Making Neoliberal Governance:
The Disempowering Work of Empowerment

Forthcoming in
International Planning Studies

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Abstract

This paper casts light on the ideological apparatus of neoliberal governance. It tries to analyze how neoliberalism operates as an authorizing narrative that links ideas such as empowerment, social capital and community participation to rationalize the nature, means, and ends of its governing. Formulation of the community-based waste collection strategies by the municipal government in Cape Town, South Africa, during the 1997-2001 period is the paper's empirical focus. The case study shows how the post-apartheid state engaged the discourses of black and gender empowerment to justify waste collection schemes that rely on unpaid or underpaid labor of township residents. The paper's conclusion stresses the paradox of neoliberal governance: it uses the processes of symbolic inclusion, yet also relies on the processes of material exclusion.

1.   Introduction

The international development literature and practice of recent years reflect the astonishing popularity of the closely related discourses of community participation, empowerment and social capital. Once the subversive, emancipatory tools of activists, they have now become tools of the trade for governments as well as for international financial establishments such as the World Bank. This transformation is enormous. It calls for examination of how such discursive shifts occur, and of their implications for development practice and the technologies of governance. The present paper joins an ongoing debate on how the interrelated concepts of community participation, social capital and empowerment, as building blocks of neoliberal governance, undergo a double movement: Each concept has been de-politicized in an interpretation by the development industry and by governments that has stripped away its implications for dominance (e.g., capitalism, patriarchy and racism), while at the same time its use by such organizations of neoliberal governance to rationalize their actions is extremely political. That sleight of hand allows a symbolic inclusion (based on symbolic capital) and a material exclusion to be used simultaneously.

The case for this view is made here by discussion of the municipal government's 1997-2001 effort in Cape Town, South Africa to formulate community-based strategies for post-apartheid waste collection programs to serve a significantly enlarged constituency and integrated

metropolitan area.[1] The historical account is noteworthy, as it occurred in the context of people's heightened expectations for equity and social justice in South Africa's post-apartheid moment. The ethnographic account here of interviews[2] with City officials, the private company senior staff, and community members who were involved in waste collection reveals the discursive element in neoliberal governance — namely, how empowerment and participatory discourses were marshaled to justify using the underpaid or unpaid labor of poor women and men in the townships, to serve the state's cost-cutting agenda. To achieve this the new government cashed in certain symbolic and ideological currency in respect to the concept of community participation.

Organization of the Paper

The paper is organized in six sections. **Section two** lays out the social, political and economic global trends within which the related notions of empowerment and social capital have acquired their new rationale and clout. Engaging with the literature, the section traces the de-politicization of these discourses, from their original theoretical import to their current application by governments and the international aid industry. Particular attention is paid to Bourdieu's interpretation of symbolic capital and Foucault's interpretation of power. The remainder of the paper presents the empirical case that grounds the theoretical analysis. **Section three** presents the local restructuring of government and public services in Cape Town. **Section four** focuses on the formulation of community-based waste collection schemes by the Cape Town municipal government, 1997-2001. **Section five** draws on field interviews to shed light on how the decision makers understood empowerment, participation and social capital and used those concepts to rationalize the community-based waste collection schemes. **Section six** concludes the paper by stressing the significance of ideology for the neoliberal project of liberalizing the economy and restructuring public sector services — a project that legitimizes material exclusion by means of symbolic incorporation.

2.   The Popularity of Participatory Discourses

The recent popularity of using community participation to emphasize social capital and empowerment is better understood in the light of economic liberalization and public sector restructuring. Around the world, neo-liberal policies and structural adjustment programs have deeply slashed governments' budget for public expenditure and have redefined the state's responsibilities for public services. For example, in developing states in the 1950s to 1970s the primary agenda for national economic growth was to provide basic services and infrastructure. But that role has now been shifted to private firms, both local and international, in a market-led strategy for providing basic public services and infrastructure. Then, to pick up the slack of the state's market-led strategies and the market's imperfections, international agencies and governments alike, have been wooing local communities and civil society organizations (Miraftab, 1997; Mohan and Stokke 2000). As Ben Fine (1999) puts it, the slogan of development agencies has become "Developmental state is dead — long live social capital!".

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[1] A more complete picture of the current waste collection strategies employed in Cape Town is discussed elsewhere (Miraftab 2004a).

[2] The field work was conducted in the summer of 2001 by the author and followed up by her student assistant, Nicole Lamers, in the summer of 2002.

A review here of the literature tracing the theoretical origin of these concepts to their current "career"[3] within the development aid industry can help us understand that drastic discursive shift. The literature marks a certain de-politicization of development theory and practice (Ferguson 1990). Further, with respect to the closely related notions of community participation, empowerment and social capital, the literature brings to light how the transformative objectives of those originally progressive concepts have been replaced with objectives designed to preserve the status quo.

Social Capital

Social capital, for example, in its original formulation is essentially about power: that one's social, economic and political positions within society influence the kind and extent of one's social relations and networks. Loury[4] and Bourdieu,[5] for instance, offering two of the early formulations of social capital call attention to the social and political structures that shape such relationships. Loury (1977) emphasizes how race determines the kinds of social and support networks one has access to or is part of; Bourdieu (1985) stresses the similar significance of socio-economic class. The interpretation of social capital is not merely economic, but accounts as well for manner, tastes, behavior — all the social symbols one can access. An individual's social capital from this perspective is not a result of her or his choices, nor something intrinsic, but a set of dynamic social relations determined "by virtue of one's social position" (Rankin, 2002: 6). Hence social capital is theorized, not as a homogenizing and shared asset of a community, but as a coercive and conflict-ridden set of relationships where individuals are positioned.

