcomes that define their relationship to social cohesion. They generally enable people to at least meet basic needs, and at best, to enjoy good living standards and social mobility. Psychologically, they can provide people with a sense of purpose and self-worth; alternatively, they may be abusive and damaging to self-esteem. Jobs may promote civic and social engagement, or they may be so alienating and oppressive they lead to distrust, resentment and resistance.

In discussing these different scenarios, this paper relies on definitions of social cohesion proposed by the WDR and the background paper by Norton and de Haan (2012). The WDR defines social cohesion as the capacity of social groups for peaceful, inclusive and collective decision-making; Norton and de Haan draw on Amartya Sen and Jurgen Habermas to emphasize the capacity of societies to inclusively deal with change in a way that also enhances individual and group freedom. Much of the literature on social cohesion also incorporates notions of shared values, trust, and social inclusion, indicators that also inform the following discussion.

How jobs relate to social cohesion is highly context-specific. Since most jobs fall somewhere between highly fulfilling and extremely abusive, they affect social cohesion in ways that are neither predictable nor self-evident, but rather depend on the specific circumstances and environment of the jobholders. How they relate to social cohesion is also influenced by institutions, local norms and practices; the role of families and other forms of social support; and laws and policies that shape the enabling environment. How jobs affect and are affected by social cohesion does not necessarily depend on whether jobs are “good” or “bad.”

Organization of the paper

The following discussion examines several pathways between employment and cohesion. Section II explores how even “bad” jobs can contribute to the transformation of entrenched power relationships. This has been the case in Bangladesh and certain regions in Morocco, as the labor market has opened up to women. Section III examines the devastating and long-term impact of retrenchment on manufacturing and mining communities in developing as well as developed countries across the globe. Section IV discusses the relationship between Arab Spring and August 2011 riots in UK to the pervasive barriers to decent employment and civic and political life experienced by young people.
Although unemployment is often linked to a range of social ills, this doesn’t mean that employment necessarily contributes to social cohesion. This point is elaborated on in Section V, which draws on examples of “adverse incorporation”—jobs that are extremely insecure, abusive and exploitive. While such jobs are inclusive in that they integrate people into the labor market, they also damage individual agency, create barriers between people and groups and undermine people’s psychological capacity to act collectively. Section VI concludes with examples of how the institutional environment affects the relationship between jobs and social cohesion.

II. Positive pathways: Jobs, voice, and the transformation of gender relations

“Bad” jobs with good outcomes: Garment work and the empowerment of women in Bangladesh

The absence of women from social and political life may not lead to overt social conflict. Nevertheless, their exclusion is often associated with hierarchical and oppressive social structures that limit the access of other social groups as well to full citizenship. Conversely, women’s success in expanding their economic and political rights, in some cases through collective action, and integrating into the larger community can benefit other marginalized groups as well (Kabeer with Kabir 2009).

The development of the retail garment manufacturing in Bangladesh provides a fascinating example of how “bad” jobs—that is, jobs characterized by exploitive working conditions) expanded women’s sense of autonomy, scope for decision-making, and opportunities to participate in the public domain. The growth and impact of these jobs were influenced by multiple international and national factors. The 1974 famine and post-war economic crisis in Bangladesh laid the basis for changes in gender norms. Increasing rural landlessness and poverty weakened the traditional family and the assurance of male protection—the “patriarchal bargain” (Hossain 2011). Men’s inability to support their families, also manifest in divorce and abandonment, forced many women to seek paid work outside the home despite traditional prohibitions on appearing in public space with male chaperones.

The government responded to the famine by investing in rural infrastructure, including sanitation, introduced an aggressive family planning program implemented by NGOs, and increased girls’ access to education. The use of female community-based workers to deliver family planning services expanded respectable employment opportunities for women, many of whom found paid positions in health and community services. Finally, the “microcredit revolution” explicitly targeted women, dramatically increasing their economic activities outside the home (Kabeer et al 2011).

Internationally, the Multi-Fiber Trade Agreement levied export quotas on traditional garment exporting countries such as Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea and Taiwan, which led businesses from these countries to partner with entrepreneurs in countries unaffected by the quota. Bangladesh’s New Industrial Policy of 1982 promoted export-led growth by offering local manufacturers tax, credit and tariff incentives (Kibria 1995). Between 1976, when the first garment factories opened, and 2004, the number of factories increased to over 3,500. Factory managers preferred female employees, whom they saw as more flexible and willing to accept
substandard wages and working conditions (although the stereotype of docility has at times been challenged by their activism in labor struggles; see Hossain 2012, p. 21). By 2009, more than 85 percent (2 million) of workers in export garment manufacturing were young women between the ages of 16 and 25 (Feldman 2009).

Working conditions in most of the factories were “tough and exploitative.” The work was physically demanding, leading to illness and high turnover among women from “sustained exhaustion.” Women were subject to sexual harassment at the workplace and even more at risk while travelling to and from work. Poor safety conditions resulted in appalling accidents, such as the 2005 Spectrum Factory building collapse that killed 64 and injured 70, or the 2006 KTS Textile Industries fire that killed dozens of young women (Feldman 2009; Hossain 2011). Women workers were stigmatized because their greater mobility and autonomy was associated with immoral sexual behavior (Amin et al 1998).

Jhorna, a young woman forced to work when her family lost its land because of a disputed claim, didn’t expect her rights to be protected. She described her workday: “Every morning we start at 8. If you are a minute late, salary is cut. I have to complete 120 items an hour. If I fail to do so I must work overtime to make up. There is no system of bonuses or increments so I earn now what I earned 3 years ago.” Women put up with these conditions because they were poor and uneducated, with few alternatives. Salma was more aware of labor laws than many of her peers, and described employers’ failure to pay overtime, restrictions on use of the toilet, camera surveillance of workers, prohibition on political discussion in the factory, and ban on trade unions (Kabeer with Kabir 2009, p. 21-22).

Despite these hardships and low pay, “exploitation and liberation [went] hand in hand” for many women (Lim, cited in Amin et al 1998, p. 187). Women valued their newfound autonomy and freedom to make choices, whether about what to wear, where to work, or whom to marry. Aleya, a single 20 year old operator, noted that “‘My married friends have to wear a sari, but I can wear a shalwar kameez [seen as more youthful, modern and fashionable]. They cannot go out of the house on their own, and I go back and forth between the village and the city’” (Amin et al 1998 p. 195-6).

