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**Neoliberalism and Casualization of Public Sector Services:
The Case of Waste Collection Services in Cape Town, South Africa**

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the waste collection strategies of the municipal government in Cape Town, South Africa. This case is used as a point of entry to a much wider debate on global neoliberalism and the privatization of municipal services. The analysis of the case study sheds light on the links between the cost recovery agenda of the neoliberal state and the casualization of labor. To minimize costs the privatizing local governments, like private sector firms, rely on and have further enhanced the casualization of labor. This blurs the conceptual distinction between the public and private sectors whereby the local governments treat citizens as customers with stratified entitlements to basic services. Stressing the continuities of apartheid under the neoliberal policies, the paper highlights the specific ways in which the neoliberal state in its post-apartheid moment uses gender ideologies and the rhetoric of voluntarism and black empowerment to justify its use of casual labor and the precarious working conditions among poor women of black townships.

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Neoliberalism and Casualization of Public Sector Services: The Case of Waste Collection Services in Cape Town, South Africa

Faranak Miraftab

Introduction

This paper is concerned with the South African state's adoption of global neoliberal ideology and how this contributes to the casualization of labor. While most research has examined labor flexibilization in respect to the behavior of private sector companies and firms, in this paper I focus on the behavior of the public sector. Taking the example of Cape Town's municipal government, known as the unicity, and its strategies for collecting waste in a black township, I discuss the full cost recovery principles of the municipal government and ways in which privatizing local governments, like private sector firms, further the casualization of labor, especially among poor women. In particular, I will discuss the government's mobilization of patriarchal gender ideologies and the rhetoric of voluntarism and skill acquisition to justify the cheap or unpaid labor of women involved as flexible laborers or volunteers in the processes of waste collection. Assuming "municipal housekeeping" as a natural attribute of women, the case example of waste collection in Cape Town brings into focus the conjuncture of privatization and patriarchy, intimately linking interests of capitalism with forms of domination established through race and gender.

The paper relies on secondary information as well as field information obtained in Cape Town in the summers of 2001 and 2002.¹ First-hand information includes a series of open-ended and semi-structured interviews with the City officials at the unicity, the private company operators and individuals contracted for waste removal in the informal sector townships, and community members involved in the various waste collection schemes described in this paper. An important secondary source of information has been a prior investigation by the International Labour Research and Information Group (ILRIG) on partnership schemes for waste removal in Khayelitsha.

The organization of this paper is as follows: First I sketch the legacies of apartheid in respect to labor casualization and stratification of basic services and their continuities under the post-apartheid government despite the 1994 constitutional change and political transition. Then I lay out the financial framework within which the Cape Town municipal government now operates and introduce the waste collection strategies of the unicity. In particular I describe the strategies employed in one of the largest black townships of Cape Town, Khayelitsha, where around half a million black Africans reside. These strategies include a public-private partnership, which hires non-unionized male and female workers from among the local unemployed population of the township, and two campaigns formulated and orchestrated by the municipality which exclusively rely on the labor of local women as volunteers or as casual workers without job security or employment benefits. Next I stress the complementarity of various schemes employed by the unicity and propose that they should be considered in relationship to each other to understand the continuity of apartheid's legacy under the cost recovery agenda of the neoliberal post-apartheid government. Furthermore, I underline a) the patriarchal gender values that ascribe "municipal

housekeeping” to women to be performed for free as their “motherly” moral duty; and b) the rhetoric of voluntarism and black empowerment, which misconstrues labor as skills training/creation of job opportunity. I argue that it is through the effective mobilization of gender ideology and empowerment rhetoric that the neoliberal South African state in its post-apartheid moment tries to justify exploitation of impoverished women’s casual and unpaid labor. I conclude the paper with a brief synthesis of these conditions stressing the links between the privatization agenda of the neoliberal state and its participation in the casualization of labor, which blurs the conceptual distinction between the public and private sector.

Continuity of Apartheid Policies under Neoliberalism

Under the apartheid regime, the central tool that the state used to maintain its mode of capital accumulation was the construction and stratification of the distinct racial categories hierarchically incorporated into the labor market. The Native Land Act of 1913, which excluded the black population from South African citizenship and tried to contain them within the designated impoverished and overcrowded “homelands,” effectively worked to create a large informal and casual labor market (Mager 1999; Mabin 1992). The enforcement of the pass law which only allowed blacks as “migrant workers” who were officially employed to have a presence in the cities and white areas where the socio economic resources were concentrated, helped in forming a large pool of informal laborers, predominantly among black women, available for use and abuse by the dominant white population and the economy.²

The racialized system of labor exploitation worked closely with the spatial organization of apartheid cities. The apartheid urban system characterized by segregation of racialized populations maintained social hierarchies by controlling the social mobility of black and colored populations (Lemon 1991; Mabin 1992). Tying the right of citizenship to race, the apartheid state stratified treatment of urban residents in terms of their access to basic urban services and infrastructure and created cities characterized by dramatic disparities in living conditions of racialized populations. Hence, while white suburbs enjoyed high standards of infrastructure and services, the black townships were deprived of the most basic of urban services.

