Forging a New Conceptualization of "The Public" in Waste Management

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WIEGO Working Papers

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Abstract

The involvement of informal workers in municipal service delivery is generally theorized and studied as a key component of a neoliberal privatization agenda that erodes both the public sector and the rights of workers employed within it. This is the predominant trend globally. However, in a range of cities across the globe a different process is taking place as informal waste pickers are organizing collectively and demanding that they be formally integrated into municipal waste systems and fairly compensated for their labour. In these instances the incorporation of informal workers in service delivery has a different genesis and dynamic, and potentially has profoundly different political implications. This paper critically analyses innovative approaches to including informal waste pickers in service delivery in Belo Horizonte, Brazil, Pune, India and Bogota, Colombia. It argues that by mobilizing collectively to demand formal incorporation into municipal waste management systems waste pickers are expanding both the public sector and the public sphere, transforming relations between the state, formal economy, informal economy, and residents, and contributing to the forging of a more inclusive, participatory, and democratic state. While recognizing the key role played by waste picker organizations, it also argues that the ways waste pickers organize, the types of demands that they make, and extent to which they succeed in achieving their goals are shaped by a number of factors, including: the historical development and nature of the municipal waste management systems; the political orientation of the political parties in power locally and nationally; national policy and legislation related to waste management as well as local governance; the strength and nature of broader social movements and how waste pickers relate to them; the extent and nature of support from government, NGOs and other civil society organizations; the political orientation of these external supporters; and, ultimately of course, the political orientation, vision for the state, and strategic and tactical decisions of the waste picker organizations themselves. The paper concludes by exploring how such innovations in the waste management sector contribute to our understanding of how new political imaginaries for the state can be forged and achieved in the current conjuncture.

Introduction

The involvement of informal workers in municipal service delivery is generally theorized as a key component of a neoliberal privatization agenda that erodes both the public sector and the rights of workers employed within it. This is the predominant trend globally, as informalization is seized upon as a way to undercut the wages and collective power of unionized public sector workers and hollow out the local state (cf Coyle 1985; Doogan 1997; Meagher 2013; Miraftab 2004; Patterson and Pinch 1995; Pinch 1989) as part of broader processes of state neoliberalization (Peck 2001; Peck and Tickell 2002).

However, in a range of cities across the globe a different process is taking place. Informal waste pickers who salvage reusable and recyclable materials from waste are organizing and forcing the state to recognize the services they provide, and to officially include them within waste management programmes. Within this context, the engagement of informal workers in service delivery has a different genesis and dynamic, and potentially counters—as opposed to entrenches—neoliberalization of the state.

This paper critically analyzes innovative approaches to including informal waste pickers in service delivery in three cities: Belo Horizonte, Brazil; Pune, India; and Bogota, Colombia. It argues that by mobilizing collectively to demand formal incorporation into municipal waste management systems, waste pickers are expanding both the public sector and the public sphere, transforming relations between the state, formal economy, informal economy, and residents, and contributing to the forging of a more inclusive, participatory, and democratic state. While recognizing the key role played by waste picker organizing, it also argues that the ways waste pickers organize, the types of demands that they make, and extent to which they succeed in achieving their goals are shared by a number of factors, including: the historical development and nature of the municipal waste management systems; the political orientation of the political parties in power locally and nationally; national policy and legislation related to waste management; local governance and regulations; the strength and nature of broader social movements and how waste pickers relate to them; the extent and nature of support from government, NGOs and other civil society organizations; the political orientation of these external supporters; and, ultimately, the political orientation, vision for the state, and strategic and tactical decisions of the waste picker organizations themselves.

The remainder of this paper is divided into four sections. The first briefly reprises how the inclusion of the informal economy in municipal service delivery has been theorized in debates on neoliberalism. The second section provides an overview of the work of informal waste pickers and their role in municipal waste management systems in cities in the South. Drawing on my previous work (Samson 2009a; 2013), it argues that because informal waste pickers created the municipal recycling system in many developing cities, excluding them from formal recycling programmes amounts to a form of accumulation by dispossession, which Harvey (2005) argues is a key aspect of neoliberalism. Including them within formal municipal waste management systems therefore has the potential to counter neoliberalism. The third section explores key aspects of initiatives in Belo Horizonte, Pune, and Bogota that have fostered new, democratic conceptualizations of the public. The fourth and final section explores how such innovations in the waste management sector contribute to our understanding of how new political visions for the state can be forged and achieved in the current conjuncture.

The Informal Economy and Municipal Service Delivery in the Era of Neoliberalism

The understanding of informality has evolved since Keith Hart (1973) first coined the term "informal sector" in 1971. At the 90th Session of the International Labour Conference in 2002, the Committee on the Informal Economy shifted the focus from "informal sector" to "informal economy", which it defined as "… all economic activities by workers and economic units that are – in law or in practice – not covered or insufficiently covered by formal arrangements. These activities are not included in the law, which means that they are operating outside the formal reach of the law; or they are not covered in practice, which means that – although they are operating within the formal reach of the law, the law is not applied or enforced; or the law discourages compliance because it is inappropriate, burdensome, or imposes excessive costs" (International Labour Organization 2002: 53).

The increasing informalization of work (which includes eroding the conditions and benefits of existing employees as well as the contracting of new, informal workers) is identified as a key aspect of neoliberalism. According to Heintz and Pollin, the growing prevalence of informality can be attributed to a number of factors associated with neoliberal policy including the decline in public employment, promotion of trade and foreign direct investment, neoliberal macroeconomic policy, increased pressure to engage in paid employment, and the strengthened bargaining position of employers (Heintz and Pollin 2003: 6–8).

Historically the public sector has been seen as the "most developed expression" of formality (Sainz 2005: 68). Thus the first link between the public sector and informalization has been the observation that decreases in public sector employment associated with neoliberalism reduce the number of formal jobs in the economy, push people to seek informal work, and therefore increase the overall informalization of the economy (Beneria 2001: 7; Sainz 2005: 68).

In addition, there has been an increasing informalization of public sector jobs themselves, as states cut expenditure on public sector employment and attempt to break the power of public sector unions, a trend exacerbated when combined with privatization. Informalization of municipal work takes various forms. Wages, conditions and benefits of municipally employed workers are eroded. When municipal services are privatized, the result can verge even more towards informality, and private companies sometimes utilize completely informal workers. Government also exploits volunteer labour to provide crucial services previously provided by the state (cf Coyle 1985; Doogan 1997; Miraftab 2004; Patterson and Pinch 1995; Pinch 1989; Qotole and Xali 2001; Samson 2004). Proponents of "co-production" within both the donor and academic communities advocate the utilization of informal workers to provide services as a way to reduce costs and remedy existing institutional gaps. While they claim this promotes synergies between the formal and informal economies, this approach has been heavily critiqued for exploiting informal workers and doing little to transform their position in the economy (Meagher 2013: 13).