Lily and Marufa, interviewed when they were 18, had both defied their parents to find factory work in Dhaka. Lily left her village to avoid an unwanted marriage, while Marufa simply ignored her parents’ opposition. Relying on family members who had already moved to Dhaka, they quickly found work and increased their wages by finding new positions. Ultimately, Marufa’s parents moved to Dhaka after they lost their land, and found themselves dependent on her salary (Amin et al 1998). Many young women justified their work as a way of accumulating their dowries. Being able to pay for their dowries also gave them greater control over their marriage partners: “If you work in garments you can better yourself. What’s the use of sitting at home? If I lived in the village I would be married by now, but I’m glad that my life is different. Because I’m self-sufficient I can go where I want and marry whom I want. Even after I’m married, I will continue to live my life in my own way” (Kibria 1995 p. 304).
Paid work augmented women’s position in their families as well as their self-confidence, both of which increased their voice and agency. Khaleda, 40, a political party worker, commented, “women’s value has increased in the sense that they are not as helpless as they used to be. If she is earning, she can use her money as she wishes. Women used to be helpless. They would have to wait for whatever their husbands gave them and when they chose to give it to them. Women would go and stand in wait for information at someone’s house. Now five women have five mobiles between them, they don’t need to rely on anyone.” (Kabeer, Mahmud and Tasneem 2011 p. 33).

A profound and visible impact of factory work on women has been the “feminization of public space” as large numbers of young women now walk to and from work each morning and evening. As Hossain (2011) writes, the “immense cultural significance” of women claiming their right to move in public space would be lost on anyone unfamiliar with Bangladesh in the 1980s. Feldman (2001) similarly comments on her shock in 1984, when she returned to Bangladesh after a mere 18 month absence, seeing groups of women on the streets, which had formerly been the sole domain of men or chaperoned women. This feminization of public space is important, these researchers argue, because it has normalized women’s public mobility and their right to access public institutions, and offers some protection against harassment and “eve-teasing” (Hossain 2011). The increased numbers of women in public spaces also represents their reinterpretation of “purdah” in a way that does not necessarily separate or exclude them from participation in society.

Factory work has expanded women’s horizons beyond the village and their confidence, giving them the opportunity to become independent, make friends outside their kinship group, join associations and learn new skills, such as operating sophisticated machinery. Coworkers travel to work together, form rotating funds, and share information about alternative work opportunities or marriage partners (Amin et al 1998). Shaheen, 26, said “I am braver now. I understand more things which I did not before. I hear many things which I did not before” (Amin et al 1998 p. 191). Aleya, 20, cited above, felt more confident and braver than her married village friends: “I have learnt a new trade and have a job, and they sit in the corner off the house and cook all day.” (Amin et al 1998 p. 196). Rehana, 25, remarked, “I am cleverer. I could not walk alone before because I was afraid, but now I can walk there alone. There are things that girls living in the village do not understand; they are foolish” (Amin et al 1998 p. 191).

Women’s expanded role as industrial workers has changed their representation in official discourse from “mothers of future citizens” to that of workers like any others, and central actors in the important garment industry (Hossain 2011). Because of rising education levels and international publicity about their working conditions, garment workers have become more cognizant of their rights and likelier to associate with trade unions and women’s rights organizations. When their wages were withheld, for example, a few women organized a strike at the advice of a local trade union. Although management called police to evict them, explained Halima, one of the leaders, they continued to organize “press conferences, processions and meetings, informed the BMGEA [Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association] about our grievances and took the factory authorities to the labour court’.” According to another leader, “Earlier it used to be much more difficult to make the workers understand about different issues. They would ask many questions. But now they understand the importance of organizations, when a worker loses their job but eventually gets it by filing a case
through the labour court they stand to gain much...Now they understand about the ILO convention and the law, and they ask for information.” (Kabeer with Kabir 2009 p. 22-23).

With the expansion of the garment industry to include capital-intensive knitwear, men have entered in increasing numbers. Their greater freedom of movement and the male domination of unions have made them likelier than women to confront management or become active in trade unions. Some of the conventional trade unions have begun to organize women, however, while new kinds of labor organizations, some made up only of women, are emerging to protect workers’ rights. Unions that organize in neighborhoods rather than workplaces and that train workers on their legal rights are also drawing in more women.

Women’s mass entry into the industrial labor force has increased their agency and their capacity to act collectively; it has also broadened their access to citizenship. The problem of citizenship in Bangladesh, according to Kabeer (with Kabir, 2009), has been the absence of the idea that all individuals have moral worth. To become a citizen in this context requires a sense of agency, which grows through participation in associational life. Women’s inroads into the formal labor market has been part of a larger struggle to democratize daily life, particularly as it affects the livelihood struggles of marginalized groups.

Diversity, dynamism and inclusion in a Moroccan town

Although Morocco shares problems of high unemployment and youth exclusion with other countries of North Africa and the Middle East, some communities stand out for their dynamism (World Bank 2007). Khalouta², one of nine rural and urban communities studied for the World Bank’s Moving out of Poverty study, began as a small shantytown near a sugar refinery on the outskirts of a market town. Between 1995 and 2005, it expanded to 6,000 people. Having attracted people from many regions of the country, Khalouta was ethnically and tribally very diverse, which residents associated with a broader than typical range of skills and less rigid patterns of hierarchy than typical of long-settled, homogeneous communities. New arrivals have built new houses, fueling the construction industry and creating a dynamic of prosperity that continued to attract more people.

Exceptionally among the communities studied in Morocco, women in Khalouta participated actively in a broad range of livelihoods: “There is no longer a difference between men and women in this district,” a study participant noted. “I saw women who unload or load a truck of goods more quickly than men do.” Participants said it was easy for women to find work and that it was considered a benefit for their families. Young women were as likely as men to migrate abroad. Halima described her daughter’s contribution: “Our household was able to maintain its welfare thanks to my husband’s work in the sugar refinery and to the transfers from our daughter abroad; our son’s transfers are no longer regular. We invest our money in agriculture since we possess agricultural lands in the area” (World Bank 2007 p. 35). Further evidence of women’s higher status in Khalouta was the fact that focus groups were likelier to mention the occupation and landholding status of women as well as men, in contrast to discussions in other communities.

² Khalouta is not the actual name of this community; place names in the Moving out of Poverty study were changed to maintain informant confidentiality.
The empowering impact of value chains

Value chains have the potential to link even the poorest, most isolated producers, to larger, urban—even international—markets. Participation in value chains is not intrinsically empowering, as demonstrated later in this paper in the discussion of exploitation in global value chains. But when poor producers retain a measure of control over the terms of their participation, involvement can bring benefits. USAID is one of many donors that have poured effort into the systematic creation or enhancement of value chains in developing countries. Their work in Rwanda (coffee), Pakistan (dairy) and Bosnia (dairy) has not only raised incomes, but also in the case of Rwanda and Bosnia, created incentives for formerly hostile ethnic groups to cooperate in the pursuit of economic interest.