Current research in post-apartheid South Africa indicates that despite the redistributive promises of the 1994 constitution little has changed in respect to the patterns of inequality created during the years of apartheid. These studies underline the significance of a swift swing in the national government’s development framework in 1996 from the equity-oriented Reconstruction and Development Program (RDP) to the growth-oriented Growth Employment and Reconstruction program (GEAR) (Moore 2001; Heller 2001; Bond 2000a, 2000b; Howarth 1998; Cheru 2001; McDonald and Pape 2002; Valodia 2001). While RDP, which was the main feature of the 1994 election platform of the African National Congress (ANC), advocated a life-line tariff for access of all citizens to the most basic of services, GEAR, a homegrown neoliberal program designed by the South African government, advocates full recovery of service costs from the users.³ GEAR prescribes growth through the usual neoliberal list of more freedom of the market, less regulation of international trade, more integration into the global economy, and restructuring of the state to facilitate these processes. The adoption of the neoliberal GEAR framework by the post-apartheid government has perpetuated great divides in different population groups’ access to urban amenities such as waste, water, electricity, shelter and transportation, and regenerated casual labor markets created under the apartheid government.

In respect to informal labor, for example, Valodia's comprehensive study (2001) assessing the consequences of GEAR on the labor force finds an overall increase in the informal and flexible labor market with a persistent over-representation of women in general (57 percent) and African women in particular (49 percent).⁴ It underlines how the state's neoliberal trade policies that promote the opening up of the South African economy by abandoning protective tariffs and liberalization of imports has affected local industries that are not globally competitive. This is by job loss and/or extensive restructuring to promote labor flexibilization and informalization as a means of increasing competitiveness (Grest 2001). A number of micro-level case studies in a range of industries record how these restructuring strategies have contributed to increased unemployment, a growth in informal and flexible labor, and a greater loss in the formal sector and of stable jobs in South Africa.⁵ (Theron and Godfrey 2000; Valodia 2001). The promotion of informal and casual labor by the current neoliberal government occurs not only through its policies of trade and industry. It also found in the restructuring strategies which directly engage local governments in labor casualization in order to meet full cost recovery of services—an aspect of the neoliberal policies and practices that this paper addresses through the case study of the municipality's waste collection strategies.

In respect to the urban spatial inequalities current research indicates the persistence of apartheid urban hierarchies (Watson 2002; Saff 1998) and continued polarization and fragmentation of space (Turok 2001; McDonald and Smith 2002). While some elite African and colored populations have moved to the affluent white suburbs and are enjoying the high quality of urban services there, overall the racial pattern of spatial disparities remains. Economic opportunities and public amenities continue to be concentrated in the affluent former white suburbs, and access by people from the black and colored townships to these economic and social resources continues to be limited as there has been no profound change in transportation and land use planning systems that were created under apartheid (Turok 2001; Watson 2002). Indeed, one of the most recent considerations of the new South African government has been removal of public transport subsidies for "previously disadvantaged individuals." This effectively perpetuates the situation whereby the majority of the poor are locked in their residential locations, deprived of job opportunities or public amenities.

Furthermore, the public sector's investment in infrastructure and basic services continues to be concentrated in affluent suburbs, where the population is still dominated by whites with a sprinkling of a recently emerging black elite. This point is clearly demonstrated by comparison of public investment for basic services in the white and black suburbs of Cape Town (McDonald and Smith 2002). McDonald and Smith compare the levels of public investment for waste and water in Khayelitsha, population 450,000, and in Durbanville, an affluent, white-dominated suburb with a population of 36,000. In fiscal year 1999-2000, Khayelitsha had a capital expense per resident ten times less than that of Durbanville (R0.56 compared to R5.55 per resident) (MacDonald and Smith 2002:30). Similarly, to service the two suburbs with clean water, the public sector capital expense per resident was almost fifteen times as much in Durbanville as in Khayelitsha (R100 versus R0.67) (ibid.: 31).⁶

In this light we can see the continuity of the apartheid legacy under the current neoliberal policies by promotion of casual labor and stratification of basic urban services and infrastructure provision. A brief description of the post-apartheid local government financial framework might explain *how* the cost recovery agenda of a neoliberal framework results in persistence of apartheid inequities.