The use of informalization of municipal service delivery by the state to undermine both labour and the local state is undeniably a pervasive and central feature of neoliberalism. Yet this is not the only way in which informal workers are being brought into the delivery of municipal services. While much less prevalent, in some cities around the world a different process is occurring in which informal waste pickers who created recycling systems (often supported by allies in NGOs and government) are pushing local governments to formally integrate them into municipal waste management systems. In order to understand whether and how this can potentially have different political implications, it is necessary to explore the historical development and nature of recycling systems in cities in the South.

Reclaiming and the Creation of Municipal Recycling Systems in Cities in the South

In advanced capitalist countries, recycling activities were historically conducted outside of the state by the private sector. However, starting in the 1970s, formal industry played a critical role in the establishment of municipal recycling programmes in order to stave off calls for more radical transformation of environmentally destructive forms of industrial production (Rogers 2005: 158). By contrast, in cities in the South, formal municipal waste management systems are generally weak and remain focused on the collection and disposal of waste. Local recycling systems were created informally by waste pickers to generate income, usually in the face of state repression and hostility. With a few exceptions, typically the salvaging of materials from waste is illegal. In many countries, waste pickers must literally fight to gain access to garbage dumps and face harassment and arrest by police for collecting materials on the landfills and in the streets. They must also battle profound social stigmatization (Beall 1997; Chikarmane and Narayan 2005; Hayami, Dikshit, and Mishra 2006; Moreno-Sánchez and Maldonado 2006; Nas and Jaffe 2004; Samson 2009b).

Although the recycling systems created by waste pickers are informal, the systems form an integral, if unacknowledged, part of municipal waste management systems and are of great benefit to the municipalities. Research conducted in six cities[1] in 2007 by the Collaborative Working Group on Solid Waste Management in Low- and Middle-Income Countries and the GTZ[2] found that in three of the cities waste pickers collected between 20-23 per cent per cent of waste entering the system and in Cairo they collected 66 per cent of all waste in the city. Overall, in the six cities, the 80,000 people and their families working informally as waste pickers saved the municipalities an estimated 38.2 million euros a year by diverting recyclable, reusable and organic materials out of the waste stream so that it did not need to be transported and placed in landfills by the municipalities. This is a significant environmental as well as economic contribution (cited in WIEGO 2014).

Increasingly, municipalities in the South are starting to transform and expand their formal waste management systems to include recycling. There are two very different catalysts for this development. On the one hand, international donors are pushing municipalities to start to recycle, and recycling has become part of what is considered to be a "modern" waste management system. On the other, in cities where waste pickers are organized, they are mobilizing to demand formal recognition and inclusion in the municipal waste management system. Often they are the first to place recycling on the municipality's agenda.

Within standard waste management discourse and practice it is assumed that "modern" means high tech. Waste pickers are seen as atavistic, dirty and marring the image of the city, which planners seek to cast in the image of European and American cities. Technologically intensive recycling systems that exclude waste pickers are frequently imported from advanced capitalist countries and municipalities contract formal sector private companies to manage these systems. Such efforts to establish formal recycling systems capture a sphere of accumulation created by waste pickers, dispossessing them of their livelihood. Although the enclosure of common land and resources (or what Marx calls "primitive accumulation") has been part of capitalism since its birth, Harvey argues it has become a key feature of neoliberal capitalism, and coined the term "accumulation by dispossession" to emphasize its ongoing nature (Harvey 2005). Once it is understood that informal waste pickers play a key role in creating the recycling industry in developing countries, it is clear that enclosing waste and *excluding* waste pickers from service delivery is a form of accumulation by dispossession and part of broader processes of neoliberalization (Samson 2009b).

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1 Cairo, Egypt; Pune, India; Lima, Peru; Lusaka, Zambia; Ciuj-Napoca, Romania; and Quezon City, the Philippines.

2 GTZ, the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit, GmbH (German technical cooperation), became part of the partnership that formed the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) in 2011. See http://www.giz.de/.

Depending on how it is done, including waste pickers may also deepen the exploitation of waste pickers. For example, a number of South African municipalities granted contracts to private companies to recycle on landfills. A small number of existing waste pickers were authorized to continue reclaiming. They were not, however, employed by the companies, paid wages by the companies, or granted any benefits. Their situation actually worsened under the contracts for several reasons. First, the vast majority of waste pickers lost their livelihoods as they were not permitted to continue reclaiming. Second, those who were allowed to continue working were no longer free to sell to the buyer of their choice. The contracted companies were granted monopsonies and the waste pickers were forced to sell to them at significantly lower prices, while the companies frequently sold to the buyers that the waste pickers previously engaged directly. In essence, the companies were taking a cut of the sale price for their own profits and to pay the municipalities for the right to recycle at the dumps (Samson 2008; 2013).

However, this is not the only possible scenario. When the inclusion of waste pickers in municipal waste management systems is driven by waste picker organizations with a clear agenda to transform both their status and the nature of the state, it can promote a more inclusive, democratic alternative that transforms our understanding of the public. The next section explores three instances where this has been attempted in Brazil, India, and Colombia.

Innovative Initiatives in the Municipal Waste Sector

Belo Horizonte – Integration as Part of a Transformative State Agenda

Belo Horizonte was a pioneer in integrating waste pickers (or *catadores* as they call themselves) into the formal municipal waste management system and has provided a model and inspiration for waste pickers across Brazil and around the world. The integration of waste pickers in Belo Horizonte was part of a broader effort by the Workers' Party (PT) at the local and then national level to democratize and transform the state. The mobilization by waste pickers in the city was linked to the building of a national movement that clearly aligns itself with other left social movements— one that brings a transformative vision for the state, society, and the economy (Dias and Cidrin 2008). The building of a strong movement of waste pickers was greatly assisted by the support of both the state and a succession of nongovernmental organizations (Dias and Cidrin 2008). The experience in Belo Horizonte highlights the important roles played by both the state and waste picker movements in developing approaches to integration that progressively transform and democratize the state. It also demonstrates how the broader political orientation of the state and waste picker movements, as well as developments at the national scale (which local developments may also contribute to), shape approaches to integration in particular cities.

The process to formally integrate waste pickers into Belo Horizonte's municipal waste management system dates back to the early 1990s. Waste pickers had been working on the city's dump since the 1960s. When the open dump was replaced with a sanitary landfill in 1973, they were evicted and many began working in the streets. For most of this period the waste pickers were not organized. But in 1987 Belo Horizonte's *Pastoral de Rua,* or street pastoral of the Catholic Church, took an interest in waste pickers, since many of them were homeless. The local *Pastoral de Rua* was inspired by the earlier formation of the country's first cooperatives of waste pickers in São Paulo and Porto Alegre. It brought them together in assemblies and street parties where they identified the need to form an organization. In 1990 they founded the Asmare association of waste pickers (Dias 2011a: 2; Dias 2000: 2–3; Dias and Cidrin 2008: 16).