In Robert Putnam's[6] version of social capital, however, which popularized and proliferated the concept, an important "conceptual stretch" shifted the scale from individual to communities and even to nations and countries (Portes and Landolt 2000:535). Social capital in Putnam's interpretation is a shared and harmonizing asset that certain communities may or may not be "blessed" with (Putnam 1993b: 36). His perspective is criticized for also treating social capital as an endowment and presupposition (Harriss and De Renzio 1997), and as circular reasoning that transposes cause and effect and that confuses resources and networks (Woolcock 1997; Schuurman 2004; Portes 1998).

Critics argue that such misinterpretations of social capital ignore the significance of the larger social, political and economic relations within which certain individuals and groups have access to "capitals" (symbolic, social, cultural, and economic) that advance them in social hierarchies (Harriss 2001; Fine 2001; Harriss and De Renzio 1997; Mohan and Stokke 2000; Carpenter, Daniere and Takahashi 2004). For example, being a member of a highly resourceful network brings in more resources than does being a member of a poor network where social ties

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[3] I borrow the term from Rankin 2002:2 and Margrit Mayer 2001 cited in *ibid*.,.

[4] Glenn Loury refers to social capital as "naturally occurring social relationships among persons which promote or assist the acquisition of skills and traits valued in the marketplace …[It is] an asset which may be as significant as financial bequests in accounting for the maintenance of inequality in our society" (1992:100).

[5] Pierre Bourdieu defines social capital as "the sum of resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition" (Pierre Bourdieu and Loic Wacquant 1992:119).

[6] Putnam et al. (1993a: 167) states, "social capital … refers to features of social organization, such as trust, norms, and networks, that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions."

are strong but resources are scarce (Portes and Landolt 2000). Moreover, assuming social capital to be a single entity owned by the community strips the concept of its ability to speak to power relations within the community (DeFilippis 2001:800). Leaving no room for power, conflict and social class delivers the concept to neoliberalism as an accomplice in rolling back the state. Furthermore, that logic blames the victims (e.g., points to social capital as something that the poor or people of the South lack). Thus shaped, however, the concept of social capital has gained currency in international development agencies as a measurable, benign "stock" possessed by communities that fosters their "good governance" and economic development (Schuurman 2004: 1002; Harriss 2001; Fine 2001; 1999).[7]

Empowerment

A similar de-politicization has overtaken empowerment, facilitating its use as a non-emancipatory tool. In the late 1960s Paulo Freire's pedagogy of the oppressed, as pre-packaged projects of development delivered to poor countries, inspired activists who joined the grassroots to work with the poor. Participatory methodology promoted communities' participation in understanding and addressing their own problems. What distinguished that from the "theory of oppressive action," Freire notes, was precisely its objective to transform, as opposed to preserving the status quo (1970:131). The pedagogy of the oppressed is not limited to individual actions, but is associated with actions in terms of both individuals and class, aiming to transform not only oneself, but also the very structures of subordination (Cleaver 2002).

In its contemporary formulation by development and government agencies, however, empowerment, or participatory methodology, seems to have been hauled full circle, for use as a benign promise of the experts' participatory packaged development projects, to be *bestowed by experts* on the disadvantaged communities.[8] Participation and empowerment are treated as

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[7] The World Bank displays this blandly depoliticized definition in describing social capital as "The institutions, relationships, and norms that shape the quality and quantity of a society's social interactions. Increasing evidence shows that social cohesion is critical for societies to prosper economically and for development to be sustainable. Social capital is not just the sum of the institutions which underpin a society – it is the glue that holds them together." (http://www.worldbank.org/poverty/scapital/index.htm).

[8] An example of economic reductionism of empowerment in its applied use by the aid industry is the definition offered by USAID on its website, whereby its mission in Nepal defines empowerment as "Women making choices that enhance their well-being, as well as that of their families and communities. The mission expects that its new, integrated empowerment program will result in measurable behavioral changes in women. These include women becoming more active participants in their households and communities and contributing more to the growth of Nepal's economy" (http://www.usaid.gov/wid/pubs/nepal98.htm). Furthermore, the World Bank definition of empowerment limits the concept to individualized experience involving material rather than an ideological change. The Bank's website states, "The term empowerment has different meanings in different social and political contexts, and does not translate easily into all languages. … Local terms associated with empowerment include: self-strength, control, self-power, self-reliance, own choice, life of dignity in accordance with one's values, capable of fighting for one's rights, independence, own decision making, being free, awakening, and capability" (http://www.worldbank.org/poverty/empowerment/whatis/index.htm). In its most recent document the Bank defines empowerment as being "the expansion of assets and capabilities of poor people to participate in, negotiate with, influence, control, and hold accountable institutions that affect their lives" (World Bank 2002:11). "Assets" are defined as physical and financial and "capabilities" are defined as being innate in people allowing them to employ their assets in order to advance their well-being. In order to achieve empowerment, the Bank states, for poor people assets and capabilities are essential for their well-being, security and self-confidence, which they can use to negotiate with people in power (*ibid*.). This notion of change is limited to an increased access by working within the system through participation and inclusion to increase one's influence and ability to negotiate. This notion of

independent of the structures of oppression, and simply processes by which programs foster individuals' sense of worth and esteem. This individualization inherently depoliticizes the notion of empowerment, often reducing it to individual economic gain and access to resources, and learning the status quo unchallenged.

To leave unexamined the power relations and conflicts in the community and in participatory processes, some have argued, has applied the notion of participation toward anti-democratic ends as a useful new orthodoxy within development practice (Henkel and Stirrat 2002). Carried out thus, it tends to benefit communities' elites and their few already privileged, more vocal members (e.g., male, elder, educated) (Nelson and Wright 1995; Guijt and Shah 1998; Chambers 1997). Others, who challenge participatory processes as being effective means of inclusionary social control, even find them tyrannical in that they mask relations of dominance and unjust power (Cooke and Kothari 2002:12). Santos describes *disempowering forms of inclusion* and "taming of popular participation, by constraining it within the boundaries of an individualistic conception of civil society dominated by business organizations" (Santos 2004:1).