Local Government's Financial Environment

The post-apartheid restructuring of the local government in Cape Town and creation of the unicity was an attempt to integrate areas that had been racialized and segregated under apartheid. Hence apartheid administrative units were re-demarcated to form local governments that span the racialized areas and reduce the existing disparities in access to urban amenities and services. This restructuring was carried out through a two-stage process. The first stage, in 1996-97, reduced the number of municipalities from 39 to seven. The second stage, in 2000, combined the seven local governments to form one municipal government for the entire Cape Town metropolitan area, with a population of over three million (ILRIG 2001). This unified administrative unit operates as a single financial unit under a common system of taxation and one budgetary environment, but a range of other demarcations, such as wards, function to facilitate representation of different areas by sending their local councilors to the unicity council. There is little intergovernmental transfer of funds available to the unicity, must earn ninety percent of its own budget through local revenues, sale of bulk services and fees. Only four percent of the budget comes from grants received from other spheres of government (Coopoo 2000:6). According to the Financial and Fiscal Commission, the size of intergovernmental grants from the central to local levels in real terms has fallen to a point 85 percent lower than in 1991 (ILRIG 2001:26). Yet, the mandate of local governments has increased due to the devolution of central government responsibilities and incorporation of the black areas into their service areas.

Within this local government structure and financial framework the budgets for specific services are “ring fenced,” meaning that each service has to recover its own costs. In the face of limited intergovernmental and cross sectoral transfers, the unicity has had to manage its financial constraints by using differential strategies in distinct areas of the city in order to bring down the overall service costs. Therefore, while service to all suburbs and areas of the city is covered by the same “pot” of funds, the fact that local governments, just like private sector firms, have to fully recover their incurred costs for a particular service and in the absence of adequate resources, sets the stage for the differential treatment of service delivery to the different areas. This might be in terms of level and quality of service and/or the treatment of residents serviced in particular suburbs of the city, which paradoxically stratifies the levels of services for different areas and defeats the equalizing intent of the local government restructuring. The unicity's waste collection strategies is a case in point.

Unicity's Waste Collection Strategies

To keep Cape Town clean with little cost to the city the unicity uses a range of waste collection strategies under an overarching campaign known as the Mess Action Campaign (MAC), a play on the famed ANC Mass Action campaign during the years of anti-apartheid struggle called.⁷ This includes hiring formal sector municipal workers to provide curbside services to the affluent suburbs, as well as a series of privatized and community-based strategies that serve the informal settlements. Here I will focus on strategies that are used to service our case study community, Khayelitsha, with its nearly half a million residents the majority of whom are black and poor, and live in a mix of formal and informal settlements.⁸

There are currently three waste collection strategies in operation in Khayelitsha. These include a partnership scheme that relies on the private sector hiring non-unionized, unemployed

local men and women, known as the Billy Hattingh (BH) scheme; an exclusively women's scheme that relies on local women as casual workers (known as the Masicoce Campaign); and several all-women volunteer groups (promoted through the Waste-wise Campaign). In none of these strategies does the local government engage in the hiring or handling of the labor. The unicity contracts a private firm (in the BH scheme) or an individual (in the Masicoce scheme) to be responsible for the recruitment, supervision, payment and retrenchment of workers. For the volunteer groups, the unicity contracts a local non-profit group (the Fairest Cape) to promote the Waste-wise Campaign. These strategies are further described below.

The Billy Hattingh Scheme is a public-private partnership formulated and promoted by a private sector firm owned by Billy Hattingh (now owned by Tedcor -- the Entrepreneurial Development Corporation).⁹ He first sold the projects to local municipalities in Gauteng in 1995 but since has had it replicated across South Africa. The scheme relies on a partnership between his company which manages the project and oversees the finances; the municipality, which collects the local municipal rates and pays the contracting fee to the private company; and the unemployed members of the serviced communities, who are hired to perform the actual tasks as laborers and as entrepreneurs, collecting and removing waste. The procedure is that the city contracts the private company for a specific service area -- in this case 50,000 service points including shacks and dwellings. The company selects and subcontracts local entrepreneurs among the local unemployed population, who are required to hold a valid driving license, operate the garbage trucks, and supervise and pay the workers. Community-based groups and community structures such as RDP forums select the workers from among the unemployed population to do the actual collection of waste.¹⁰

Three arguments are put forth by the private sector and City officials in favor of the BH scheme: 1) the scheme minimizes the service cost to the municipality by saving on both the cost of labor and equipment (trucks are maintained and paid for by the entrepreneurs not the municipality); 2) it creates jobs for the local unemployed population; and 3) it empowers the local entrepreneurs who through this scheme learn entrepreneurial skills but most importantly develop an asset base and financial history by paying off the garbage trucks leased in their names towards their individual ownership (NBI 2001; Tedcor n.d.).