Initially Asmare had a difficult relationship with the municipality characterized by conflict and mutual distrust. But in 1993 the PT won control of the local council for the first time. As Dias and Cidrin observe, the PT had an agenda of transforming the state, promoting participatory democracy, working with social movements, and responding to their interests. The process of decentralization to local governments in the

1980s ensured that the PT-controlled municipalities had the financial resources and authority to pursue their progressive social agenda. Once the PT came to power in Belo Horizonte Asmare finally had a receptive partner in city hall (Dias and Cidrin 2008: 17).

The approach to formally integrating waste pickers in Belo Horizonte was multifaceted and involved engagements in the political, social, cultural, and economic spheres. This required the state to transform the internal functioning of its waste management department, along with how it related to waste pickers and how it engaged the city's residents. The approach itself was developed through a participatory process involving both Asmare and the *Pastoral de Rua* (Dias 2011a: 2; Dias and Cidrin 2008: 27).

Not Just a Technical Issue

The municipality began by shifting from framing waste as a purely technical issue to seeing it as a social, environmental, political, cultural, and economic issue. In 1993, after consultation with Asmare and the *Pastoral de Rua,* the city's Public Cleansing Unit (SLU), which is responsible for waste management in the city, moved away from a collection and burial model of waste management and implemented an integrated system. The new system included upgrading the landfill, recycling civil construction waste, composting organic waste, selective collection to separate out recyclables, environmental education, improving working conditions of formal workers employed by the SLU, and formally integrating waste pickers (Dias 2011a: 2).

Forging a Social Accord Between the State and Waste Pickers

In the same year, the city signed a covenant with Asmare and the *Pastoral de Rua* that made Asmare the city's preferred partner for selective collection. In the covenant, the municipality committed to erecting recycling containers where residents can deposit recyclables, collecting the recyclables, providing Asmare with warehouses where waste pickers can sort materials, transporting recyclables from the containers to the warehouse, and conducting environmental education with residents around the importance of recycling. In more recent years, the municipality also started collecting recyclables from homes in certain parts of the city and delivering these to the Asmare sorting centre. Asmare is required to sort and sell the recyclables, run the warehouses, and provide data on its activities so that the municipality can monitor them. In recognition of the fact that Asmare's members are performing an integral part of the waste management service and saving the city money by extracting recyclables from the waste stream, the covenant also commits the municipality to paying Asmare a monthly subsidy to cover its administrative costs (Dias and Cidrin 2008: 27–28; Dias 2011a: 3). The payment to Asmare represented possibly the first case in the world where a municipality provided waste pickers with financial compensation for their contribution to the city's waste management system. This has served as a basis for movements across the globe to make similar demands.

Creating the Conditions for Meaningful Collaborative Governance

Historically the SLU, like other cleansing departments around the country, had been the domain of engineers and technical experts, and did not have strong relations with other departments in the local administration (Dias 2006: 2–3). But the state recognized that the new conceptualization of waste and waste management required a new way of governing provision of the service. After signing the covenant, regular meetings were held between the SLU, Asmare, and the *Pastoral de Rua* to plan and evaluate the separation at source. In 1997, a Collegial Board comprised of all key stakeholders was established and assumed responsibility for planning and evaluation. It also clearly defined the role of each stakeholder in the process. According to Dias and Cidrin, this shift to collaborative governance created a more democratic culture in the SLU, increased the SLU's regulatory capacity, strengthened Asmare, increased Asmare's profile, and boosted waste pickers' self-esteem and professional recognition (Dias and Cidrin 2008: 32–33).

The PT administration acknowledged that it wasn't sufficient to simply create space for waste pickers to participate. Waste pickers come from marginalized backgrounds, live and labour in precarious conditions, and face extreme social ostracization and victimization. It is, therefore, unrealistic to expect them to simply organize themselves and engage as equal partners in consultations and negotiations. The SLU therefore assumed responsibility for building the waste pickers' individual and collective capacity and transforming their place in society. In 1993, it created a Social Mobilization Unit staffed by sociologists, psychologists, education specialists, geographers, artists, architects, and engineers. The Social Mobilization Unit worked collaboratively with Asmare to design and implement education and mobilization campaigns. It provided technical advice to Asmare, training for individual waste pickers, and collective capacity building for the organization. The SMU and Asmare conducted a number of highly innovative and creative cultural events to transform public attitudes towards waste pickers, including hosting an annual carnival of waste pickers and SLU employees. The carnival became a highlight on the city's social calendar and established the importance of waste pickers and the work they do for the city. The municipality has also supported Asmare to open a bar and a restaurant that not only allows waste pickers who work there to develop new skills but also creates a space for waste pickers and the city's residents to interact socially. In 2000 the municipality adopted Law 8052, which institutionalized the work of the Social Mobilization Unit by creating the Department for Social Mobilization. The department is now legally charged with building the capacity of waste pickers and transforming social attitudes towards them (Dias and Cidrin 2008: 28, 32; Dias 2011a: 3–4; Horn 2008: 2–3; Samson 2009b: 55).

The process of collaborative governance was further deepened when the Belo Horizonte Waste and Citizenship Forum was created in 2003 (Dias 2011b: 3). The first Waste and Citizenship Forum was created at a national level in 1998, after UNICEF conducted a study revealing the alarming extent of child labour on open garbage dumps. UNICEF helped to establish the National Waste and Citizenship Forum, which was charged with ending child labour on garbage dumps, replacing open dumps with sanitary landfills, and promoting partnerships between local governments and waste pickers' organizations to develop and implement municipal recycling programmes. Waste and Citizenship Forums were subsequently created at state and local levels. One of their key objectives is to promote the right of waste pickers to work and to improve their working conditions (Dias 2006: 2–3). The Belo Horizonte forum includes Asmare, newer waste pickers organizations, NGOs, and local government representatives (Dias 2011a). When it was formed, the Belo Horizonte Waste and Citizenship Forum included 21 organizations and provided a public platform for collective deliberations on guidelines for integrating waste picker organizations and the allocation of public resources for solid waste management. Although the Forum does not have any legal powers, it is housed in the SLU and its deliberations carry significant authority (Dias 2011b: 3).

Building and Being Bolstered by Developments at the National Level

Together with Porto Alegre, Belo Horizonte was a pathbreaker in the forming of waste pickers' organizations and the development of local policy and legislation to formally integrate waste pickers. It played a pivotal role in leading developments at a national level in both spheres. In turn, these developments helped to bolster transformation at the local level.

Throughout the 1990s, waste pickers organized in cities across Brazil and began to form state-level associations. Belo Horizonte hosted the First National Meeting of Waste Pickers in November 1999 (Dias and Cidrin 2008: 17). The National Movement of Waste Pickers (MNCR) was, according to its website, officially launched in June 2001 at a congress held in Brasilia that was attended by 1,700 waste pickers from across the country (see www.mncr.org.br).