Looking at power relations in the processes of community participation and empowerment, this literature argues that, lacking anti-hegemonic work, the more participation there is, the more the power structure of local communities is masked, and the more disempowering the process can be (Kothari 2002: 143). Using a Foucauldian analysis of power, Kothari tries to explain that paradox. In the empowerment discourse, she argues, power must be understood not as a thing found here or there — with communities or the state, the periphery or the center, women or men. Such a binary conceptualization of power, being limited to identifying its sources and forms, restrains the emancipatory potential of empowering processes. Kothari cites Foucault: "Power must be analyzed as something which circulates, or rather as something which only functions in the form of a chain. It is never localized here or there …. Power is employed and exercised through a net-like organization" (1980:98). By focusing only on the personal and the local as the sites of empowerment, " participatory development approaches minimize the importance of the other places where power … [is] located" (Cooke and Kothari 2002:12) — i.e., the state, global capitalism, patriarchy, or racism.

A more recent wave of literature on community participation, social capital and empowerment has pointed to certain overstatements in the critiques outlined above. These authors stress the ambiguity in how the concepts are defined and how their outcomes are evaluated (Parfitt 2004; Williams 2004; Schuurman 2003). In the absence, as of yet, of an alternative progressive political project for the poor such as socialism once offered, this ambiguity is seen as positive, prefiguring an attempt to reassess "the politico-emancipatory potential of social capital" (Schuurman 2003). Looking again at the small scale initiatives of local communities some commentators see the construction of liberating practices that can give birth to processes able to bring down the Goliath of global capitalism (see De-Philipis 2004). Re-imagining the processes of community participation as open-ended, they argue that, as for any other complex and dialectical phenomenon, the consequences of communities' participation in expert programs are not predetermined. While it may indeed be a form of "subjection," it may also launch the eventual opening of new spaces for political action. In short, the consequences of community participation and the mobilization of social capital — whether leading to

change does not attempt to transform the overriding ideology or ways in which systems and power relations are defined and structured.

empowerment or to exploitation, social emancipation or control — are not predestined (see Williams 2004).

Location(s) and Dimension(s) of Power(s)

Now, if power is not a thing to be possessed or measured, but sets of relationships that change; and if the sites of power relations are not singular but multiple, overlapping and concurrent, how can he empowering potential of specific community-based programs and community participation be assessed? In other words, how can the abstract definitions of power and empowerment be operationalized to do that?

A large body of literature has taken on the challenge to establish a concrete framework for such assessments (see, for example Friedmann 1992; Wilson 1996; Kabeer 1994, 1999; Nelson and Wright 1995; Rowlands 1997; Sen and Batliwala 2000; England 2000). Thriving beyond economic reductionism, this literature calls for distinguishing among the kinds of power and change that can be achieved and recognizing the distinct sources of power. To assess empowerment, these studies assert, power has to be examined at multiple levels nested within each other and in an indivisible relationship.

Here, synthesis of their discussions views three levels of analysis, building on Steven Lukes' (1974) theorization of power. The **individual level** concerns individuals: how different actors perceive their interests, their sense of self-worth and self-confidence, their personal potency and ability to reflect on the options perceived as either within or outside their available choices. The **inter-personal level** concerns mostly individuals' power to draw on a range of resources, including the economic resources, skills, information, and social capital to assert their interest vis-a-vis others in decision making when there is observable conflict. At the **collective level**, the analysis stresses the institutional and the structural dimensions of power, and considers social forces and institutional practices that keep potential issues out of politics or decision making. For example, within patriarchal structures of family and deeply entrenched gender roles, women's economic gain may allow them power to bargain over certain aspects of household expenditure, "but what remains non-negotiable is men's overall control of household land, capital, and other valued resources" (Kabeer 1994: 225). John Friedmann (1992), theorizing an alternative form for development that relies on and achieves empowering processes, also uses these three levels of analysis to articulate psychological, social, and political power as different kinds, which households dispose to further their livelihood.

Thus stressing the multidimensionality of (dis)empowerment, the literature highlights the need to achieve change at all three levels (Friedmann 1992; Kabeer 1994; Rowlands 1997). In other words consideration should be given not only to how A can get B to do what A wants or what B does not want to, but also to how to influence B's aspirations, beliefs, desires and wants so that B does as A wants with no conflict of interest even apparent. The first effort focuses on the individualized level of the relationship between A and B, and the second on political, social, and institutional forces affecting that relationship.

The above distinction resonates with a Gramscian interpretation of power, in particular with the writings of Wendy Brown (1995), who discusses individualized and decontextualized empowerment in terms of "the fictional sovereign individualism of liberalism" (p. 22).

Contemporary discourses of empowerment," she writes, "often signal an oddly adaptive and harmonious relationship with domination insofar as they locate an individual's sense of worth and capacity in the register of individuals' feelings, a register implicitly located on something of an otherworldly plane vis-à-vis social and political power. …[for this] almost exclusive focus on subjects' emotional bearing and self-regard, empowerment is a formulation that converges with a regime's own legitimacy needs in masking the power of the regime. (p. 23)

Hence Brown concludes that "the possibility that one can 'feel empowered' without being so forms an important element of legitimacy for the antidemocratic dimensions of liberalism" (*ibid.*).