Today to service its contracted area, the scheme hires nine local entrepreneurs (seven men and two women) to drive the garbage trucks and supervise and pay the workers, and one hundred workers (split with slightly more men than women) to do the actual work of cleaning and waste collection. Responsibilities of the workers include collection and removal of waste from the 50,000 service points in the area (approximately 300 to 700 shacks and dwellings per worker per week), sweeping streets and sidewalks and collecting illegal dumping in public spaces. But in practice this expectation has proven unrealistic. BH workers rarely manage more than the collection of garbage at their designated service points, and the rest of their tasks are often left to the other schemes operating within the area -- the Masicoce and volunteer groups. Had the City carried out the work performed by BH workers, according to the City official interviewed, it would have occupied one truck with four men, and cost the City at least double the amount currently paid, when calculating for the equipment, salary, sick leave and other benefits of the formal municipal employees. BH workers, however, hired on five-year contracts at the official minimum wage earn less than 2/3rd of the wage for municipal workers,¹¹ which was estimated to bring down the City's service cost from R22.11 per household per month to R11 (Xali 2001:136).

The Masicoce Campaign, which exclusively involves women, started in 2001. It captures the overflow of work that BH workers do not cover, namely the sweeping of streets and sidewalks, and the collection and removal of public trash to clean the communal neighborhood spaces. Masicoce women are provided with brooms and plastic bags, and are required to carry the bagged public waste to specific points for deposit into skips. Periodic removal of these skips to the dumpsite is contracted to a private company, and the management of waste at the dumpsite is contracted to yet another private firm.

The Masicoce scheme involves one local contractor who takes up the role of employer and recruits and hires 105 women from the unemployed local population to clean public neighborhood spaces in Khayelitsha. Masicoce women are hired as casual workers, without any benefits, on a non-renewable one-year contract, with a salary below the official minimum wage, equivalent to half of what is paid to workers on the BH scheme and less than one-third of what formally employed municipal workers receive. The City celebrates its Masicoce campaign as a strategy to provide training and hence future employment opportunities for disadvantaged women of Khyaelitsha, who are said to earn a skill through their one-year participation in this waste collection program.

Volunteer groups are exclusively composed of women residents and they rely entirely on their unpaid labor. They are promoted by the Waste-wise campaign which, according to its promotional material, encourages communities to “*live better, fight litter!*” The unicity has contracted a local nonprofit group, the Fairest Cape, to oversee the campaign. It is based on the participation of communities and individuals who help to keep the city’s neighborhoods clean, report illegal dumping and littering, and raise public awareness of the health hazards of waste. While the City refers to it as a citywide initiative, including the industrial areas where they want to stop the illegal dumping of industrial waste, in practice it is only taking place in the disadvantaged areas of the city and only women have been involved. Currently, there are about a dozen volunteer groups engaged in the Waste-wise campaign in Cape Town. Plastic garbage bags are the only equipment provided to collect the illegal trash and dumping. These groups are commonly mobilized by local councilors who promise to get compensation for the women volunteers and in return catch their votes.¹² But few of the groups have been recognized by the City, even fewer have received plastic garbage bags. Still, the hope and the expectation have been created.

In Khayelitsha, many women involved in this volunteer activity do not know the difference between the various programs and were disappointed, to say the least, when provided with plastic bags only and no payment. Others are aware of the voluntary nature of their work, yet hoped that this would give them a better chance to be recognized by their local RDP forums and councilors, and thus eventually be selected for work with the Masicoce or BH schemes. This voluntary scheme links to the Masicoce scheme as it captures the many women who were not included in the short list of 105 women recruited by Masicoce, but are hard working and desperate to find a source of income.

Analysis: Complementarity of the Waste Collection Schemes

As we can see from the description of the waste collection schemes currently operating in Cape Town, the unicity has incorporated a range of strategies to serve its residents: from formal municipal services to privatization (in the form of partnership with the private sector)¹³ to employment of casual and flexible labor to promotion of voluntarism. These strategies I argue

must be understood not in isolation from each other but as interlinked and complementary features of the state's strategy to (re)define its role and responsibility in the provision of basic services to residents.

In Khyelitsha's case, for instance, seeing the unicity's three programs in complementary relation to each other allows us to understand how the unpaid and casual labor of women in the volunteer groups and the Masicoce campaign subsidize the privatized BH scheme. The BH scheme has been able to maintain its margin of profit and yet offer a lower service cost to the municipality not only by paying a minimum wage to its workers but also by taking advantage of the casual and unpaid labor of women mobilized under the other schemes in Khayelitsha who pick up the work left behind by the BH scheme. This exposes the myth held by City officials that the private sector can do it better and cheaper and reveals the links between the privatization agenda of the neoliberal state and the casualization of labor.