As a founding member of the MNCR, Asmare shaped, and is shaped, by the MNCR's political orientation. As the MNCR elaborates on its website, it sees waste pickers as workers who must be recognized and valued for the important work they perform by being formally integrated into municipal waste management systems and paid for the service they provide. The MNCR promotes collective—as opposed to individual—advancement. It advocates the formation of democratic, waste picker-controlled cooperatives. In keeping

with the broader tradition among the left in Brazil, it recognizes that differences exist within the MNCR but is committed to ensuring that these do not divide the movement and that waste pickers do not create hierarchies and inequalities between themselves. The MNCR also supports waste picker cooperatives to move up the recycling value chain and take increasing control over their own work, as well as control over the sale and processing of their products. Importantly, the MNCR has a class analysis of society and sees waste pickers as part of the broader class of the oppressed. It believes that waste pickers' interests can only truly be met through a fundamental transformation in society to eradicate class-based power relations and inequalities. The MNCR is therefore committed to building solidarity with social movements in Brazil, and beyond that to advance the struggle of the oppressed class (see www.mncr.org.br).

The MNCR quickly grew to become the largest and strongest national movement of waste pickers in the world (Medina 2007: 82). Even as the PT retreated from a more radical agenda as it assumed power nationally, the party has remained open to waste pickers. Former President Lula had a particularly close relationship with the MNCR, often mentioning that he worked as a waste picker as a child and holding annual Christmas meetings with the MNCR leadership. The MNCR has succeeded in negotiating a number of landmark agreements with national government that have led to some of the most progressive legislation in the world related to waste pickers. Key policy and legislative developments at the national level include: the establishment of an Inter-Ministerial Committee for the Social Inclusion of Waste Pickers composed of representatives from seven ministries, the presidency, the National Economic and Social Development Bank, the Secretariat for Human Rights, and the MNCR; officially recognizing a number of different types of waste pickers as occupations in the Brazilian Classification of Occupations in 2001; adoption of a law in 2007 that allows municipalities to contract and pay waste picker organizations to conduct selective collection without putting the service out for competitive tender; and, a 2006 Presidential Decree that all federal buildings must give their recyclable materials to waste picker organizations (Dias 2011c). All of these developments have bolstered efforts to integrate waste pickers within Belo Horizonte and municipalities around the country.

Covenant or Service Agreement?

The formal integration of waste pickers into the municipal waste management system in Belo Horizonte fundamentally transformed and democratized both the system itself and the way that the state relates to waste pickers and residents. Waste pickers gained greater work and income security. Some moved off the streets and into warehouses, and their social status was greatly improved. Through the development and strengthening of their organizations, waste pickers have also been able to move up the value chain, with the most dramatic example being the coming together of a number of cooperatives in 2007 to open a factory that produces plastic pellets (Dias 2011a: 7–8).

Despite these gains, some waste pickers and people within supportive NGOs have recently criticized the nature of the covenant. They argue that giving Asmare a subsidy from the welfare budget makes it a form of charity. As an alternative they advocate that as in Diadema Brazil, the municipality should pay reclaimers for the service they provide by paying reclaimer cooperatives a rate per kilogram of recyclables extracted from the waste stream. While there are some clear advantages to the Diadema system, research has shown that many waste pickers struggle to adjust to the work regime imposed once they become service providers. There are, therefore, potentially some benefits to maintaining the approach to recognition and payment used in Belo Horizonte (Dias and Cidrin 2008: 32; Gutberlet 2008: 137).

Pune – Forging New Relations Between Waste pickers, Residents and the State

The approach to integrating waste pickers in Pune, India overcomes this either/or dichotomy as it includes direct payment of waste pickers by residents as well as an organizational subsidy from the state in the initial years of the programme. The development of this approach and its formalization through an agreement between the Pune Municipal Corporation (PMC) and the SWaCH (Solid Waste Collection and Handling Waste

Picker Cooperative was the outcome of many years of struggle by the Kagad Kach Patra Kashtakari Panchayat (KKPKP) trade union. It is rooted in the KKPKP's strong vision for progressive transformation of the state and the forging of new relations between waste pickers and residents. The failure of an attempt by KKPKP and SWaCH to introduce the same approach in the neighbouring municipality of Pimpri Chinchwad reveals the challenges in transporting approaches to new contexts, and the central importance of local histories of mobilization by waste pickers, local political dynamics, and the nature of orientation of the local state.

Organizing Waste Pickers in Pune

The formation of the Kagad Kach Patra Kashtakari Panchayat (KKPKP) waste picker union in Pune in 1993 was part of a broader effort to organize waste pickers that started in major Indian cities in the 1990s. These initiatives were led by NGOs, university departments, and trade unions. As the KKPKP Central Secretariat notes, the political orientation and philosophies of these groups shaped their approaches to working with waste pickers (Central Secretariat KKPKP 2009a: 37). In Pune, feminists working for the National Adult Education Programme of Shreemati Nathibai Damodar Thackersey Women's University (SNDT) who were interested in increasing girls' access to education argued that if waste could be segregated, then girls working as waste pickers would have more time to attend school. Their mothers soon realized that if they could access the segregated waste, they could earn enough money to allow their daughters to go to school full time. It was from this starting point that the KKPKP union was born (Chikarmane and Narayan 2005: 1).

Winning Collective Rights and Benefits Based on Informal Work

KKPKP took an innovative approach to achieving formal integration for waste pickers, which started by first attaining social welfare rights from the state for waste pickers. The union began by insisting that the municipality recognize that, through their informal labour, waste pickers were already providing a valuable service that generated economic and environmental benefits to the city and its residents. They then used this as a basis to demand that the municipality provide waste pickers with social benefits.

In order to win these benefits, the municipality needed to recognize the waste pickers as workers. The first challenge for KKPKP was to transform how waste pickers saw themselves; initially, most waste pickers did not view what they did as "work". Through education methods and cultural activities, the members began to develop a structural analysis that allowed them to see themselves as workers who were making important contributions to society, the environment and the economy. They realized they preferred waste picking to other forms of available work such as domestic work or construction, that they wanted to improve their conditions within the waste picking sector, and that it would be possible to do so by engaging in collective action (Chikarmane and Narayan 2005: 2–3; 23–26).

KKPKP members began mobilizing in 1993 to demand recognition and benefits from the municipality. They also campaigned against the daily harassment endured at the hands of the police. They were bolstered by detailed research conducted by the union and allied academics that showed each waste picker contributed US$5 free labour to the municipality every month, and that their work saved the municipality US$316,455 in transport costs (cited in Chikarmane 2012: 3). In 1995, the Pune municipality acknowledged the contribution of waste pickers to municipal waste management systems and endorsed the waste pickers' KKPKP identity cards, officially authorizing them to collect scrap. This example was followed in 1996 by the neighbouring municipality of Pimipri Chinchwad, where the KKPKP also organizes. Validation of the identity cards legitimized waste pickers, transforming how they were seen by themselves and by others. Waste pickers have also used the cards as bail and as surety (Chikarmane and Narayan 2005: 14–15; SNDT Women's University and Chintan Environmental Research and Action Group 2008: 47).