This convergence of the subjects' and the regime's "interests" in participatory development projects taking empowerment as their slogan can be understood as hegemonic. For example, deconstructing development projects in Lesotho and in India, Ferguson (1990) and Kamat (2004), respectively, show how grassroots participation in development processes that do not differ from challenge the development practices of the state indeed fosters the hegemony of undemocratic states and privatizes the public interest. Gramsci terms hegemony "the consent given by the great masses of population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group" (1971:12). Participatory development projects, by "incorporating the marginalized in an even more distant clustering of power, undermine their resistance" (Nelson and Wright 1995:11); under the rubric of development they use "potentially bottom-up concepts … to perpetuate and disguise continued top-down attitudes and approaches" (*ibid.*, citing Rowlands 1992). To the extent that the grassroots reproduce and engage in similar relations of power, what occurs displays the hegemonic power of the oppressor, not the empowerment of the oppressed.

Foucodian analyses contribute to this discussion by articulating the key role of the power outside the state in the bottom and dispersed everywhere among "subjects" of disciplinary power. Accounting for power as a subjectless "apparatus consisting of discourses, institutions, actors and flow of events" (Nelson and Wright 1995:10) allows us to see that the power-relations in certain participatory projects like those presented below, although de-centered from their traditional sites, may be reproduced within the community (Nelson and Wright 1995; Guijt and Shah 1998). In other words, individuals and specific sites and forms of power may be challenged, but the relations of power are not. "Power is never exercised in pure, exclusive form, but rather as a power formation, that is a constellation of different forms of power combined in specific ways" (Santos 1995: 406). Domination at a particular historical moment may rely primarily on coercion and sheer oppression (as was the case under the apartheid regime), but at other times on symbolic or material means that brings B to do as A wants, by B's own "choice."

In the case study that follows, the officials' discourses of black and gender empowerment are a concrete example of neoliberal governance revealing two interrelated dimensions of the above analysis. First, the city officials' de-politicized understanding of the participatory notion of empowerment limits it to an individualized dimension. Though at the personal level

individuals in the community-based waste collection schemes may gain access to certain economic resources as local entrepreneurs, or even as under-paid workers, at the collective level the structural and institutional sources of their oppression nevertheless remain intact. In other words, the community-based schemes re-inscribe old social hierarchies of class, race and gender in new patterns[9] (Comaroff and Comaroff 2001). Second, the case study shows how the government mobilizes certain symbolic values, rationalities, reasons, programs, techniques and devices to achieve its end, in what Foucault termed "the conduct of the conduct." De-centering relations of power, the post-apartheid, neoliberal City government employs a social rather than an economic fix (Santos 2004) to get the township residents to do as it wants, by using language with significant symbolic capital to rationalize and legitimize the City scheme so that township residents perceive it as being in their own interest.

3.   Cape Town and the Restructuring of Local Governments and of Municipal Services

In post-apartheid South Africa the need to integrate segregated areas and reduce the disparities in access to urban services and decision-making was met through a series of restructurings of government and basic services. Local governments were established across the country to decentralize government decision-making power and to allocate more responsibilities to localities. In the Cape Town metropolitan area, the process had two phases. In the first phase (1995/96-2000) administrative units were re-demarcated to form a reduced number of local governments spanning the racialized areas; in the second phase (2000- present) one municipal government (the unicity) was created to unify all local governments in Cape Town into a single financial unit with a common system of taxation and one budgetary environment. To facilitate direct input by community groups on development issues through the local government, Integrated Development Plans (IDPs) were called for, and the Reconstruction and Development Program Forums (RDP forums) were created in every community and township for community participation and communal decision-making. Local governments were to work closely with RDP forums to come up with IDPs that set development priorities for their communities.

Since the inception of the state's restructuring strategies, however, local governments have found themselves with limited ability to fulfill the IDPs and to deliver basic shelter and services to the poor. The government restructuring increased the mandate of local municipalities, yet, according to the Financial and Fiscal Commission, the amounts of intergovernmental grants from the central to the local levels in real terms fell to 85 percent lower than those in 1991 (ILRIG 2001:26). Since there is little intergovernmental transfer of funds available (four percent) (Coopoo 2000:6); ninety percent of the unicity's budget comes from local revenues. Those revenues include the sale of bulk services such as water, sanitation, and electricity (85 percent) and to a limited extent of property rates and levies (Watson 2002:77, citing Ministry of Provincial Affairs and Constitutional Development 1998).

Thus caught between a rock and a hard place, since 1994 local governments with limited budgets are nevertheless responsible for enlarged constituencies. To manage these constraints, local governments restructured their delivery of municipal services. One strategy was "ring fencing" the budgets for specific services, meaning that each service had to recover its own cost. Another was to shift the provision of public services to private sector firms, which was facilitated

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[9] I am grateful to Ken Salo for bringing to my attention this particular framing of the social changes that have occurred during the transition to the post-apartheid era in South Africa.

by the Municipal Infrastructure Investment Unit (MUIIU), based at the Development Bank of South Africa with funding from international donors and the central government. As a consulting body, MUIIU promotes the outsourcing of municipal services and helps municipalities form partnerships with private companies.[10]

4. Community-based Waste Collection Strategies

Today the Cape Town unicity covers an extended area with a population of over 3.5 million. A combination of municipal (i.e., council) and private or community-based (i.e., non-council) waste collection services covers this population's almost 832,000 service points. Service ranges from full coverage by the municipality and/or private companies regularly collecting waste at each residence, to the rudimentary service in which the municipality or private companies collect waste periodically at communal skips. In between those levels of services are several community-based schemes in which both private companies and residents collect and sometimes also remove waste; those are found particularly in the areas newly incorporated into the unicity's service responsibility, namely black townships and informal settlements.