In 2004, USAID began working with local NGOs on the Behind the Veil project in Pakistan, to integrate rural women into the potentially profitable embroidered garment value chain (Mennonite Economic Development Associates 2007a, 2007b and 2008 and Management Information Systems 2008). In addition to working with producers, they trained and deployed women as mobile sales agents because they could gain access to sequestered rural women. The sales agents (some of whom were community based and could thus access even the most isolated women) also connected women with skilled designers to help them upgrade the style and quality of their work, and helped them access input and output markets. Ultimately, the project succeeded in raising the incomes of more than 9,700 women rural embroiderers and sales agents, increased women’s mobility, and created a self-sustaining system of market linkages by directly involving beneficiaries as agents of change. This complex network of links also reduced women’s complete dependence on male family members and limited local markets.

While the project did not lead to changes to the formal enabling environment, implementers hoped that as it further expanded under the Canadian International Development Agency, greater pressure could be exerted on the government agencies to promote better business-friendly policies. The project demonstrably improved the lives of its women participants, however. According to MEDA/ECDI’s internal impact assessment, almost all the interviewed beneficiaries said that they were able to contribute more to household decision-making, and that their husbands and in-laws respected them more. They used their increased incomes to keep their children in school and to improve household nutrition. As a sign of the women’s increased confidence, several unmarried women had requested their parents to seek husbands for them who would support their entrepreneurial activities after marriage.

The evaluators’ visit were told that “whereas the men in the villages used to be suspicious of the project staff visiting their female family members, they now stay out of the way because they realize that their wives and sisters are benefitting from the assistance, which also benefits the household” (Management Systems International 2008 p. 18). The organization of women entrepreneurs gave women much more freedom to meet in groups than ever before. In Quetta, a very conservative community, women sales agents formed an association and were able to host an event for the project promoters in a restaurant without any male family members present (unheard of before this initiative). And through such organizations, women learned that cooperation, through different kinds of marketing links and producer associations, benefit rather than hurt them economically. While these relationships did not always run smoothly, they were significant given the extremely limited contact women had previously been permitted outside.
their immediate families. In sum, the project enhanced women’s direct inclusion, rather than inclusion through their husbands, into social and market relationships.

The foregoing examples focus on the relationship between jobs and one aspect of social cohesion—the inclusion of women into the labor force on terms that expanded their freedom and their capacity to participate in collective action. In Bangladesh, despite harsh working conditions, inclusion in the formal labor force was broadly empowering. Women’s experience in Khalouta likewise reflects a gradual narrowing of the gender gap, although the very limited access to employment for both men and women - particularly among educated young people (not highly represented in Khalouta) remains a destabilizing factor in Moroccan society. In Pakistan, embroidered garment value chain not only increased the autonomy and agency of women within their households, but also increased their capacity for positive collective action.

III. Negative pathways: Displacement, unemployment and the erosion of ties

Loss of existing jobs as well as long-term and chronic unemployment, especially in the absence of compensatory social policies to cushion the negative impacts, creates financial insecurity and hardship, undermines feelings of self-worth, and stresses family and broader social relationships. A significant literature demonstrates that the retrenchments associated with closure of mines and manufacturing plants undermines the financial sustainability of entire neighborhoods and towns.

_Downsizing and depression in Barberton, Ohio_ 

Gregory Pappas’s _The Magic City_ (1989) follows downsized workers in Barberton, a town of 30,000 near Akron, Ohio, former “Rubber Capital of the World.” Between 1950 and 1980, the local rubber industry around Akron lost 29,000 jobs. That year, the Sieberling Plant closed in Barberton and laid off 1,200 workers; other rubber plant closures followed. Two years later, 20 percent of the retrenched workers had found comparable jobs, 40 percent had insecure, low-paying jobs and 40 percent remained unemployed.

At its height in the 1960s, rubber workers took pride in contributing to an essential industry. High levels of employment gave workers security, “developed their belief in progress,” and strengthened union demands for better contracts. The rising standard of living “brought forth an efflorescence of community spirit and development,” including construction of a library and improved financing of schools. Barbertonians developed a strong sense of allegiance to their town and its factory culture.

The gradual decline of the rubber industry through the 1970s led to the gradual economic and physical deterioration of Barberton. In the wake of closures in the 1980s, “postindustrial Barberton…is a ravaged environment. The marshlands and forest of the early Western Reserve, once refuge for exotic birds and rate orchids, are now industrial sewers. PPG alone has left behind it 1,000 acres of chemical dumps…” (p. 123-). Barbertonians were no longer able to support their community financially—between 1970 and 1983, they didn’t pass one school levy, and their failure to pass an emergency levy in 1983 resulted in major cuts. Crime, including homicide and rape, increased. As a recipient at a food distribution center cynically commented, “I know what to do if I’m hungry” (p. 122). Pregnancy and drug use soared among teens, whom
the high school counselor characterized as “OK kids who feel like there’s nothing better to do (p. 125)”

Prolonged unemployment was a shock for the downsized rubber workers, whose good wages and job security, supported by a strong union, had put them at the top of Barberton’s “status hierarchy” among factory workers. Unemployment affected their social status, personal identity, and willingness to participate in the collectivity (p. 76).

Time, once structured by employment, became more of a burden than a luxury to the unemployed, who didn’t know what to do with it. Katie Miller, stunned by the loss of her job, sat staring out of her windows for the first month after she lost her job. Danny Lawson stayed in bed until late afternoon, not knowing where to go. “Leisure” did not exist for the unemployed, who lacked the money to pay for entertainment. And, because most of them implicitly accepted the ideology that ascribes unemployment and poverty to individual failings, the unemployed felt guilty about enjoying their free time.

By disrupting social status, job loss broke families. Bob Younger had been one of the highest paid workers in his plant. The family’s standard of living plummeted when he was laid off. Tensions finally to divorce between Bob and his wife, who had been raised on welfare and couldn’t cope with a “slide down the social ladder.” Artie Simpson used his severance pay to buy a small bar. But Artie didn’t think of himself as a bartender—he ended up drinking too much, had an affair with one of the women who frequented his bar, and was divorced by his wife after telling her “I don’t know who I am any more. I need some space.” (p. 93).

The tendency of workers to internalize unemployment as somehow their own fault interacted perniciously with other forms of marginalization. Curtis Hill, 48, was forced to depend on the income of his wife, who worked for the county welfare office. An African-American family, the Hills had been well integrated into their neighborhood, where they supported their church and other community organizations. Unable to find work, Curtis suffered from the loss of standing in the community and in his own eyes. He felt he had become an example of the racist stereotype of the “lazy nigger that lays around while a woman supports him.” A suicidal depression resulted in three weeks of hospitalization (p. 80).

Mark found himself skidding from one low-paying temporary job to another, deeply ashamed of being without money much of the time. While his parents frequently invited him to meals, he was too embarrassed to eat with them after it became obvious that these meals were his main source of food. Eventually, Mark found a full-time job at a plant making rubber mounts for engines, but complained to Pappas about the hazardous working conditions and frequent injuries at his new workplace. Once a union activist proud of his work, he told Pappas that when his probation period was over and the union asked him to join, “I’ll tell them where they can stick it.” Three years of instability had undermined Mark’s sense that working collectively could help him: “His experiences had shaken confidence in the union movement and eventually shifted his world view. He could no longer sustain a vision of the common good won through collective action” (p. 139).