Once the role of waste pickers in providing a municipal service had been established and a relationship with the state had been forged, the KKPKP could mobilize to make claims on the state. Waste picking is a hazardous occupation and most waste pickers could not afford health care. After years of mobilization, in

2002 the Pune Municipal Corporation agreed to create a Scheme for Medical Insurance for all registered waste pickers in the city. In subsequent years it also began to pay the waste pickers' annual premium for the New India Assurance Company (Chikarmane and Narayan 2005: 14–15; SNDT Women's University and Chintan Environmental Research and Action Group 2008: 49).

The KKPKP has also won major victories in the sphere of education. Although all children have the right to go to school and public education is free in India, the children of waste pickers often faced discrimination so extreme that they were turned away from school. KKPKP united with children's rights organizations to remove procedural requirements that prevented the children of waste pickers from attending school and sensitized people in the school system to reduce the harassment they experienced. KKPKP mobilization has also ensured that children of waste pickers are included in a scholarship scheme for students whose parents work in "unclean occupations" (Chikarmane and Narayan 2005: 15-16).

Waste Pickers Expanding the Public Sector

In 2000, the national government adopted the Municipal Solid Waste Rules, which for the first time required municipalities to ensure segregation of waste, door-to-door collection of waste and recyclables, and the processing of recyclable materials (Chikarmane and Narayan 2005: 16; KKPKP 2009: 3). Until this time the Pune municipality had not collected waste directly from residents and was not involved in recycling, and the KKPKP had been clear that it would not become involved in providing services delivered by municipally-employed waste management workers (Chikarmane and Narayan 2005; Samson 2009b), However, the new Rules meant that the state was encroaching on an area of service delivery that was provided informally by waste pickers. KKPKP feared that the municipality would contract a private company to collect waste from households, reducing waste picker livelihoods. The union therefore used the passage of the legislation as a strategic opportunity to reach a formal agreement with the municipality for waste pickers to provide the service (KKPKP 2009).

KKPKP did not want a contract with the municipality that fed into neoliberalization of the state. It wanted waste pickers to be formally charged with collecting waste and paid for this service, but it also wanted the state to remain involved in service delivery, and to ensure that residents' needs were met and that their involvement in and control over waste management services increased (KKPKP 2009). In 2005, KKPKP partnered with the municipality and SNDT Women's University to pilot a door-to-door programme based on these principles. The Pune Municipal Commissioner authorized KKPKP to conduct collection services and provided it with equipment and space. Waste pickers received training and were responsible for the implementation of the programme. They collected the waste from people's homes, retrieved and sold the recyclable materials, and deposited the remaining waste in municipal containers or compost pits. They were paid directly by the residents of apartments, which facilitated the development of a direct relationship with the people they were servicing. Through this pilot, KKPKP proved that waste pickers were capable of delivering services to residents. Rates charged depended on the area and were determined by the class of the residents (SNDT Women's University and Chintan Environmental Research and Action Group 2008).

In 2006 the Municipal Commissioner appointed a Steering Committee—which included KKPKP— to oversee the restructuring of the city's waste management system. Based on the committee's recommendations, the municipal general body approved the formation of a cooperative of waste pickers that would perform door-to-door collection and would receive support from the council for five years. This was subsequently amended to allow poor people who had not previously worked as waste pickers to join.

In response, in August 2007 waste pickers formed the Solid Waste Collection and Handling (SWaCH) cooperative, India's first cooperative of self-employed waste pickers and other members of the urban poor. In 2008, SWaCH entered into a memorandum of understanding with the Pune Municipal Corporation to conduct door-to-door waste collection. Waste pickers earned income from the sale of recyclables and from a service fee paid by residents. A lower fee charged to slum residents was supplemented by the municipality. Following the model used in the pilot, to strengthen relations and increase accountability,

SWaCH members collected fees directly from residents and waste pickers were directly accountable to local citizen's groups.

As in Belo Horizonte, the municipality recognized that it is difficult for waste pickers to establish organizations that are financially viable from inception. The Pune Municipal Corporation therefore committed to providing the co-operative with funds for handcart maintenance, uniforms, gloves, insurance, and other necessary requirements/services for the first five years. For the same period, it also agreed to provide SWaCH with training and to conduct awareness raising with residents (Chikarmane 2012: 7-8 SNDT Women's University and Chintan Environmental Research and Action Group 2008: 51-52, 106). The memorandum of understanding expired in 2013 and SWaCH no longer receives support from the municipality, but services continued to be provided and governed in the same manner (Chikarmane 2014: 14). As of April 2014, SWaCH's 2,300 members collected 600 tonnes of waste a day (90 tonnes of which was recyclable) from 375,000 non-slum households and 28,716 slum households (Chikarmane 2014: 11). Through SWaCH, waste pickers' incomes increased by 40 per cent, their daily working hours decreased, and they gained a weekly rest period[3] (SNDT Women's University and Chintan Environmental Research and Action Group 2008: 106).

The Importance of Local Context

SWaCH's success in Pune led the municipal corporation in the neighbouring city of Pimpri Chinchwad to approach the cooperative in 2009 and request that SWaCH take responsibility for collecting waste and recyclables in two of the city's wards. At the time, KKPKP had 1,000 members in the city. The municipality had received a grant that provided small trucks for door-to-door collection and which also prioritized recycling and social inclusion.

SWaCH saw the expansion to Pimpri Chinchwad as an opportunity to improve the conditions of waste pickers in the city. The use of trucks introduced a new element, but could potentially help to modernize the system and further strengthen the position of waste pickers and collectors. As in Pune, cooperative members were to collect user fees from residents. The municipality was supposed to conduct public outreach to encourage residents to pay, and was also supposed to pay SWaCH a subsidy over the first five years to support the cooperative while residents gradually became accustomed to paying for the service.

However, the system fell apart relatively quickly after it started in November 2010. The municipality did not pay the full subsidy, expected SWaCH members to perform additional, unpaid tasks, and did not assist with outreach to encourage residents to pay. Many residents did not believe that the SWaCH members were legally entitled to request payment. They argued that their property taxes already included a fee for waste disposal and they did not want to pay an additional amount. Instead of supporting the waste pickers/collectors, local councillors—heading into an election in 2011— actively fed into this misconception and denounced the user fees.

Then, in 2011 the municipality issued a tender for collection of waste in two other wards in which the service provider would be paid by the city out of the existing rates. SWaCH argued that this created an unfair situation. When the city refused to address the inequalities, the cooperative eventually terminated the contract. However, SWaCH was subsequently successful in negotiating a requirement that the new contractors hire waste pickers and pay them the minimum wage (de Brito 2014; SWaCH Cooperative 2013).

