PRECARIOUS WORK AND LIVES
CONSERVANCY WORKERS IN MUMBAI AND JOHANNESBURG

Presentation at ICDD Workshop
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Scope of the paper

• Wage work within the purview of the municipal authorities
• Type of jobs: solid waste collection and transportation; street sweeping
• Focus on Mumbai and Johannesburg – non standard employment
• Methodology – extended fieldwork in Mumbai; based on this experience, very focused interviews in Johannesburg
• Attempted comparison
Mumbai and Johannesburg

- Large cities
- Character of the city – Mumbai (financial capital of the country; migration); Johannesburg (city of gold; migration; rebuilding in post-apartheid era)
- Reorganizing of the city boundary...growing cities
- Located within different historical contexts, and currently at different points
- Administration
Context of privatization

• Change in governance of labour and in the relation between the worker and the state

• In both cities, there has been a gradual diminishing role of the state/municipal authorities as employers
Mumbai

- One of the largest Municipal Corporations in the country
- Solid waste under the SWM department of the MCGM
- Almost 27,000 employees in this department – standard and non standard
- SWM has been a key function of the Corporation
- Mumbai Municipal Union
- Municipal Solid Waste Rules, 2000 led a major restructuring of the work and employment in this sector: door-to-door collection and entry of private firms
- Hyderabad pattern for sweeping of streets – NGOs, private contractors and companies
- These companies etc. supposed to be registered and to obtain license for operating
- Process of bidding and awarding of tenders
- Vision of Mumbai as a world class city; Shanghai
Johannesburg

- Gradual radicalisation of the CTMWA – started unionizing ‘coloured’ municipal workers – emphasis on non racialism and workplace organising as well as supporting community struggles
- 1985 – COSATU
- 1987 – SAMWU; consistent anti-privatization stand; in 2003, SAMWU largest local government union in SA – more than 70 percent of Johannesburg city workers; 90 percent of SA municipal workers were unionized by then
- GEAR: economic liberalization – reduction of funds for municipalities, cost recovery policies; cooperation with the private sector; thrift, efficiency and self-reliance; people as individual consumers and users rather than citizens
- 2002: city development strategy – Jo’burg 2030 – world class city
Johannesburg

- iGoli 2002 – restructuring of the city administration – unified municipality – combining eleven previously segregated local authorities; today it is the City of Johannesburg Metropolitan Municipality
- Fiscal exigency – led to restructuring of local services...PPP and independent business units
- iGoli – “not for full scale privatization but for corporatizing and commercializing municipal activities” (Barcheisi)
- UAC entities – registered independent companies with the council as their sole shareholder
In both the cities municipal authorities getting this job done through private firms/contractors and sub-contractors

Pikitup in Johannesburg and a host of companies in Mumbai; division of city and jobs

Pikitup has 12 companies under it; the areas are divided across the companies for street sweeping and waste collection etc; in some areas, there are 2 companies (those with trucks and labour) doing both the jobs
Some details of PIKITUP...to illustrate issues

• PIKITUP: Initially PIU had their own trucks; then outsourced – the new set of trucks belonged to another set of people who had to employ drivers and workers – exploitation as people could be dismissed; no sick leave, no maternity leave; resistance to unionization; with the EPWP, local councilors started bringing their own people for PIU as part of EPWP. Further when PIU had labour problems, they started approaching councilors. Hence the politicians began interfering in labour relations. Work culture was spoilt

• During the strike of April 2011, companies hired other workers to clear the waste; it became a violent strike; garbage piled up; PIU tried to co-opt SAMWU; immense pressure; PIU Board members started resigning; both workers and drivers had to join the strike: it was about coercion.
Profile of labour - Mumbai

• Migrants from other districts in Maharashtra and south India; identity; caste; male; living in precarious settlements across the city; poor access to health and education; multiple jobs in order to supplement the income from this work; low levels of literacy; travel to and from work; public transport a problem

• Poor job security and employment security

• Alcohol and indebtedness
Profile of labour – Johannesburg

• Least educated
• Travel by train to the pick-up point: issue of distance
• Collection – male workers only; women as drivers
• SAMWU – Pikitup workers as a category not split; most of them are from the South Coast
• Live in informal settlements, hostels; most do not have homes; families are in the rural areas; men find women here;
• All municipal employees come from rural areas – networks play a central role
Issues

- **Wages**: Rs. 259 per day in Mumbai; Johannesburg: (Pikitup workers) more than R 6000 p.m.; contract workers are paid about R 2500 p.m. Competition for these jobs
- **Awarding of tenders**
- **Costs**: Mumbai – house rent; school fees; health; food; transport; emergency; special events etc. Johannesburg – some families can survive on R 500 p.m. if the family size if small; fees (R 35 p.a.; hostel – R 20 p.m.; food – workers share the costs and pay R 100 p.m. and cook together; there was a plan to convert the hostels into family units in order to manage conflicts)
Issues

- **Hostels**: were run by municipalities but were aligned to political parties; individuals began running them; belief that one would not come out alive; fights in homelands carried forward into the hostels; those utilized by municipal workers were more peaceful; those belonging to the apartheid era – witness fights.

- **Protective gear**: in Mumbai, some contractors provide; no enforcement from the Corporation.

- In Johannesburg: protective gear is to be returned when one leaves the job; deducted from salary if one loses it/gives to family; private companies do not provide; leads to injuries.

- **Compensation**: workers contribute to a fund and get compensation under the Health and Safety Act; in Mumbai: case by case claim making needed as the contractor and corporation pass the buck on to the other.
Issues

• **As jobs**: Johannesburg, some workers do this work for even 3-4 months and then seek better jobs, due to the tenuous working conditions. Shop stewards are more upwardly mobile; move into HR and communication related jobs; language and skills are both important; they are not seen as a threat; this is a decent job and even the company views them as people to be won over.

• Mumbai – jobs of the last resort and taken up due to ease of entry; but now getting competitive in both cities.

• **Alcohol and indebtedness** are major problems with this group in both cities.
Role of the union – Mumbai

• Separate unions for the standard and non-standard workers and hence limited penetration of unions with the contract workers
• Worker grievances
• Accessing insurance schemes and certain services
• Raising issue of alcohol
• Intervening in the indebtedness problems
Role of the union – Johannesburg

• Many unions in one sector
• 80 percent of collection and transportation has been privatised
• 6000 employees in waste collection; relatives come in to the job; hence unionization is difficult
• SAMWU: tripartite alliance (ANC-left-COSATU-civic associations)
• Labour broking companies – politician nexus
Role of the union – Johannesburg

- Worker grievances
- Offering different schemes for the members; they are encouraged to join
- Alcoholism is prevalent – trauma of finding bodies/foetuses etc. in the waste – legalized abortion
- Conflicts – in the 1960s, black people were segregated in an area – they would fight among themselves
Comparison: Similarities

• Context of insecure welfare regimes
• Privatization
• Contract system
• Wages and working conditions
• Employment and job insecurity
• Social profile of labour
• Vulnerability in everyday life
• Competition and conflict on the demand and supply side
• Type of work – difficult; stigma attached
• Difficult living conditions within the larger environment of urban poverty
Comparison: Differences

• Size of cities – spread – number of workers – challenge of collectivizing and unionising
• Structuring of the work – vis a vis the municipal authority
• Unionizing – standard and non standard workers
And in conclusion...about precariousness...

• Stemming from the nature of work; several such jobs in the urban informal economy that are objectively and subjectively looked down upon – hazardous because of informal employment

• Cycle of precariousness

• Inevitably precariousness of work as well as of life...