Furthermore, consideration of the unicity's full range of waste collection schemes allows us to highlight the contrasts that exist in levels of services and in the state's accountability to the residents of different areas: a key characteristic of the old apartheid urban system. In disadvantaged areas like Khayelitsha with an informal settlement pattern, shacks are often inaccessible to the municipal garbage trucks, which makes collection of waste more labor intensive. To bring the service cost down the privatizing local government¹⁴ facilitates the employment of casual and informal labor, contracting its services to private sector firms, such as BH/ Tedcor, who then side-step the formal municipal workers and instead hire unemployed local labor at half the cost and double the work load, or making use of an individual contractor, as in the case of Masicoce, who hires the casual labor of women, at less than minimum wage and with no job security. This is while the unicity continues offering the affluent areas curbside service by formal municipal employees and clear accountability of the municipal government. In Khayelitsha, however, as one of the interviewees stated, the fact that the service is contracted out to a series of private firms and individuals result in residents finding it increasingly difficult to report unsatisfactory service to government officials as blame is tossed around and little changes.

This is not meant to suggest a permanent division between the unionized public sector services for the affluent suburbs and privatized or outsourced cheap labor services for the townships. Affluent areas are unlikely to be excluded from the privatization agenda of the municipalities. Indeed in many cases the affluent suburbs have spearheaded the privatization and outsourcing agenda of the municipality, for example in the case of City Improvement District (CID) programs. What this discussion does point to is how the neoliberal goal of full cost recovery fails to redress the apartheid, and indeed maintains them, as it encourages differential treatment of urban dwellers' need for basic services.

Despite the constitutional entitlement of all South Africans to access basic services, by defining basic services as commodities, neoliberalism treats citizens as costumers and hence stratifies their access to basic urban amenities and infrastructure. In the neoliberal scenario the urban residents' rights, and therefore the kinds of claims they can make, to basic public services is de-linked from citizenship (Denhardt and Denhardt 2001; Warner and Hefetz 2002; Smith and Ehwada 2002).

Now, if we agree that the neoliberal post-apartheid government maintains key aspects of apartheid policies, then the next important question to ask concerns its means of justification. How in its particular post-apartheid moment, does the state justify its participation in exploitation

of casual informal labor for provision of basic municipal services? How does it justify the stratified treatment of services for different groups of urban residents? What distinct ideologies and discourses are mobilized among men and women to participate in the provisioning of municipal services at under-paid or unpaid wages? It is to these specific questions that I now turn. In particular to shed light on the discursive aspect of the state's labor casualization, in the section that follows I draw on the interviews conducted with the unicity officials and members of the waste collection schemes to highlight the use made of the ideologies of gender and the rhetoric of voluntarism.

Ideologies of Gender: Women as Municipal Housekeepers

Ironically, women and trash have historically been connected. Patriarchal gender ideology that prescribes the home and the neighborhood as the realm of women, and caring for domestic space as a sphere of women's activities, has been central to this relationship. Experiences in the formulation and implementation of the waste collection schemes presented in this paper and documented elsewhere by researchers in other parts of the world underline the strong gender dimension of waste collection strategies (Beall 1997; Ali et al. 1998).

For example, McGurty (1998) demonstrates in her historical account "Trashy Women" that, at the turn of the last century in Chicago, in the early stages of urbanization when cities were facing great public health hazards, women through their women's clubs and associations played an important role in the development of public waste collection and management. Then, in the absence of the state's clear role in waste collection in the emerging cities, middle-class women mobilized the rhetoric of "municipal housekeeping" to request government intervention in the handling of waste by private companies. "Municipal housekeeping" was understood as the moral obligation of women to extend "their domestic care-taking into the neighborhood streets" (McGurty 1998:30). Thus under the rhetoric of their "womanly duty to provide a clean and nurturing home," these women were able to justify their involvement in the public domain of urban issues such as waste collection and the demand for state participation in the management of waste (ibid.:27).

Today, at the turn of this century, in the light of neoliberal urban policies that advocate withdrawal of the state and privatization of basic services, yet again the rhetoric of gender roles is mobilized to explain women's involvement with waste. This time, however, it involves poor women and it is the city officials and private sector companies contracted for waste collection that make use of gender specific rhetoric. The rhetoric of municipal housekeeping is employed to justify the free and casual labor of poor women, who subsidize the private sector's waste collection schemes and compensate for the state's withdrawal from the provisioning of basic services. The state uses gender ideologies that stereotype women into specific roles and present them with particular characteristics. In the case of Khayelitsha, beliefs in women's traits as docile and reliable and women's identity as guardians of the home (for black women in South Africa historically this has meant as guardians of white folks' homes) have been mobilized as government tries to find ways to reduce its expenses and cope with its financial constraints.