In seeking to understand why the SWaCH approach failed in Pimpri Chinchwad when it succeeded in Pune, de Brito notes the challenges raised by introducing motorized vehicles. Given the short time frames, existing waste pickers could not be trained to drive them, and so outsiders who did not feel they owned the initiative needed to be hired. Perhaps more importantly, de Brito highlights differences in the political contexts in the two cities. While the Nationalist Congress Party is strongly dominant in Pimpri Chinchwad, there is more political diversity in Pune, which allows for a wider range of opinions among politicians and

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3 Personal communication with Malati Gadgil, former SWaCH Coordinator, January 20, 2015.

citizens. There is also less history of the municipality working with social movements in Pimpri Chinchad than in Pune, and in Pimpri Chinchwad the politicians are seen to be more beholden to business lobby groups (de Brito 2014). The failure of KKPKP and SWaCH to introduce the same approach in the neighbouring city of Pimpri Chinchwad reveals the challenges in transporting approaches to new contexts, and the central importance of local histories of mobilization by waste pickers, local political dynamics, and the nature of orientation of the local state.

Bogota – From Neoliberalization to Remunicipalization (and Possibly Back Again)

Two distinct initiatives have been undertaken in Bogota, Colombia to formally include waste pickers (or *recicladores* as they call themselves) in the municipal waste management system. The first was started in 1994 by the local government, initially as a short-term measure to help break a strike by municipal waste workers and then as part of the process to implement privatization. The second, current initiative was driven by waste pickers and opened a space for a new mayor to attempt to reverse privatization and bring waste management back into the public sector, which was reconceptualized to prioritize social and environmental justice and include waste pickers. Opposing forces subsequently attempted to remove the mayor from office over these very efforts to democratize and expand the public sector. The Bogota case clearly demonstrates how the formal inclusion of waste pickers can either facilitate or undermine neoliberalization, depending on how it is conceptualized, the politics that underpin it, who drives it, and how it is linked to broader social, political, and economic agendas. It also reveals the profound challenges encountered when trying to undo neoliberalization of the state and remunicipalize services, particularly in a context in which the power of private capital has been strengthened by more than two decades of privatization.

Contemporary struggles around the privatization and remunicipalization of waste services in Bogota are shaped by the city's unusually long histories of public provision of waste management services, the collection of recyclables by waste pickers, and organization by waste pickers. The politics of waste cannot be divorced from the broader commitment to neoliberalism within Colombia and the heavy-handed enforcement of a right wing political agenda, which includes violence against waste pickers as described below.

History of Public Waste Management Services and Collection of Recyclables in Bogota

Government has been involved in the collection and disposal of waste in Bogota for almost 140 years. In 1875 the council established a body of watchmen tasked with ensuring the city's cleanliness, beautification, and health and safety. In 1884 the first tax was imposed on businesses to finance waste services; an Agency for Public Cleanliness was established in 1902. The institutional location of waste services underwent a number of transformations over the first half of the twentieth century until 1958, when the municipality established a public service enterprise called *Empresa Distrital de Servicios Públicos de Bogota* (EDIS), which was given sole responsibility for the collection and disposal of the capital's waste among other functions (Ruiz-Restrepo and Barnes 2010: 48–50).

Ruiz-Restrepo and Barnes argue that the collection of recyclables is an integral part of waste management services and the government is therefore responsible for ensuring the provision of recycling services. The legal argument for this position was strengthened with the passage of Law 142 in 1994, which made the provision of public services the responsibility of the state even if it outsources them, as well as Decree 1713 of 2002 that explicitly includes recyclables in the definition of solid waste and requires the state to include recycling in an integrated solid waste management system (Ruiz-Restrepo and Barnes 2010: 55, 56, 58, 62).

However, Ruiz-Restrepo and Barnes note that the state had not historically included recycling in the waste management system and that the city's waste pickers "have been almost exclusively developing the recycling trade for nearly one hundred years in the only niche available to them for ensuring their survival"

(Ruiz-Restrepo and Barnes 2010: 66). Medina also cites this long historical time frame, observing that it is likely that waste pickers have been working on dumpsites in Colombia for at least a century. According to Medina waste pickers became more prominent on the streets of large cities such as Bogota in the 1940s and 1950s, when WWII rendered raw materials scarce and large numbers of people fleeing political violence in the countryside discovered they could make money in the city by selling recyclable materials to industry (Medina 2007: 153–55).

Oldest Waste Picker Movement in the World

The long history of waste pickers' presence in Colombia's cities is accompanied by a long and proud history of collective organization by waste pickers. Indeed, Colombia boasts the oldest known waste picker movement in the world, with the first cooperative formed in Medellín in 1962 (Medina 2007: 155–56). It was a movement born of repression, dispossession, and struggle. As in Belo Horizonte and Pune, support from nongovernmental organizations also played (and continues to play) a critical role in providing essential support to assist waste pickers to organize (Medina 2007: 156–163; Rosaldo 2014: 1; Samson 2009b: 33–4). And, as I will argue below, just as in Belo Horizonte and Pune, the political orientation of outside support agencies and allied movements also shaped and influenced the ways in which waste picker organizations understand the state, the visions that they have for transforming it, and the ways in which they engage it.

Locating the history of organizing by Colombian waste pickers within a context of severe violence, Medina notes that the stigmatization and marginalization that waste pickers experience the world over reached its apogee in Colombia, where starting in the 1980s waste pickers, sex workers and beggars were labelled "disposable" by right wing groups who killed or forcibly removed them from the cities as part of a process of "social cleansing". By 1994 approximately 2,000 "disposable people" had been murdered. In one horrific 1992 case, 40 waste pickers in Bogota were killed, their organs sold for transplants and their bodies bought by the university for dissection by medical students. Medina argues that while this repression and violence made the work and lives of waste pickers dangerous and difficult, it also played a key role in spurring waste pickers to begin organizing in the 1980s in order to defend their lives and livelihood (Medina 2007: 155–56).

Violence continues to shape and affect organizing by waste pickers. Leaders face continual harassment and threat of violence from right wing paramilitaries who seek to prevent progressive and left groups from organizing, threats which have been stepped up in recent years as the *Asociación de Recicladores de Bogota* (ARB) has taken on the state through legal battles described below (Rosaldo 2014: 25; Samson 2009b: 11).

In the mid-1980s waste pickers were also pushed to start organizing by a shift in Colombian waste management policy which led to the replacement of the open dumps, where waste pickers worked, with sanitary landfills where reclaiming was forbidden. Waste pickers therefore faced large-scale dispossession and loss of their livelihood. While the first cooperative of displaced waste pickers was formed with government assistance in 1984 in Medellín, subsequent cooperatives were formed without such support from the state. From 1986, however, support came from an important new source, when the nongovernmental organization *Fundación Social* began providing waste picker organizations with assistance to form local, regional, and national associations as well as significant financial aid (Medina 2007: 156–59). Although the *Fundación Social* ceased working with waste pickers in the late 1990s, in recent years Colombia's waste pickers have brokered support from a range of local and international nongovernmental organizations, pro-bono lawyers, and donors. They have also developed relations with waste picker organizations around the world through continental and global "waste picker" networks (Samson 2009b).