Other workers described their loss of trust in community institutions and suspicion about local government measures to help them. John Damiani, actively searching for employment when
Pappas first interviewed him, was apathetic and discouraged a year later. He judged placement and retraining programs to be worthless. He felt that government programs had been designed to discourage people from seeking help, and claimed that staff members of Ohio’s employment services reserved jobs for their friends. Three years after he was laid off, he refused to tell Pappas how he was earning money, saying only that he had “devised ways of providing for my wife and children.” John’s friends confirmed to Pappas that John was engaged in illegal business (p. 41-2). After repeated failures to find a job, Danny Lawson became involved with gambling machines and worked informally as an electrician, telling Pappas “with malicious glee” that he didn’t report his income to the Internal Revenue Service. These men, while sharing a sense of failure, also resented what they perceived as inequitable treatment that excluded them from benefits they felt they deserved.

Pappas followed these workers for only three years. But his findings are similar to those from the analysis of 45 years of data from the Wisconsin Longitudinal Study on the education, career, family and social lives on almost 5,000 people who graduated high school in 1957. Born in 1939-40, members of this sample consisted of what Robert Putnam has termed a “cohort of joiners.” Using this data, Brand and Burgard (2008) found that even a single job displacement, especially if it occurred during a person’s prime working years, resulted in “enduring, substantively and statistically significant lower probabilities of social involvement over the lifecourse,” particularly in the church, youth and community groups that form the core of social interaction in many American communities.

*Household and community impacts of bauxite mine downsizing in Guyana*

Despite the different conditions in the US rust belt and this tiny Caribbean country, the downsizing of bauxite mines in Linden, Guyana, comparably affected family and community relations. A 2004 analysis found significant deterioration in family relationships as well as in the community’s willingness to peacefully respond to change (World Bank 2004). Between the early 1970s and the mid-1980s, bauxite mining near Linden was cut by half, with successive layoffs throughout the 1990s. By 1999, formal unemployment had reached about 40 percent in Linden, and residents complained of rising crime. Moreover, downsizing signaled the end of the free or low-cost electricity, water and social services provided by the mine until the early 1990s. The imposition of cost recovery when the municipality took over water and electricity provision from the mine stirred up huge anger and resentment among community residents toward both mining and government authorities.

Once among the best-paid workers in Guyana, miners were respected for their work in the bauxite mines, which were seen as drivers of the economy. For this reason, people felt particularly demeaned by the downsizing process: “The people off the job don’t get any information. They treat us like we don’t exist. Yet… before we came off, there used to be meetings with us, as to what was happening.”

The impact of material hardship and insecurity took a harsh toll on personal identity and on relations between men and women. Members of a local women’s organization claimed, “the rum shops now are full. Long ago only at lunch or after 4 in the afternoon people could be seen drinking. Now they start drinking before 8 a.m. No seats are available at the rum shops. Men have nothing to do now but drink.” Women directly linked men’s inability to retain their
authority as breadwinners to increased domestic violence: “Especially in cases of abuse, you would be surprised that after counseling them, the problem comes right back to the economic situation. The man can’t provide adequately for the home. A typical example, there is a woman who is a security guard. She had to go to work and her man asked her to stay home. She said she couldn’t because who will bring home the money? He started to get ideas because of that and accused her of having another man and chopped her. Now she is in hospital and the children are home. Nobody knows where he is.”

Indigence was linked to child neglect and abuse. Some parents prostituted their children: “Male friends of parents are abusing girls; there are three cases now of girls, ages 12, 13 and 15 who have babies for their mother’s gentlemen…. The girls are going to school and having relationships with men outside and the parents all have attitudes when confronted. They say, “What you minding my daughter business for, how you think she getting the school books? I can’t afford it.” Teachers reported that there were “young girls who like selling their bodies to the bus and car men. “You seeing ‘nuff of them pregnant. You have mothers but no father for the newborn.” And cultivation of cannabis, increased use of cocaine, and involvement in the international transshipment of drugs were said to be rapidly increasing among young men.

People who managed to find jobs for local enterprises claimed that the owners took advantage of them and failed to pay them. Once part of a respected and unionized workforce, some former workers allegedly refused to work because of disrespectful behavior from their bosses: “There are a lot of people who are not working because of the employers’ behavior. Some of them curse and belittle their employees. People treat others like pigs, just because they have to depend on them.”

Downsizing, however, also diminished the economic resources available to community organizations such as churches: “The churches should have an impact, but don’t. Churches don’t send out representatives. Got to face reality, eh? The churches are in crisis also. As individuals, we are part of the crisis, so we carry it into church and it in turn goes into society.” The polarization of Linden became a national issue when angry citizens occupied blocked a bridge and important route running through Linden, causing a loss of millions of dollars in revenue to the Omai Gold Mine and timber companies, and resulting in the personal intervention of Guyana’s president. Linden residents, however, saw nothing ahead but the deterioration of their town. They pointed to Buxton, a nearby coastal village that escaped prisoners had made their base and that had descended into chaos in late 2002 and early 2003: “We must say thanks [that] we don’t have another Buxton here. By that I mean that if you have young people with nothing to do, nowhere to go, probably they will look in other directions and follow what is normal.”

*Regime change and unemployment in Bulgaria*

The end of the Communist regime in Bulgaria resulted in the massive downsizing of state enterprises. Given that this downsizing occurred in parallel with the dismantling of economic and political institutions, the psychological as well as economic impacts were severe—but not unique. Loss of state jobs entailed loss of multiple fringe benefits, including medical services—although it should be noted that for the redundant American rubber plant workers, loss of job-related health insurance was equally devastating. And like industrial workers in key industries throughout the world, workers lost the sense of security linked to what they had assumed would
be lifetime employment. While wage labor and temporary jobs were available, the downsized workers considered them unreliable and just as importantly, demeaning. Older men in particular experienced a huge loss of face when they had to ask young relatives or employers for work.