In its specific post-apartheid context, gender ideologies are used in conjunction with the rhetoric of empowerment and communities' voluntary action. To counter the fierce protests of the South African Municipal Workers' Union (SAMWU) against the government's side stepping of formally employed municipal workers, the state utilizes the intertwining of these rhetorics to make a case for outsourcing the provision of basic services to poor areas and to justify the use of

the casual and insecure labor of women, while stressing “no job expectation,” to substitute for formal public sector employees – namely the unionized male municipal workers. As one City official states:

“Most of the gender empowerment in this country has been around refuse and waste. For very many reasons, one of which is that women are found to be very suitable for handling waste. ...if organized properly, the physical capability is there as opposed to digging trenches and other types of municipal work. ... Secondly, women are found to be easier to manage in a waste environment in the sense of reliability, they tend to get drunk less often, they come to work on time.”

Such gender beliefs also play a significant role among black and poor women themselves. On the one hand, as breadwinners of their households and in an environment without any prospect of a job, they are desperate to find any source of income—no matter how little or insecure; on the other hand, as care givers of their families they are concerned with their children’s health and safety. Thus, they join the Masicoce for minimal pay or a volunteer group for no pay, in hopes that it will eventually lead to a “real” job, but also with the “moral” justification that in this way they are carrying out their responsibility of caring for their neighborhoods. Basically, it is a coupling of their poverty and their “morality” as “good women/mothers” that rationalizes the participation of Khayelitsha women in these programs. One group of volunteer women interviewed explains their activity as follows:

“We are the volunteer group, we started from last year, 7th May, we were 150 members at that time. We were supposed to clean the street area. That is our purpose. We are sweeping from 8am to 3pm, but when it is raining we don’t sweep. ... We are using our own brooms [the councilor] says to us that he will get us something. He said he will go to the minister to get us something, but he hasn’t yet. ... our streets were so dirty, and we were not working, doing nothing at home – so we decided to collect garbage to clean our area. And there were so many condoms everywhere and the children would play with them and it is so dirty and also there is HIV. ... we also want something for us. ... They should give us something – we are hungry. I have no money to pay for food or school for the children – they should give us some work.”

These women, who spend all day sweeping the streets of their neighborhoods without pay, have hope for a job in the future as well as the immediate reward of protecting their children from open cuts on their bare feet or playing with used condoms. Khayelitsha men, who stand all day along the shoulder of the entrance to the nearby N2 highway also often end their day without pay, but then only with the hope of being picked up to sell their labor the next day. Gender beliefs underlie the distinction between women’s and men’s days spent without pay in hope of a future job. Gender codes and values justify women’s participation in volunteer or casual labor as something beyond economic activity in that it contributes to their other area of responsibility as care givers. It is these desperate conditions of poverty combined with gender codes and values that neoliberalism takes advantage of and taps into in order to finance its cost recovery agenda.

Rhetoric of Voluntarism: Training not Employment

Another means by which the unicity tries to justify its labor casualization strategies is by blurring the distinction between employment and training. To justify the less than minimum wage that Masicoce workers are paid and the insecure conditions of their labor, the unicity officials present the Masicoce scheme as a scheme to provide women with job training and skills to enhance their employment opportunities elsewhere. Referring to the analogy of “teaching people how to fish rather than giving them a fish,” a senior official interviewed argues against

the state's engagement in employment of its municipal workers and declares: "As local government we do not employ, we empower others to employ people from disadvantaged backgrounds." Masked under the rhetoric of training, the municipality obscures its responsibilities towards its workers and allows others (individuals or private firms) to hire casual labor to perform the work needed for provision of municipal services at a lower cost. It justifies the temporary and below minimum wage conditions of these contracts as a means of spreading the opportunity of training and new skills acquisition among poor women of Khayelitsha. The reality is, of course, that the scheme does not offer new skills to women, it rather exploits their existing unpaid domestic skills.

Furthermore, by calling its Masicoce strategy a "*campaign*" the unicity tries to present this program as a voluntary action and in that, it takes a significant right away from the workers. By referring to this scheme as a campaign, women working within it are presented not as *employees* but as *campaign members*. Consequently, the payments that they receive cannot be considered as a wage to be measured against the criteria of fair labor compensation. Masicoce women's remuneration for less than the official minimum wage (R800 versus the R1,300 official minimum wage)¹⁵ without any benefits is hence justified as an amount offered by the government in support of their campaign participation, job training and acquisition of new skills. It, therefore, should not be assessed as fair treatment of labor.