Organizing in Bogota followed a similar path as in the rest of the country. The city soon became the heart of the Colombian movement. The ARB was formed in 1990 by three cooperatives fighting the closure of

their dump. By 2013, the ARB brought together 17 grassroots organizations representing 1,800 waste pickers (Táutiva and Olaya 2013: 6). Although the ARB represents only a small percentage of the 13,694 waste pickers recorded by a 2012 waste picker census as working in the city (Táutiva and Olaya 2013: 8), it plays a critical role in shaping and leading struggles to formally integrate waste pickers into the municipal waste management system.

Formal Inclusion of Waste Pickers, Round One – Forging the Neoliberal State

The first effort to formally integrate waste pickers was squarely located within the municipality's neoliberalizing agenda. In step with the global trend towards neoliberalization of the state, in 1994 the Colombian national government passed the *Ley de Servicios Públicos Domiciliarios*, which promotes privatization and outsourcing of public services (Ruiz-Restrepo and Barnes 2010: 50–1). This created a framework for the Bogota Council to decide to close EDIS and privatize waste services. When the municipal waste management workers went on strike in opposition to the privatization plan, the municipality contracted the ARB to collect waste. Waste pickers also continued to collect recyclables, but were not paid for this. The strike was unsuccessful and the municipality began to liquidate EDIS and privatize waste management. Between 1994 and 1996, EDIS was reduced to providing only 45 per cent of waste services in the city and another 45 per cent was provided by private companies. With the support of *Fundación Social*, the ARB provided services in the remaining 10 per cent of the city. But this inclusion was destined to be short-lived; when EDIS was completely closed in 1996, the municipality gave seven-year contracts for the entire service to large private companies. Waste pickers were once again shut out of the system (Ruiz-Restrepo 2008: 2; Ruiz-Restrepo and Barnes 2010: 101; Samson 2008: 67).

In this first period of formal integration, the ARB was clearly used by the municipality to break public sector unions and hollow out the local state. The ARB was, however, a willing participant and did not appear to have qualms about the broader political implications of its involvement in this process. In a 2009 interview, Nohra Padilla, a founding member of the ARB and its Executive Director, reported that the ARB took the contract to continue collecting waste as the fight against privatization had been lost and they felt it would be better for waste pickers to get the contract than private companies. This response skirted the issue that the ARB had contributed to the failure of the strike by acting as scab labour.[4] Padilla did note, however, that as the ARB's main concern is improving the livelihoods of its members it would likely not have a problem bidding for contracts on work currently conducted by municipal workers (Samson 2009b: 80). Unlike KKPKP, in this period the ARB did not, therefore, have a principled political position opposing neoliberalization of the state and seemed to see neoliberalization and privatization as a strategic opening for them to formally enter the municipal waste management system.

Formal Inclusion of Waste Pickers, Round Two – Opening a Window (But Possibly Closing the Door) for Remunicipalization

This political orientation and framing of the relationship between waste pickers' struggles for inclusion and the broader nature of the state has had profound implications for the form and nature of future waste picker struggles, as well as for the ability of others to use these struggles as a wedge to open up more radical projects of state transformation.

Ruiz-Restrepo and Barnes note that the first period of formal inclusion "allowed the waste recyclers to realize their business and public service provision capacity and potential" (Ruiz-Restrepo and Barnes 2010: 101). In preparation for the issuing of a new tender to provide waste management services in 2003, the ARB found international partners and secured legal assistance to submit a bid. However, they were

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4 It should be noted that Ruiz-Restrepo and Barnes assert that the waste pickers started providing services during the strike with the "acquiescence of the public servants on strike" (Ruiz-Restrepo and Barnes 2010: 101). They provide no evidence to support this claim and do not explain the conditions that would have induced the union to acquiesce to the waste pickers breaking the strike. It is hard to imagine a scenario in which a union striking to prevent privatization would have willingly accepted the contracting of scab labor during the strike.

precluded from doing so as Law 142 of 1994 stipulated that only stock corporations could provide waste services in large cities. In addition, the terms of reference required that companies have direct experience in cities of more than five million people in the preceding five years. The ARB's lawyers provided pro bono assistance and secured a Constitutional Court ruling. The ruling stated: that it was unfair to exclude cooperatives from bidding; that the terms of the proposed contracts would deepen marginalization and discrimination faced by waste pickers; that waste pickers are a vulnerable group who merit special protection by the state; and that it is the responsibility of the state to build the capacity of waste picker organizations to compete for future tenders. Unfortunately, by the time the Court reached its judgment, the municipality had fast tracked the issuing of the contracts and so the ARB needed to wait for the next tender, scheduled for 2011 (Ruiz-Restrepo 2008: 2–6).

In the intervening years, the ARB and the *Asociación Nacional de Recicladores* (ARN) took forward a number of other Constitutional Court cases that built on one another and clearly established the right of waste pickers to compete for recycling contracts. At the time of the 2003 Constitutional Court case over the Bogota contract, the ARB also challenged National Decree 1713 of 2002, which made rubbish placed outside of buildings the property of private consortiums collecting waste in the area--meaning that waste pickers could be charged with theft for taking recyclables out of the waste bins (Ruiz-Restrepo 2008: 6). The Court overturned this aspect of the Decree. However, in 2008 the government passed Law 1259 that created an environmental fine for opening garbage in public places. The ARN used the case of waste pickers who had been evicted from a dump in Cali to challenge Law 1259. The ARN's lawyers argued that if Law 1259 remained in place, the waste pickers would not be able to generate an income working in the streets. The Court suspended the application of the law in Cali. It ordered the municipality to issue human rights writs of protection to provide basic social rights to waste pickers and said the municipality must establish a multi-stakeholder committee to develop a separation at source programme that included waste pickers (Ruiz-Restrepo and Barnes 2010: 111–14; Samson 2009b: 69–71).

In 2010, when the *Unidad Administrativa Especial de Servicios Públicos* (UAESP) opened up a public bid for the running of Bogota's Doña Juana landfill, the Constitutional Court ruled that the tender had not complied with the 2003 court ruling. It ordered the UAESP to ensure that bidders partnered with waste picker organizations. After the contract was awarded to a company that partnered with a newly formed cooperative, the ARN returned to the Constitutional Court, which ruled that there must be a process to verify the legitimacy and legality of waste picker organizations, that a census of waste pickers be conducted, and that municipalities must develop affirmative actions to include waste pickers (Parra 2015).

Finally, in 2011, when Bogota issued the new tender, it was clear that the municipality had done nothing to build the capacity of the waste pickers to compete for the bid. The waste pickers returned to court. The legal team drew not only on the previous precedents, but also on contacts developed through the Global Alliance of Waste Pickers to provide concrete proposals based on progressive, inclusive approaches in Brazil and India that remunerate waste pickers for providing an environmental service to the city. Persuaded by these arguments the Constitutional Court refused to allow the municipality to proceed with the tender and ordered it to develop a plan to give waste pickers the exclusive right to recyclables in the city, to create an integrated waste management system that built on the existing informal system, and to pay waste pickers for extracting recyclables from the waste stream (Parra 2015; Samson, Parra, and Abizaid 2014).