The noble rationale for restructuring of waste collection services in Cape Town was to ensure service to all areas of the city, including the newly incorporated black townships and informal areas that had receive(d) no or minimal services. The city officials and planners involved in formulating these strategies who were interviewed for this research for the most part had the interest of the communities in mind. The outcome, I argue, nevertheless failed their expectations in that it promoted labor casualization and differential levels of services that reproduce apartheid's spatialized hierarchies. Elsewhere (2004) I substantiate this assertion and offer a full picture of the present structure of waste collection services for Cape Town residents; I refer readers to that article for full documentation.

This paper examines only the early phase of that process (1997-2001), when the municipal officials were experimenting with a series of pilot projects, based on which they adopted the unicity's official schemes in 2001. the focus here is on the discourse of empowerment and community participation they used to promote their waste collection schemes in poor townships newly incorporated into the municipal coverage. Three experiences are examined: the partnership scheme (Tedcor); the one-person contracts or Masicoce scheme; and the women's voluntary groups.

The partnership scheme was implemented in Cape Town in 1997. It constitutes a partnership among the private company (first the Billy Hattingh company, later sold to The Entrepreneurial Development Corporation-- Tedcor) that 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 communities served, who are hired to perform the actual work of collecting and removing waste, as entrepreneurs as well as laborers. This public-private partnership was formulated and promoted first by the private sector firm Hattingh in 1990, following the general privatization initiatives of the apartheid government. Since several municipalities across South Africa have since adopted the scheme.

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[10] Established in 1998, MIIU in its first three years launched Partnerships with a value of over 5.6 billion Rands. At the 1998 exchange rate this equals a bit below one billion US dollars. For more on MIIU see their website at http://www.miiu.org.za/

At the time of field work, under this scheme in Khayelitsha nine jobs were created for entrepreneurs (seven men and two women), and one hundred jobs were created for local laborers (split male and female). For a monthly wage of R1,300[11] local laborers work full time, collecting garbage from service points (dwellings and shacks) and litter from public spaces, as well as sweeping streets and sidewalks. The entrepreneurs' earnings are not fixed, but vary depending on how they manage the lump sum they are paid to cover costs such as workers' wages, gasoline, garbage bags, and monthly payments for the garbage truck that at the end of the five-year lease becomes their property. Some entrepreneurs interviewed had managed to increase their share of the lump sum from R2000 per month in the initial phase of the project to R20,000 at the time of the interview (close to 5 years into the project.) This was partially due to their improved management and efficiency in operation costs, e.g., reducing gasoline expenditure by not taking half-empty trucks to the dump site; and partially due to their exploitative strategies to reduce labor costs, i.e. reducing workers' wages by establishing a fine system that penalizes them for being late or missing days, and organizing "brrai" (barbeque) or selling workers cooked chicken or meals on site at lunch time, paid for by paycheck deductions. So, as one of the workers said, "At the end of the month I seldom see the actual R1300."

The Masicoce scheme, or one-person contract (OPC), started in Cape Town in 1997 as the Clean and Green project. It was initiated under the auspices of Keep South Africa Beautiful (KSAB),[12] a movement operating since 1995 in other regions of the country that promoted voluntarism. The Clean and Green project as KSAB's community-based waste collection campaign was promoted in Cape Town (1997-2000) by an NGO called The Fairest Cape. It was funded by South African breweries (supplying plastic bags and brooms) and also by the Public Works Department, which at the time was in charge of the waste collection services for the newly integrated areas. In 2000 it was taken over by the Cape Town municipality (2000-2001, before local governments' unification) as part of a larger campaign to promote voluntarism and community-based action, and changed its name to Masicoce ("let's clean up" in the Xhosa language).

Masicoce, in its original formulations as Clean and Green and as one person-contracts (1997-2000 and 2000-2001) involved women only. The scheme used one contractor (hence its name) within the community to oversee the recruitment, retrenchment and performance of local unemployed women. For the 2000-2001 period, the scheme hired 105 women (one for every 350 dwellings) full time, but on non-renewable one-year contracts with no benefits, at a fixed monthly wage of R800 (not quite one-third of what formal municipal employees received). They were provided with brooms and plastic bags, and required to carry the bagged public waste to specific points for deposit into skips. Periodic removal of these skips to the dumpsite by other contracted private companies often lapsed, so workers often faced the additional burden of re-bagging trash that had built up around the overflowed skips and been torn by dogs and other animals.

Volunteer groups, also composed exclusively of women, have emerged as a different solution to waste collection. These groups were promoted by local councilors as part of a larger campaign launched in 2000 referred to as the Mess Action Campaign (MAC) — a play on the famed ANC Mass Action Campaign during the years of anti-apartheid struggle — to encourage

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[11] Based on exchange rates in July 2002, this equals approximately US$130.
[12] This had been inspired by the Keep America Beautiful movement.

voluntarism and community-based action.[13] The volunteer women sweep the streets and collect trash from public spaces. These groups work mostly in areas of the city with no services other than periodic removal of waste from communal skips. For women volunteers, incentives vary from improved hygiene of the neighborhood streets and protection of their children (e.g., from broken glass, used condoms and syringes), to an enhanced possibility of employment in the paid, community-based waste collection schemes. At the time of the field research (July 2002), about a dozen volunteer groups operated in Cape Town, few of them recognized by the City; even fewer had been given plastic garbage bags to use.

Many volunteer women interviewed in Khayelitsha, Boys Town, and Onati, for example, did not know how the various programs differed. Some were disappointed, to say the least, when provided with only plastic bags, and no pay. Others were aware of the voluntary nature of their work, yet hoped that it would improve their chances of work with the Masicoce or Tedcor schemes.

One group of volunteer women interviewed in Khayelitsha explain 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. (Volunteer interviewed 2002).

Hard working and desperate to find a source of income, the women continue (even today) their free work, cleaning at home and in the neighborhood with hopes that it will eventually lead to "real" jobs, but also with moral satisfaction that in this way they are carrying out their responsibility of caring for their children and the community they live in.