People linked job loss to poor health, social isolation, and crime. As Pappas observed in Barberton, unemployed people don’t have “leisure.” Milena, a divorced mother of 35, had been fired from a chemical plant. She retrained and worked three years as a waitress until she was replaced at a lower salary by a 17 year old girl. She described the paralyzing impact of unemployment: “The more things you have to do, the more things you do. And when you are unemployed you can’t do anything. When I stay half an hour at home, I start to say to myself, “Milena, why are you staying at home like this, as if everything is all right with you? Stand up, do something” So I go to see my friends. Other days I can’t do anything—I start one thing, then I leave it half done and start another one, so I end up doing nothing.”” p. 240

Unemployment did more than simply weaken social ties—it created distrust and mutual suspicion. The radical restructuring of the former socialist economy created winners as well, but they also suffered from the pervasive distrust. Colleagues and neighbors were said to avoid each other: “Even if you have something good to say, you are afraid that the other will start to envy you.”” P. 248 People who had lost their jobs began to avoid traditional social gatherings because they were unable to purchase the obligatory gifts. People felt that security—once linked to good health, the opportunity to pursue personal and professional fulfillment, good personal relations, respect in the community, and social cohesion—had moved out of reach. In communities that were once relatively equal, people could identify five or six wellbeing categories. But even the people at the top were described as insecure: “The rich live in constant fear because that’s how the times are—everybody’s trying to poke out everybody else’s eyes” (Kabakchieva et al 2002).

Economic reforms and community deterioration in Argentina

La Matanza is a city of 1.2 million just outside Buenos Aires, in Argentina. Once a manufacturing center for textiles, diesel engines, household appliances and steel, economic transformations in the 1990s led to increased reliance on technology and highly skilled workers. Factories in La Matanza closed, pushing people into temporary or casual jobs without unemployment or health insurance. Those who managed to find jobs complained of exploitative pay, abusive treatment and assaults to their dignity: “I work in construction. In the old days, the architects would ask me things. Now I am treated like dirt.” The law, they reported, no longer defended workers. Not only had hourly wages drastically decreased, employers could demand 15 hour days. A woman complained “The law doesn’t defend the worker anymore…. At La Lonja [a dairy plant] they hire people by the month. They make you sign a resignation or a new contract. They can do anything to you; these are ghost contracts” (Cichero et al 2002 p. 340).

As elsewhere, job loss impacted men and women’s relationships, sometimes for the worse (although domestic abuse was said to be a longstanding issue). While some men adapted to more egalitarian role, many responded to the blow to their self-esteem as breadwinners with depression or anger; women complained that male violence in the household had increased. Men felt that joblessness had also undermined their effectiveness as fathers: “There is no place for the man anymore, no role. Men used to be closer to their children. P. 342”
Women also deplored the impact of unemployment on children. Some parents were said forced to pull their children out of school and send them to work. Worse, security in the neighborhood had decreased: “Anyone can do anything to you. There are kidnappings, murders. When we cleaned up a vacant field we found all kinds of horrible things—weapons, syringes—and we also know that rapes were committed there…” Another woman explained: “Riding a bicycle used to be pleasant but I can’t ever let my children out; you can’t let a child go ride a bike. It’s not just that [thugs] will steal the bike, it’s that they use knives and guns…It isn’t the robberies that scare me so much, it’s the rapes. I have teenage daughters and I don’t sleep at night because we live in a very unsafe neighborhood…. (p. 334-35).

Growing insecurity in communities fostered distrust, even among neighbors: “People never used to rob from their own neighbors,” said one woman. 335Another explained that people were equally unable to trust the police: “Within the police department and in my neighborhood there are informants. If we report a criminal we run the risk of being fingered and suffering retribution.” 335 Suspicion amongst neighbors had reduced people’s willingness to become involved with each other. “Nowadays when a child is being abused, the neighbors don’t get involved. In the old days they would intervene and defend the child,” a woman observed. “‘It’s every man for himself. People will watch you getting killed and say to themselves, I’d better stay out of it.’” 347-48

Victims of downsizing also expressed distrust toward the government: “I believe that this government is not interested in changing things. They want poor people to continue being poor, and if possible to get poorer because that way they have secure vote and no one speaks out, and if someone does challenge them they buy him off with a political job or they find another way to shut him up” (Cichero et al 2002 p. 338).

Perhaps surprisingly, even across societies as different as the United States, Guyana, Bulgaria, or Argentina, job loss has surprisingly consistent effects on individuals and their communities. Loss of face and self-respect, particularly among men, has been linked to depression among individuals and tensions, violence, divorce or abandonment within families. Across communities, job loss often fosters distrust, not only towards former employers or government authorities suspected of being indifferent or complicit, but also among neighbors, former colleagues and friends. When unemployment is widespread and prolonged, its impacts reverberate within communities, where the impacts may be visible for decades.

**IV. Shattered expectations: Unemployment and civil unrest**

Unemployment appears to have played an important role in two otherwise disparate examples of civic unrest, the “Arab Spring” and the “London Summer.” While London summer was an unplanned, disorganized and destructive reaction to unemployment and exclusion, the Arab Spring was a social movement with a positive social agenda. Yet a recurring and central theme of these events was widespread disappointment, especially among youth, with the pervasive barriers they felt limited their gainful employment and full social and political inclusion in their societies.
In August 2011, triggered by the police shooting of a popular local figure, riots, looting and arson broke out in Tottenham (the London borough with the highest unemployment) and soon spread to other parts of London and other industrial cities (Muir 2011). By August 15, over 3,000 people had been charged, and there had been an estimated 200 million pounds worth of property damage. Small, locally owned shops suffered as well as larger businesses. Despite initial government claims ascribing the major responsibility to gangs, gang members proved to be only a small minority among those arrested. The majority turned out to be young, male, and underprivileged: 85 percent were under 25, 90 percent were male, and most came from educationally and economically deprived backgrounds; more than 42 percent received free school meals (Travis Oct. 24, 2011). Thus, youth exclusion was an important factor.

Academic commentators argued that the context was one of youth hopelessness. Joe, a young man who acknowledged taking part in the violence, felt that “All the upper generation are judging the lower generation… I’m at the job centre most days of the week…I’m trying my hardest. I’ve got CVs and everything bro, I still try, I still do all this shit, I still don’t get nothing. I don’t get nowhere because of what we look like…. At the end of the day, they think we’re youths and the youth generation goes mental. [But] we don’t go mental, we don’t want no trouble. We just want a job” (Malik 2011).

Joe’s perceptions were widely shared, according to a Teesside University survey, which found that 57 percent of young people felt employers discriminated against them because of their age. One in four were depressed about their future and less than half expected to have a secure job in five years. Trisha, 27, looted three bags of supplies from a supermarket. Despite her psychology degree from Middlesex University, she recently lost her job. “I’m still paying my student loan. That’s why I looted all I could,” she says without remorse.” Trisha did not feel that society “owes her a living”—she just wanted a decent job that will allow her to pay her rent without claiming social benefits (Malik 2011).

These riots have been compared to those that erupted in Detroit in 1967 in response to police brutality, poor living conditions—and lack of jobs. Researchers linked the riots, which spread to Newark, Milwaukee, and Washington, DC, to the problem of rising expectations: having fought for social equality, African American youth were still not finding jobs. Detroit never recovered: like Barberton, described above, post-industrial Detroit remains depopulated and abandoned, with whole blocks of buildings boarded up (Younge 2011).