In this discussion we cannot ignore the dire conditions of poverty within which we are examining the unicity's waste collection strategies. The truth of the matter is that in an impoverished black township like Khayelitsha, most of these women would have probably done the job even for less than the amount offered through the Masicoce or BH schemes. In such extreme conditions of poverty and despair any payment in exchange for their work would be a relief that would get any number of unemployed women to line up enthusiastically for recruitment. Even a promise or a hope of future payment is enough to get these women to continue their work. Therefore, the mere fact that they are paid less than the official minimum wage, which itself is not a living wage, is not grounds for assessing these schemes. We can endorse these smaller payments as a way of spreading out the resources among a larger number of workers and argue that in conditions of sheer poverty they are better than nothing and do save some hungry families, an argument that places us on slippery ground for "a race to the bottom." Or we could condemn the scheme on the basis of its low wages and call it unacceptable, which could only be done on moral grounds or in relativistic terms. Neither of these lines of argument would offer a viable platform for assessing the labor conditions involved in these processes. What should be asked in the context of such local impoverishment and deprivation is, rather, whether these schemes achieve the goals they set for themselves in justifying low wages and precarious labor conditions.

Two main arguments used by City officials in favor of these schemes are black empowerment for BH entrepreneurs and skill attainment for Masicoce women to increase their future job opportunities. A review of these programs, however, suggests their limited outcome. In the BH scheme, only nine individuals are hired on the project as local entrepreneurs, out of which only two are women. In the Masicoce scheme, despite the City's rhetoric, sweeping streets and picking up litter does not develop skills that women can market for future employment elsewhere. This is low or no-skilled work that does not offer any enhanced opportunity of jobs. Therefore, there is limited truth to the argument that keeping these contracts as temporary will allow the spreading of the opportunity for skills attainment to a larger number

of women. What the scheme offers does not have a long term value; it allows women workers to bring bread to the table for one year and after that their chances of employment are as bleak as they were before. As one of the residents states, the one year that they have a source of income places them in a harder position later on because they start certain credit and financial commitments that then have to be interrupted soon after. It is such limitations to these schemes that suggest a rhetorical use of empowerment discourse for formulation of municipal strategies in waste collection. The municipality's rhetoric allows it to avoid taking responsibility for labor conditions involved in the provision of municipal services and promotes labor casualization among the unemployed disadvantaged populations to subsidize the state's privatization strategy.

Conclusion

The case example of waste collection in Khayelitsha highlights the ways in which the cost recovery agenda of the neoliberal state sustains the key legacies of the apartheid state, by its continued stratified treatment of citizens' rights to urban services and amenities and continued participation in the casualization and flexibilization of labor. Both the apartheid and the neoliberal post-apartheid governments of South Africa, albeit each relying on and mobilizing distinct arguments, discourses and ideologies, have actively taken part in the formation of this dual labor market of formal and secure versus casual and insecure jobs.

The neoliberal South African government in its post-apartheid moment, uses gender beliefs and values to justify the use of free or cheap women's labor in black townships, and relies on the rhetoric of voluntarism and a campaign language to disguise the processes of labor casualization by the privatizing local government. In the particular context of this study gender ideology is intertwined with the rhetoric of voluntarism and empowerment through skill acquisition to obscure the nature of women's labor in these waste collection schemes and the role of the state in furthering the precarious and casual conditions of labor in black townships.

Under the hegemony of neoliberalism, the state's primary goal of cost minimization and full cost recovery, which has compromised its goals of social justice, redistribution, and attending to the public good and basic needs of all its constituents, has blurred the distinction between the public and the private sectors. Thus, like the private sector, privatizing local governments actively take part in the flexibilization and casualization of labor and in turn promote precarious labor conditions among disadvantaged populations.

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Endnotes:

¹ The interviews for this project were conducted in the summer of 2001 by the author and followed up by her student assistant, Nicole Lamers, in the summer of 2002.

² Black men who were hired as migrant laborers had to leave their wives and children behind in homelands and be shackled with other men in overcrowded, single-room occupancies called hostels (Mamphela 1993). This meant that black women who were unable to earn a living in the impoverished homelands and came to the cities, sometimes with all or part of their families, to be with their husbands or to look for a source of income, were illegal and vulnerable to arrest and expulsion. Most black women found informal employment as domestic workers and, deprived of their own families, were housed with whites to care for their households. But others set up their makeshift shacks in areas adjacent to hostels and black townships and made their labor available cheaply and flexibly as a massive urban reserve labor force (Slater 2000).

³ It is important here to point out the significance of the influence exerted by the World Bank and IMF consultants as well as the local black and white elites in the post-apartheid government of South Africa, who consistently pushed for full speed adoption of neoliberal policies, enhancing the influence of the market while diminishing the intervening role of the state for justice and equity. This virtually 180-degree shift can be described as one where “the language of managerialism and cost recovery has displaced the language of participation and social justice” (Heller 2001:150).

⁴ Seventy percent of women in the informal economy are occupied in domestic and elementary occupations (per Statistics South Africa 1999; see Valodia 2001: 876, table 2). A large proportion of informal workers are also involved in home-based work. A survey among home-based workers in Cape Town and Durban, where seven out of every ten households interviewed had at least one home worker, found that sixty percent of home workers are women (Valodia 2001:878).