5.   Empowerment Talk

In the time period under examination in this paper, 1997-2001, during the first phase of government restructuring leading to its unification, the idea of empowerment and mobilization of social capital in black townships through participation in waste collection schemes became central. Its importance is evident in the extracts from interviews with members of the private sector firm doing waste collection, as well as from those with city officials and planners who (re)formulated municipal services to provide coverage for the enlarged service area. The

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[13] It is important to keep in mind the ways in which local party politics play into the rhetoric of waste collection as well as the strategic choices of elected city officials. Western Cape and Cape Town constitute the strongholds of parties in opposition to the ANC. Indeed, in the national elections of both 1994 and 1999, the ANC did not win a majority in this region. In the local government elections of 1999, the Democratic Alliance, the alliance of Democratic Party (DP) and National Party (NP), won the local elections and constituted the city officials. Cost recovery strategies discussed in this paper should not, however, be interpreted as particular to Cape Town or the local opposition parties; the ANC-dominated national government has also spearheaded the neoliberal GEAR agenda within the national government.

interviews reveal the ways in which at this important historical juncture the public and private sector organizations involved in waste collection services viewed empowerment of blacks and women, and how they understood community participation. With this focus on the role of those concepts in official neoliberal discourse, we examine how they are operationalized in a particular practice of development.

Besides cost reduction, a key argument of the City officials in support of their waste collection schemes has been black and gender empowerment. In the partnership scheme, for example, pointing to black empowerment helped the private company sell the project to local governments promoted proliferation of the scheme among the nation's municipal governments. BH/ Tedcor documents argue that the project empowers the black and disadvantaged communities because it hires their unemployed members and also develops the financial and managerial capacity and skills of the community entrepreneurs, turning them into "small business people" (NBI 2001; Tedcor n.d.). In an interview, one of the Tedcor officials stressed the empowering aspect of the project in the following terms:

> What I find unique about this concept [of BH/Tedcor] is that it addresses the empowerment … In order to be empowered in any way, you have to have a network that is going to facilitate that empowerment process. That is what we [Tedcor] are all about. …We took people from the street, totally unemployed and we give them only the minimum basic wage --because remember we also must make this whole operation profitable for the entrepreneurs themselves. … All of the entrepreneurs started as unemployed, they lived in shacks, they had nothing. They live in fancy houses now, they drive fancy cars. So I mean something must have happened in the right fashion. … entrepreneurs are fortunate people … out of refuse they can make a profit. (Tedcor interview 2002).

Here empowerment is clearly reduced to its economic dimension and to something that is individually acquired and consumed. Moreover, the economic point is de-politicized and separated from the political struggle of the poor. The rhetoric of empowerment is used to divert attention from the fact that it is not "out of refuse" but out of the underpaid labor of the local workers that the entrepreneurs and the private company make a profit. What Tedcor calls empowerment is in actuality "self-enrichment of a few entrepreneurs" at the cost of local laborers, and in the name of the community (Xali 2001:138). The conflicting interests of the local laborers and the local entrepreneurs and the project's promotion of inequality within the community are masked by presenting the community as a homogenous and unified entity, so that the economic gain and self-fulfillment of a few are presented as benefiting all. Empowerment is presented as a benign process, is good for everyone.

Furthermore, it is precisely this disassociation between economic gain and power structures that defines empowerment in a way that allow the state and private firms, both, to claim to be allies of civil society — in this case, of the township men and women disempowered by those same institutions and structures of dominance (Kamat 2002:70-73). The partnership scheme legitimizes and enforces the larger exploitative systems of capitalism and patriarchy by internalizing them at the local level. It celebrates local entrepreneurs' ability to multiply their earnings as their "developed sense of business," but that "business sense" consists of internalizing the exploitative relations of capitalism to keep wages low and reduce what the workers take home — e.g., by deducting from workers' monthly pay their purchase of on-site cooked meals or by imposing fines for being late or absent.

In the Masicoce scheme, gender empowerment was the main banner the City used. While the project paid its women workers less than the officially declared minimum wage and offered no job security or benefits, the City declared it a gender empowerment project because it developed skills that could lead to jobs for unemployed black women. In the words of one senior official in charge of developing the Masicoce campaign, that is how it all started:

> Peter Marais [the former mayor of Cape Town] came up with the idea that we can no longer spend money just cleaning up Cape Town. … the idea was *to use as much gender empowerment as possible.* … As far as empowerment is concerned everything was geared to job creation without job expectation because we keep saying … as local government we are not an employment agency. We will empower others to employ on an empowerment basis. We will stimulate and be a catalyst by providing funds, direction, training, encouragement, policies that will create employment opportunities for disempowered people, people who … [are] from disadvantaged backgrounds. … Disadvantaged is defined for one as black, the other as woman… black plus woman is seriously disadvantaged. [So our] campaign ran mostly through the black areas and used women extensively in promoting the ideal and aim [of the project which is] … job creation without job expectation. Expectation means we will hire you for this project but we will not guarantee you a job after that … The philosophy here is that by training these women in performing certain functions, they will be able to create job opportunities for themselves … [with our budget cut] from 40 million to 8 million, if we had said we are going to employ you indefinitely, can you imagine the riots we would have had? … Masicoce was an annual contract. … The council didn't sign the contract, the [individual] entrepreneur did — well done. When that year was up, they didn't want to stop working, they said no you have given us a job and we had near anarchy on our hands. It took a lot of explaining to say time is up, you have to give others the opportunity now, … they had a year of training. They can now go into the job market and say well I have been trained to do X…. that is what I mean by job creation. (City official interviewed 2002 — emphasis is mine).