Bradford, UK: When unemployment becomes chronic

The UK riots, described above, occurred in only a subset of communities where chronic unemployment, particularly for youth, has weakened community cohesion. Interviewed in several communities in Bradford, a deprived English city where riots took place in 2001, people spoke about the importance of social cohesion, which they defined as fairness and equality, shared values and interests, interdependence and neighborliness, and working together and accepting differences. At the same time, people thought that the chronic lack of opportunities in their communities was undermining cohesion: “…when communities feel under threat, unheard, not acknowledged, the underdogs, they tend to become introverted and they tend to be self-
reliant and in that process they lose the opportunities or the exposure to be able to truly have sort of balanced view on most things…” People expressed concern that as their communities struggled to survive long-term decline and further recession, cohesion sometimes became a defensive strategy that undermined a broader sense of affiliation with society as a whole (Hudson et al 2011).

Like other former industrial centers in UK, Bradford had never fully recovered from the decline of its textile industry and the replacement of unskilled but permanent jobs by short-term low wage jobs. The migration of young people to other cities, middle class flight to the suburbs, and lack of investment in the city center have compounded the overall sense of urban deterioration. Joblessness increased tension among settled (South Asian) and newer (East European) migrant groups, although both suffer from unemployment. A former apprentice recounted how he “got a modern apprenticeship….they replaced us all with robots… So then I turned to butchery, did five years on the job training, got qualified and that and now that’s all gone down the pan.” Young people complained of encountering “postcode bias” when they applied for a job in other cities, or of getting stuck in Bradford and drawn into gang culture and drug trafficking (Hudson et al 2011). In 2009, two years before the UK riots, youth and community workers warned of growing youth disaffection, and expressed fear that chronic unemployment and stymied opportunities in Bradford would “result in a generation with rock-bottom aspirations” (Day 2009).

“No for misery, no for unemployment”: The Arab Spring

Thwarted hopes among young people also played a role in catalyzing the “Arab Spring,” although in contrast to the anarchic and destructive violence of London Spring, they were part of a much broader social and political movement. Beginning in December 2010, protests and demonstrations calling for regime change swept across the countries of North Africa and the Middle East, ultimately toppling the governments of Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Yemen, and precipitating violent conflict that is still ongoing there and elsewhere. Governments in the region have long been concerned about the potentially destabilizing combination of their youth bulge and stagnant or decreasing employment opportunities, especially for educated youth. Recent years have seen protests, strikes and sporadic outbreaks of violence against rising food prices, stubborn poverty, unemployment, corruption, and disappointed aspirations among youth. Unemployment and underemployment may not have been enough to bring down governments, but the fact remains that the demonstrations in Tunis began with the self-immolation of college graduate reduced to street vending, and a young unemployed man who was electrocuted when he climbed a high voltage electric power line, reportedly shouting “no for misery, no for unemployment” (Saleh 2010).

The following discussion focuses on how these issues have played out in Egypt and Morocco.

While these countries have differed considerably in political openness, they still share many social features, including their demographic structure. Young people between 15 and 24 made up 21 percent of Morocco’s population in 2004 (Boudarbat and Ajbilou 2007), while youth 15 to 29 comprised 28 percent of Egypt’s population in 2007 (Assad and Barsoum 2007). These statistics translate into a huge number of young people competing each year for a limited number of good jobs. Since the 1970s, when a third of jobs for job entrants in Egypt were in the public sector (and about 5 percent in the private sector), secondary school and university were assured public
sector jobs. By 2005, public sector jobs provided only 18 percent of the jobs for new entrants, the private sector made up 10 percent, while informal employment comprised 72 percent. Partly because the education system is still geared primarily to train young people for work in public bureaucracies and state-owned enterprises, youth have been unable to deploy their degrees into good private sector jobs. Today, “Egyptian youths face a virtual devaluation of their educational credentials in comparison to the groups that preceded them” (Assad and Barsoum 2007).

In both countries, unemployment is sharpest for labor market entrants, as well as women and educated youth of both sexes. With women almost 4 times as likely to be unemployed as men, Egypt has one of the region’s highest gender gaps in employment. Far from being a recent phenomenon there, unemployment among educated youth was voiced as a potential cause of civil unrest during the British Mandate (1922-1948). As of 2006, university graduates had the highest unemployment rates among men, with post-secondary institute graduates having the highest rates among women. While the number of good jobs has declined, the number of “bad jobs” has increased—as of 2006, only 33 percent of employed youth had legal contracts, and even fewer had benefits.

In Morocco, many youth prefer to remain in schooling when possible because they can’t find jobs. The proportion of young people with diplomas has risen to over 55 percent in cities and almost 20 percent in rural areas, but graduates face huge barriers. A female law graduate complained, “I showed my resume to the human resources director of a small enterprise and he looked at me and asked if I knew how to read and write I answered that I had obtained my university degree. He said he did not need university graduates” (World Bank 2011 p. 40). Other graduates have reported that they hide the fact they had a university education to become more employable.

Among educated youth in particular, the dearth of public sector or good private sector jobs has forced many to delay marriage or downgrade their expectations for independent living arrangements after marriage. In 2004, the costs of a marriage in Egypt—housing and furnishings, celebration, dowry and jewelry—were such that a low income man and his family would have to save their entire earnings for five years or more to pay their expected two-thirds; and even the best paid men would have to work two full years. Among the poorest wage workers, father and groom must save their entire earnings for more than 7 years to pay for marriage, although marrying a relative and/or moving in with parents reduces costs (Singerman 2007).

Singerman cites a recent newspaper headline in Egypt, “Youth complain about unemployment while refusing 10,000 job opportunities.” She explains that young men often feel compelled to refuse temporary work because many parents prefer to “marry up” their daughters, and hold out for potential husbands with permanent jobs. This dilemma becomes particularly painful for educated young people who find that their degree is useless. Youth complained that connections determine employment: “To work in a big company, you’ve got to have wasta [connections or, literally, a middleman]. Regardless of your qualifications, you must search for someone to secure the job for you. In some cases, you have to pay money” (p. 33). Singerman cites reports of increasing suicide among youth, a problem aired in parliament in 2005.

Likewise, tensions have been simmering in Morocco. At the beginning of the Nineties, over 300 unemployed graduates occupied the handicraft complex in Sale as a protest. This was one of the
almost daily demonstrations by young people demanding employment and threatening hunger strikes or collective suicide. Boudarbat and Ajbilou (2007) argue that the May 16, 2003, terrorist attack in Casablanca, carried out by young people from a poor urban area, was fundamentally a protest against economic exclusion.