⁵ According to Statistics South Africa 1999, 1) the percentage of officially defined unemployed has been increasing, from 19.3 percent in 1996 to 21.0 percent in 1997 to 25.2 percent in 1999. 2) The expanded definition of unemployment reflects similar growth but at a greater rate: from 33.0 percent in 1996 to 36.0 percent in 1997 to 37.5 percent in 1998. The official definition refers only to cases where the individual has been actively searching for employment or taking steps for self-employment. The expanded definition excludes this criterion. 3) Using the OHS (October Household Survey) sample size reveals an increase in informal sector employment from 996 cases in 1996 to 1,136 in 1997 to 1,316 in 1998; and a decline in formal sector employment from 1,550 cases in 1996 to 1,587 in 1997 to 1,445 in 1998 (Statistics South Africa 1999. See Valodia 2001: 874, Table 1).

⁶ The operating expenses per capita for the two areas are also indicative of these gaps: during the fiscal year 1999-2000, the municipality spent R57 for every resident of Khayelitsha versus R194 for every resident of Durbanville for waste services, and R11.56 versus R86.67, respectively for their water services (ibid.: 30-31).

⁷ In the choice of this title for the campaign there was a political word play involved by the ruling political parties in Cape Town at the time— an alliance of the Democratic Party (DP) and National Party (NP). It is important to keep in mind the ways in which local party politics play into the rhetoric of waste collection and also the strategic choices of elected city officials. Western Cape and Cape Town constitute the strongholds of parties in opposition to the ANC. Indeed both in the national elections of 1994 and 1999 the ANC did not win the votes of the majority in this region. In the local government elections of 1999 the Democratic Alliance, the alliance of two main opposition parties (DP and NP), won the local elections and constituted the city officials. cost recovery strategies discussed in this paper, however, should not be interpreted as a strategy particularly occurring in Cape Town or among the opposition parties, as the ANC-dominated national government has also spearheaded the neoliberal GEAR agenda within the national government.

⁸ Seventy four percent of the 2000 households surveyed in 1995 had income less than R1500 (\$200) a month. Among informal dwellers 58 percent earned about \$100 per month. Due to poor services in the area and the low income of the residents, only 28 percent of the households in Khayelitsha paid for services (ILRIG 2001).

⁹ Billy Hattingh’s company and its contracts were sold to Tedcor in 1997 when the wealth accumulated by Mr. Hattingh through these proliferated projects prompted him to take early retirement. The public-private partnership strategy, nevertheless, continues to be referred to as the BH approach or scheme.

¹⁰ As can be imagined, in areas like Khayelitsha with a soaring unemployment rate above fifty percent, to appoint and select the scheme’s workers and entrepreneurs has involved conflict-prone processes vulnerable to favoritism and political clientalism. Another example of this is waste collection in Crossroads, also an informal sector black

township, where the tension that had arisen around selection of workers resulted in several conflicts between members of the Crossroads community and the contractor in charge of waste collection in the area, Sisonke. In this case, furious members of the local community set fire to one of the garbage trucks and chased out the workers, because those who were selected for employment by the project were from another community but were offered the job for political or personal relations with the councilors in Crossroads. Since this incident and several similar conflicts over the selection process, the workers have not gone back to the community for collection of waste.

¹¹ Monthly wages of BH workers are about R1,300 (US\$130) versus that of R2,200 (US\$220) for unionized municipal workers. Based on the exchange rates of July 2002.

¹² In Khayelitsha the volunteer groups interviewed were organized and promoted by the councilor of the opposition party (DP).

¹³ Elsewhere (Miraftab 2002) I discuss at length how public-private partnerships by in large function as a form of privatization and why they should be placed along the spectrum of state privatization strategies.

¹⁴ The notion of “privatization of the state,” which refers to the public sector’s adoption of the principles and strategies of the private sector, is reflected in the parallels that can be drawn between the public sector’s behavior, exemplified by the unicity’s waste collection services, and industries’ labor flexibilization practices, exemplified by the Confederation of Employers of South Africa (COFESA). COFESA “advises employers on restructuring their production such that employment contracts are converted into service contracts, and employees become independent contractors. The firm is then run as a network of contractors. While the activities of COFESA and similar organizations are aimed mainly at bypassing minimum standards labor legislation and collective bargaining agreements, the organization has been able to use arguments of empowerment and microenterprise development to justify its activities. ... The organization claims to have restructured employment contracts in over 13,000 companies, thereby creating a network of over 700,000 ‘independent contractors,’ who were previously employees in the restructured companies” (Valodia 2001:877 citing Jones 1999).

¹⁵ R10 equals US\$1, based on exchange rates of July 2002.