But to the question of whether any of the women found job opportunities with their garbage collection skills after their contract ended, his response, following a reflective silence, was, "No. I'll be honest. None." In this conversation the city official explains the logic of using women in the garbage collection scheme as follows:

> Ironically 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. … [At one point even the national government,] the Minister of DEAT was taking interest in this. [The idea was] to employ women to clean up South Africa.

What is evident in this interview is that the logic for using women in low-budget community-based waste collection schemes is the patriarchal gender ideologies that underscore women's cheap labor and availability. The significant role of women in waste and garbage collection is not coincidental, but entrenched in patriarchal gender relations that extend women's

domestic responsibilities to municipal housekeeping. Patriarchal gender ideologies that see domestic housekeeping as women's responsibility go on to assign them the cleaning of neighborhood spaces, as well, as an extension of women's motherly and womanly duties to protect their families from filth and harm (Samson 2003). This ideology lends itself to the cost-cutting logic of capitalism, particularly in its neoliberal version, as justifying the under-paid and casual labor of women for municipal waste collection (see Beneria 2001, 2003; for a further discussion with reference to waste collection see Miraftab forthcoming).

The words of the former mayor and the Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism (DEAT) minister on the need "to use a lot of gender empowerment" to clean up South Africa, rather than "spending money," reveal the economic motives of officials in their "empowerment talk." Empowerment becomes an alibi for the exploitation of poor women, as well as putting forward a moral justification for the neoliberal evasion of public responsibility for providing basic services to the poor.

Depoliticization of Emancipatory Discourses

Within the three dimensional understanding of power and empowerment outlined earlier, we see that the Cape Town waste collection schemes consistently fail to address the collective dimension of power — the challenge to change the institutional and structural basis of one's powerlessness. The absence of that dimension in the empowerment rhetoric de-politicizes the notion of community participation. Some community members may indeed improve their individual economic situations and thus their decision-making power at the personal and inter-personal levels. But this change leaves intact the systemic basis of their poverty and oppression. Rather, it not only relies on, but perpetuates societal racial, gender and class hierarchies.

Deprived of its redistributive potential, the participatory aspect of these community-based waste collection schemes remains compatible with the inequities of capitalism, racism, and sexism (Santos 2004). While the residents of affluent neighborhoods received their waste collection services at curbside as a citizens' entitlement, to meet the city's budget constraints for waste services the poor residents of areas served by community-based schemes had to invest their own underpaid or unpaid labor into these projects.[14] Similarly, patriarchal gender hierarchies are perpetuated in the waste collection schemes. While the underpaid and unpaid workers of the Masicoce and volunteer groups are exclusively female, the local entrepreneurs and the BH/Tedcor directors are predominantly male. In short, the officials' understanding of the empowerment of blacks or of women and their celebration of communities' participation and social capital obscures their inequitable handling of citizens' right to basic urban services.

There is no doubt that some black men and women of these townships ascend the social hierarchies by joining the local entrepreneurs and perhaps even the emergent group of black elite. These changes, however, do not transform the collective and institutional basis of the blacks' disadvantage, which in its new pattern, is closely aligned with their class position.

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[14] For more on the inequitable provision of municipal services in Cape Town, see MacDonald and Smith (2002). In particular, see Table 1 and 2 (pp 30-31) for a summary of the municipal expenditure for basic services in Khayelitsha (450,000 population) versus Durbanville (36,000 population). To collect waste, the municipality of Cape Town spends R5.55 for every resident of the affluent suburb of Durbanville, predominantly populated by whites, while it spends R0.56 for every poor resident of the disadvantaged Khayelitsha area and its black inhabitants.

Official viewpoints may present the street sweeping activities of volunteers as women's mobilization of social capital and hence their empowerment, since they use informal networks of reciprocity and support to "uplift" their families and neighborhoods and thus gain self-reliance, self-confidence and power. By considering the multiplicity in forms and sources of power beyond its individualized levels, however, one can see the limitation of that viewpoint: it serves to maintain existing power relations. In the guise of empowerment rhetoric, the neoliberal post-apartheid government rides on the despair of poor and unemployed women for whom even the slightest hope of future casual labor is enough to motivate them to offer their fulltime unpaid work.

Nevertheless, as the account of events in this case shows, the authorities' de-politicized presentation of communities and processes of participation does not change the reality. Serious tensions emerged after the schemes' implementation in black townships of Cape Town. The harmonious presentation of community as a single entity with homogenous interests soon unraveled as the conflict-ridden nature of the community participation processes emerged. One example is the conflict between community members and workers who were seen as not deserving their jobs, but having them through favoritism by local councilors. In a serious clash, several garbage trucks and trash bins were set on fire, and workers were chased away from their job sites. More than one year later, that conflict and hostility were still unresolved.[15] Another, instance is of tension arose between the Masicoce women and the volunteer women. At the end of their working term the Masicoce women declared that they could not "eat" the project's slogan of "no job expectation" and showed up at their job sites with their brooms in hand. There they were confronted by the volunteer women who had keenly awaited that day to replace them. It was this kind of resistance that finally led to certain modifications in the Maiscoce scheme before its formal adoption by the unicity in 2001.

Ideological Devices of Neoliberal Governance

Facing the challenge of governing the highly politicized and disenchanted, racialized populations of South Africa in its post-apartheid moment, neoliberalism offers a gamut of interrelated ideas to be used as devices of its governance. These ideas including 'civil society', 'decentralization,' 'participation,' and 'social capital.' These ideas should be understood as building blocks of an ideological edifice that facilitates the ability of the neoliberal government to rule.[16] Neoliberalism, in other words, provides "a certain rationality … [and] a way of linking up these various tactics, integrating them *in thought* so that they appear to partake in a coherent logic." Once that happens the formulated rationality can be extracted and used in various deployments in various policies and programs (Rose 1999:27). In analyses of the ideological dimension of neoliberal governance, that logic often is argued to be social, as opposed to economic. For example, following Masimo de Angelis, Santos points out an inversion of Polyani's argument under neoliberalism whereby governance "is premised upon the need to

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[15] This incident occurred in Crossroads, between residents of Boystown and workers of the private subcontractor Sisonke, recruited from a different community (interview with Sisonke representative, 2002).

