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Restructuring, retrenchment, and re-employment: Exploring South Africa's clothing and textile industry through the experiences of Black women workers in Cape Town's factories

After the ANC's (African National Congress) ascent to political power in 1994 the party shifted away from its equity-oriented RDP (Reconstruction and Development Plan) to adopt a neoliberal program of economic reform known as GEAR (Growth Employment and Redistribution). This macroeconomic strategy resulted in changes to South Africa's political economy which included processes such as the liberalization of trade and the flexibilization of labor. These trends are what this research aims to explore by paying attention to the adjustments made and experienced in South Africa's clothing and textile industry. This research will bring forth the histories and current experiences of Black women workers in Cape Town's clothing and textile factories to create a rich timeline that details the restructuring of the industry in terms of their retrenchment and re-employment. By doing so, this research will draw on a range of economic and geographic literature and will mirror archival and ethnographic studies that focus on Black women's experiences in the context of labor. By employing oral history interviews, archival research, semi-structured interviews, and the ethnographic methods of job-shadowing and sewing lessons this research will articulate a study that considers how the experiences of women workers in South Africa's clothing and textile industry intersect with broad trends of political economic change.