Young people in Egypt and Morocco thus remain dependent on their families in what Singerman terms a prolonged state of “waithood,” and families end up supporting the status quo by providing security for youth (Singerman 2007). While civic activism could potentially offer alternative mechanisms for participation in society, the Egyptian government has strictly constrained campus activities, imposing strict control over youth organizations, further amplifying young people’s cynicism toward the state. According to a 2007 national attitude survey of 2,400 youth, young people reported that they lacked faith that their voices or efforts would be appreciated, heard or considered. Two-thirds had never been involved in school activities, and only 13 percent did volunteer work, generally for religious reasons. The survey also found low rates of tolerance toward people who were different, particularly if they were from lower socio-economic backgrounds or of different religions (UNDP 2007, cited in Assad and Barsoum 2007).

VI. Forms of employment that prevent or erode cohesion

In the cases of retrenchment described earlier in this paper, many once-secure industrial jobs have been replaced by insecure and poorly paying jobs. In many developing countries, global value chains are outsourcing work at the bottom of the chain in ways that leave people extremely vulnerable to exploitation. The Chronic Poverty Research Poverty Centre (CPRC) in UK has labeled these kinds of jobs as a form of “adverse incorporation” to make the point that labor market incorporation or inclusion can coexist with social political exclusion. Indeed, the reason that people participate in the labor market under such negative conditions is that their extremely weak social and political positions significantly limit their opportunities. The CPRC also argues that “adverse incorporation” is an integral rather than residual part of the modern global economy, at the extreme end of the spectrum of casual and insecure jobs (Phillips 2011).

While the concept of “adverse incorporation” has generally been applied to poor or developing countries, it could also be applied to the situation of many workers in the new “temp economy” (Hatton 2011). Ehrenreich, for example, documents the daily life of the low-wage worker in the United States (2001, 2008). Working as a waitress, hotel maid, house cleaner, nursing home aide and Wal-Mart associate to research her book, she details her own experiences and those of her predominantly female co-workers. Asking her co-worker, Holly, a house cleaner why so many of the owners seemed hostile or contemptuous toward them, Holly explained, “They think we have nothing better to do with our time.” Marge, other cleaner, added, “We’re nothing to these people….We’re just maids.” Ehrenreich writes that she no longer stopped at the grocery store in her maid’s uniform—“I couldn’t take the stares, which are easily translatable into: what are you doing here?” (p.99-100). It is not that these women are totally excluded from social relationships; most had families. But unable to accumulate enough money at once for a down payment or even a deposit on an apartment, they also lived very precariously, in temporary accommodations, motel rooms, trailers, and sometimes even their cars.
Employers, she noticed, actively discouraged their workers from “gossiping” or comparing wages, largely to discourage attempts at unionization. Ehrenreich’s observations are consistent with what Pappas and Hatton both discuss—the deliberate attempts of employers to prevent any form of collective action. What offended her the most deeply about the low-wage workplace, however, “was the extent to which one is required to surrender one’s basic civil rights and—what boils down to the same thing—self respect.” Thus, management had the rights to search employees’ purses while they were at work; to insist on drug testing—in some cases, requiring employees to strip and give a urine sample in the presence of an aide. “Not only were employees subject to arbitrary changes of schedule, those without contracts could be dismissed without an explanation.” Trying to understand her own failure to defend a co-worker from an unfair management accusation, Ehrenreich concluded that the constant indignities effectively disempowered workers; “if you’re made to feel unworthy enough, you may come to think that what you’re paid is what you are actually worth” (p. 210-11).

A study of workers in the bovine cattle sector in Brazil documents the mechanisms that induce workers to voluntarily subject themselves to such harsh conditions (despite the government’s active efforts to eliminate “slave labor,” which it defines as work performed in degrading conditions). These workers are much more poorly educated than comparably poor workers, and generally come from isolated, poorly serviced regions with few employment opportunities. Despite their harsh treatment, workers sometimes exhibited a surprising acceptance of their lot, perhaps because of what Ehrenreich noted of low-wage workers in the US, that workers internalized the disrespect with which they were treated. Asked why they didn’t just quit, for example, a worker named Difran explained: “We don’t have the right to do so. Because the job must be finished, right? If I take a job to do, I’ll finish it.” Adão described the conditions: “In the mud during the day and in the mud during the night. A shack, by the pit. Bad work, in the mud. The shack, when it rained, we’d untie the hammock to wait for the rain to stop. It was like that. That’s why it was no good. Then they said: you guys can’t work like that. Cattle are being treated better than you” (Phillips and Sakamoto 2011 p. 28). Although federal inspectors in Brazil have freed tens of thousands of workers from such degrading situations, many have lured back by the promise of higher wages than they could command elsewhere. These wages, however, do not facilitate their socioeconomic mobility; instead, these workers remain vulnerable and responsive to the regular appearance of labor recruiters from the cattle industry (Phillips and Sakamoto 2011).

VI. Jobs, social cohesion and intervening institutions

Whether and to what extent employment helps build social cohesion, or social cohesion promotes employment, depends critically on the institutional environment. This environment encompasses many elements: the families and social networks that support or impede access to decent employment, the quality of local or national governance, including enabling or constraining laws, policies, and institutions, and the norms and practices that that shape people’s aspirations and ambitions.

In Bangladesh, for example, women’s movement into retail garment manufacturing was a response to acute rural poverty and landlessness, international quotas that made Bangladesh
attractive for international entrepreneurs, the microfinance movement, the efflorescence of NGOs, and explicit government policies to improve female education and health. Family networks were important as the “relational resources” on which women could draw as they moved from sheltered village existence to stay with relatives in the city and expand their independence (Kabeer, Mahmoud and Tasneem 2011).

Conversely, the impact of large scale worker retrenchments in the US, Bulgaria, Guyana and Argentina was magnified by the large role the particular industries had played in service provision. Linden, for example, had been a typical one-company town in a very poor country, so the shift to cost recovery for infrastructure services placed a huge burden on unemployed households. In Barberton, the impact of job loss would have been far less severe had stressed and depressed workers not simultaneously lost health insurance. In the UK, the curtailment of social supports further exacerbated the anger and hopelessness of young people already depressed by their employment prospects.

A rich literature documents the many mechanisms by which formal and informal collaborative relationships help create and expand economic opportunities, and the many ways in which the expansion of through opportunities can strengthen such relationships. In some circumstances, however, the efficacy of such collaborative relationships can be undermined. The following example from Nigeria examines how changing international conditions and local institutional reforms combined to undermine what had been highly effective local organizations.

Informal employment networks and disempowerment: Enterprises in Nigeria

While social capital, as a facet of social cohesion, can aid people in finding and exploiting economic opportunities, it can also become dysfunctional or exclusionary as the economic or political environment changes. A study of a weaving cluster in Ilorin, a city in the Yoruba Muslim part of western Nigeria, and a shoe and garment cluster in Aba, a city in the Igbo Christian area of eastern Nigeria, examines “whether the informal livelihood networks and associations of the urban poor foster economic empowerment and popular political participation, or... disrupt institutional development” and lead to poverty and social conflict (Meagher 2011 p. 48).