[16] At the risk of simplifying the relationship between these ideas, Harriss' explanation is offered: "through 'participation' in voluntary local associations and [use of their social capital]… people are 'empowered' in civil society' … [which is also expected to] contain the expansion of the state … [and] be broadly supportive of the market-lead orientation of economic policy …[and] to make 'choices'. … 'Decentralization' of government [then] should facilitate all of this, partly because it is at local levels that citizens' or community action is most effective" (2001:79).

embed society in the economy" — that it is contrary to Polyni's reflections on neoclassical economics. In other words, the neoliberal emphasis on community participation, communities' social capital, civil society, and decentralization are all closely related ways in which this new governance mode tries to "manage" or offer a "social fix" to the inherent tensions of the capital accumulation within capitalist, racialized, and patriarchal societies.

In his eloquent analysis of neoliberal governance, Santos (2004:3) writes: "to identify the political meaning of neoliberal governance we must pay attention not only to what it says but also to what it silences." The present case study observed an example of neoliberal governance by means of appropriating the voice and idiom of the disenchanted citizens: a strategy that constrains society's claims on the state and silences social transformation, popular participation, social justice, power relations, and social conflict (*ibid.*).

Considering that basic services were at the center of social conflicts under the apartheid regime, bringing about townships' boycott of municipal rates and serious riots and clashes with the authorities, we should be paying attention to the post-apartheid government's efforts to tame community participation and control the claims of citizens on the state. Is it not useful to ask how, at this specific post-apartheid historical juncture, the South African government has sought "authority for its authority"? (Rose 1999:27) — namely, to allocate its municipal resources unequally across neighborhoods and, more importantly, to motivate township residents to participate at the cost of their own free or under-paid labor in community-based schemes that counter their aspirations for social justice and distributive democracy.

Rose (1999:27) differentiates between the exercise of power in the form of simple domination that crushes the capacity to act, and power in the form of governing that is reflexive on the actions of those governed. The latter, he argues, "continually seeks to give itself a form of truth … and offering an ethical basis for its actions" that acknowledges and utilizes the capacity of those governed for its own objectives (Rose 1999:7). The discourse of women's and black empowerment brought to light in this paper as part of a larger language of social fix (including participation, empowerment, social capital, and decentralization) highlights the reflexivity of the post-apartheid, neoliberal government. Acknowledging and utilizing the capacities of township residents for community-based voluntary action, the post-apartheid neoliberal government tries to establish a legitimating basis for its action that draws on residents' beliefs, sentiments, and language of struggle. An important aspect of the 1994 political transition can be understood as a shift in the forms of power mobilized to govern. The earlier era relied on coercion as the main form of its power; the new era has shifted this position to symbolic and ideological power.

6.   Conclusion

The case study presented in this paper demonstrates how the working relations within community-based waste collection schemes are structured by and reproduce the hierarchies of gender, race and class in South African society. It shows how community-based participatory projects may de-center certain power relations from their traditional sites, but then engraves them in new forms and sites. For example, the exploitive capitalist relations in the cases discussed are no longer primarily organized externally at the apartheid sites of the workplace by white employers. Rather, they are organized internally within the residential spaces and among community members by black males and females who seek status as the emergent black elite. Similarly, patriarchal expectations for women to provide unpaid care are perpetuated not only in respect to the domestic space, but also in respect to the public space of neighborhood streets.

The officials' appropriation of the empowerment discourse has facilitated those processes by masking social hierarchies and by eliminating the political and social limbs of progressive concepts, leaving only their economic and individualized trunks, which pose limited threat to the existing relations of dominance and power.

The paper has further tried to contribute to understanding the ideological apparatus of neoliberal governance, by examining how the City officials and planners legitimize their practices for waste collection and how they justify and rationalize the nature, means, and ends of their actions and their style of governance. The paper has also sought to understand how these authorities understand empowerment, social capital and participation, and how their depoliticized understandings of these concepts serve a critical political purpose: the material exclusion of township residents joined to their symbolic incorporation in development practice and decision making.

To close, I would like to stress on two points. <u>One</u>, the paradox of neoliberal governance (Santos 2004). By reducing notions of empowerment and participation to individualized and economic change, neoliberal governance depoliticizes the emancipatory concepts; meanwhile, to seek legitimacy for its acts, it adopts a socially concerned posture of social upliftment that politicizes decisions that government technocrats, policy makers and planners have traditionally claimed as mundane and technical. These sorts of double move, depoliticization/politicization; inclusion/exclusion, are an important feature of neoliberalism, highlighting the paradox of its policy processes and framework.[17] <u>Two</u>, the contradictions within the system and the thousand tiny cracks that emerge in the processes of participation open up spaces of resistance and emancipatory change[18] (Sandercock 1998). Women and men who organize to clean up their neighborhoods for free, or for little remuneration, in the process discover the litter of the system itself, which may be prompt their long-term process of empowerment and emancipation. While such possibilities exist, they should not be confused with the intention of the neoliberal state and its community-based projects. The grassroots movements and their empowering outcomes emerge *despite* the "empowerment" rhetoric of the neoliberal programs.

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Acknowledgement:

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[17] I thank Ken Salo for helping me see this point more clearly through his insightful discussions with me on the topic.

[18] An important example in the contemporary South Africa is the Anti-Eviction Campaign, which has created a significant space for grassroots resistance (see Miraftab and Wills forthcoming).

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