From the late 1970s up through the 1990s, when falling oil prices and radical structural reform led to massive unemployment in Nigeria, these enterprise clusters generated expanding employment and incomes. Although most of the firms were informal, they manage to establish links with global chains supplying markets in Europe and North America. Ultimately, however, the structural reforms weakened their capacity to act collectively, despite their dense ties. According to Meagher, the problem was not inadequate social capital or poor capacity to mobilize people across social cleavages, but rather a lack of political capacity to make these “connections work in favor of the poor.”

High unemployment and falling incomes had created a flood of entrants into these clusters from a broad range of social groups, which created new tensions. The increased age and class diversity overwhelmed established procedures and weakened the sanctions that clusters had previously used to limit opportunistic behavior. As a result, people sought to build up their individual networks at the expense of collective arrangements. Better educated or connected producers
could thus expand their credit and marketing networks relative to more disadvantaged producers. Some producers were able to diversify their contracts by joining multiple organizations, including ward associations, prayer groups, and professional and political organizations. The poorest producers had no regular suppliers or credit networks but depended mainly on customers from their own villages.

With different types of producers practicing different networking strategies, their collective effectiveness as a cluster declined. As the cluster networks fragmented, fewer of the gains accruing to producers with more powerful networks trickled down to poorer producers. The fragmentation also reduced the clusters’ capacity to influence political decision-making, whether through personal or formal channels. During this time, political decentralization was implemented. The dependence of the new local governments on oil rather than tax revenues meant that they were not particularly receptive to private sector needs: “Far from being reined in by these active but politically weak associations, Nigerian local and regional governments oscillate between ignoring them and using them to mobilize electoral support…” The state’s neglect of these enterprises has contributed to their increased rate of failure, “with young men hemorrhaging out of the clusters to swell the chaotic and volatile ranks of hawkers, motorcycle taxi drivers, and the unemployed.”

Decentralization is often thought to be a prerequisite for responsive and accountable governance, because it brings citizens into closer touch with the state. In Nigeria, the particular development of global markets, Nigeria’s oil wealth, and the way in which decentralization was implemented undermined the efficacy of the long-standing tradition of collective action within the weaving, shoe and garment clusters. Whether workers in these clusters can reorganize themselves to promote their interests will depend in part on their success in developing ties to trade unions, central government officials, or international organizations as an alternative way of exerting political influence.

**VII. Conclusions**

As the examples above suggest, multiple and overlapping links between jobs and social cohesion run in both direct directions, and they way they affect each other is profoundly depending on the economic, institutional and policy context. In Bangladesh, for example, a legacy of war and drought, rural impoverishment, international trade regulations, and government policies provided the context in which “bad” jobs gave women opportunities that expanded their autonomy and agency. Likewise, in Morocco, drought stimulated migration to Khalouta, resulting in a heterogeneous community where traditional hierarchies and gender relations started to loosen. At the same time, labor migration of men and women to Europe increased in response to new opportunities there, resulting in a stream of remittances to households in Khalouta. This influx of cash stimulated the economy and further increased household incentives to let women work outside the home and enjoy greater freedom of movement and autonomy. Further research could add a more systematic dimension to our understanding of how communities across the globe have responded creatively to changing employment conditions.
In the manufacturing and mining communities described above, massive retrenchments hurt households and contributed to social fragmentation. It wasn’t job loss alone that did the damage. For one thing, plant downsizing entailed the end of many subsidized services. This was true not only in Bulgaria, where industry collapse followed regime change, but elsewhere as well. Pappas, for example, documents the serious material and psychological difficulties that loss of health coverage entailed for Barberton’s retrenched rubber plant workers. The scale of closures in Barberton damaged the entire local economy and severely reduced revenues available for public services such as schools. Whether in the US, Bulgaria, Argentina and Guyana, for workers in industries once seen as engines of growth, their self-respect, identity, loyalties and affiliations were tightly linked to their jobs. Unemployment thus weakened the basis of many ties and relationships on which social cohesion had been built.

Whether in the urban centers of the Middle East and North Africa, the UK, or North America, chronic exclusion from the labor market has a toxic and long-lasting effect on individuals, households, and communities, and not only because of its material impact. First-person accounts of unemployed people make it clear that their perceptions of being treated unfairly and disrespectfully are just as debilitating. As the reactions in the UK and the Middle East illustrate, given the right trigger, this feeling of being abandoned or written off by those in power can explode. Thus, it isn’t simply the failure of public policies to improve employment opportunities, but also the feeling that their grievances are not even taken seriously. Particularly in the UK, the random destruction that took place suggests that the angry and largely underprivileged young perpetrators felt they had little stake in mainstream society.

In the temporary and insecure jobs described as “adverse incorporation,” abusive conditions are not simply a byproduct of the task, but may be deliberately imposed by employers to keep workers weak and divided. While this terms was coined to describe the workings of global value chains, it seems equally applicable to emerging forms of unstable and poorly paid employment in upper income countries. In the US, for example, Ehrenreich has documented employers’ attempts to intimidate workers to prevent efforts to organize and push for better working conditions.

Perhaps the most important policy conclusion from this brief exploration of jobs and social cohesion is that the institutional context of employment has more of an impact on the various indicators by which social cohesion is defined, than does the actual job itself. And depending on the institutional environment, unemployment should not inevitably undermine the capacity or incentives of people to work collectively toward socially positive goals. Delinking social benefits from employment, for example, would go far in reducing some of the harshest aspects of temporary or even long-term unemployment. Interestingly, a comparison of 14 European countries found that unemployment had the least effect on individual well-being in Denmark and the Netherlands in good part due to extensive unemployment protection, in the form of unemployment benefits and active labour market policies (Namkee et al 2004, see also Martin 2001). Given the huge social costs that long-term unemployment can have, policymakers should consider the important role that unemployment insurance, child benefits, social assistance and/or income transfers could play in terms of maintaining social stability and cohesion during periods of severe unemployment.
Governments can also take much stronger positions toward employers who punish workers for sharing information about wages and working conditions or supporting trade unions. Clearly, making education and training more widely available would increase workers’ freedom of choice. And, given the long-term impact of prolonged unemployment on communities, policymakers should consider the long-term costs of letting industries or areas of the economy collapse and rationalizing public sector employment so that they already have in place measures to energize and support the private sector and to mitigate serious social and economic impacts for households and communities. Particularly in upper income countries, governments could work with the private sector and workers’ organizations to reduce working hours as an alternative to redundancies. In the interests of social cohesion, European governments, supported by trade unions, have encouraged firms to reduce working hours rather than fire workers (Foa, no date; Baker 2012).

All these measures should be part of public discussion, given the rapidly changing pattern of employment worldwide. How such mediating policies influence the relationship between jobs and social cohesion constitutes an important topic for further research on the two-way relationship between jobs and social cohesion.
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