All of these cases were based on arguments related to the need to protect the human rights of waste pickers, who were cast as a particularly vulnerable group in need of protection of the state. It is crucial, however, to note, that they were also grounded in a framing of waste pickers as entrepreneurs whose Constitutional right to compete in the market was being threatened by exclusionary policies. Two lawyers who were involved in arguing these cases have said that they needed to make a strategic decision between framing waste pickers as workers whose right to work was being violated or as entrepreneurs whose right to compete was being undermined. They note that waste pickers typically resist choosing one over the other,

but that the legal team determined they would have greater success in court by focusing on entrepreneurial rights (Ruiz-Restrepo and Barnes 2010: 93–95). Writing about the Cali case they elaborate:

> …the CiViSOL Foundation decided to argumentatively seek and secure entrepreneurial space and rights for waste pickers. This does not imply that waste pickers should somehow discard their worker status; it only implies that their entrepreneurial capacity as own account workers typically, and conceived within a solidarity based organization or enterprise, might provide a greater possibility of securing a more ample and better future for their dignified life, work and development in Colombia. While structuring the legal arguments of the case, CiViSOL characterized the waste pickers as own account workers and highlighted their role as micro-entrepreneurs in a lucrative waste economy. As waste was now a successful business, and following Colombia's Social Rule of Law, it was necessary to secure the waste pickers' place as entrepreneurs in the waste economy and to ensure their access to waste so as to develop and nurture their traditional entrepreneurial initiative, innovation, organization, waste and recycling know-how and labor capacity
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> Ruiz-Restrepo and Barnes 2010: 95

The Challenges to Remunicipalizing Waste

As in the past, the authorities in Bogota did little to implement the court's ruling that they must incorporate and pay waste pickers. However, in January 2012 Gustavo Petro assumed office as mayor. A former leftist guerrilla, he was not only committed to including waste pickers in the waste management system, but saw the requirement to do so as a strategic opening to develop a new public waste management system focused on promoting environmental and social justice and prioritizing public interest (Samson, Parra, and Abizaid 2014).

Petro adopted a development plan called "Bogota Humana 2012-2016", which fundamentally reoriented and restructured waste management services in the city by introducing three critical changes to the city's waste management system. First, it is a zero waste plan that prioritizes reducing the creation of waste, transforming industrial production, and increasing recycling and composting. Second, in order to address the court's ruling, a system was created to register waste pickers and then pay them a fixed rate per kilogram of recyclables diverted from the waste stream. When added to the money they earn from selling the recyclables, this has significantly increased their incomes (Parra 2015). Third, Petro sought to completely end the costly privatization contracts that a 2012 report by the Auditor General found had led to an overcharging of residents of between 20 and 23 per cent profit by the private companies. Instead, as part of Petro's plan, all waste would be collected and disposed by the municipally owned *Aguas de Bogota* (Valenzuela 2013).

Petro developed a phased approach to implementing his plan. He began paying individual waste pickers in March 2013 (Parra 2015). In order to ensure a smooth process of remunicipalization, Petro wanted to extend the existing contracts with the private contractors for six months while he built capacity within the state to deliver the service. But the four companies did not want to lose their lucrative contracts. According to Emilio Tapia, the key witness in the ongoing "Merry Go Round" corruption scandal that brought down Petro's predecessor, they calculated that, "the city cannot take three days of garbage. That is enough to bring down the mayor."[5] So they refused the short-term extensions of the contracts, sent their trucks for maintenance and conspired to create a crisis. Trash was not collected for three days in December 2012 and eventually Petro was forced to grant the companies contracts to collect waste in 48 per cent of the city.

He did, however, manage to change the basis on which the companies were paid. In the past they had received a percentage of the service fee, which created an incentive to massively inflate charges to

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5 Translation by Olga Abizaid.

residents. Petro changed this to a fixed monthly fee. Together with the partial remunicipalization of waste, this led to a 37 per cent reduction in the cost of waste management services in the city (Valenzuela 2013).

But Petro's efforts to remunicipalize waste and transform the service in the public interest enraged a right wing contingent already alarmed by the leftist's strong showing in the previous presidential elections and his victory as mayor of the country's capital. On December 9, 2013, the country's extremely conservative Inspector General Alejandro Ordóñez ordered that Petro be removed from office and banned from politics for 15 years for having endangered public health during the short garbage crisis and for the partial remunicipalization of waste, which Ordóñez ruled was a "violation of the principle of free enterprise" (Vieira 2013). Petro labelled this a "right wing 'coup' orchestrated by Colombia's ruling elite" (Wyss 2013). The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) leadership declared that it threatened peace talks that were underway with government and made a farce of claims that Colombia is a liberal democracy (Wyss 2013). Tens of thousands of protestors took to the streets on a daily basis to defend Petro (Vieira 2013; Wyss 2013). Both Petro and a private citizen launched legal challenges to the mayor's ousting. But on March 20, 2014, one day after the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights instructed the President of Colombia not to enforce the Inspector General's ruling, the President proceeded to uphold it and remove Petro from office. Petro responded by stating that this revealed that "voting is useless in Colombia", that he "was not born in a generation that has been accustomed to kneel before the Colombian oligarchy", and that he would lead an uprising of citizens to "force the oligarchy to convene a constituent (assembly) to make peace" (Staff Writer 2014). Although a court returned Petro to office in April 2014, nothing could reveal more starkly the profound stakes in seeking to reverse privatization and the ways in which remunicipalization is bound up in much larger politics.

The ARB and Bogota's waste pickers came out strongly in defense of Petro. Although they had criticisms of his model and argued that state control of the service would not necessarily advance the interests of waste pickers, they recognized the gains that they had made and feared that these would be undone when he was removed.[6] It was, however, unclear if the ARB came to share Petro's vision for a transformed and stronger public sector, or whether they remained agnostic to the broader form of the state as long as their interests are met. Regardless, it is useful to explore the implications of the strategies that they employed to secure their own inclusion for Petro's broader efforts to radically transform the state and the public sector.

In seeking to explain the rise of the Colombian waste picker movement in the contemporary era, Rosaldo highlights the significance of support from NGOs, the adoption of a new Constitution in 1991 that includes human rights provisions, and the entrenchment of neoliberalism and the associated privatization of waste. According to Rosaldo, privatization threatened waste pickers' livelihoods when contracts were given to large private companies, but also created the opportunity for them to receive contracts themselves. Further, the new Constitution provided them with the legal basis to launch this claim (Rosaldo 2014).

All of these factors were important in explaining why the movement arose. But if we want to also grapple with the political orientation of the movement and the type of demands waste pickers developed, it is necessary to understand the dynamic interplay between these three factors and the ways neoliberal hegemony shaped and infused the nature of the constitution, the support received from some key NGOs, and the political goals and tactics adopted by the ARB. Although the Constitution includes important commitments to human rights, it also entrenches the rights to private property and free economic competition (Republic of Colombia 1991). It clearly falls within what Gill (1998) calls the "new constitutionalism", which locks in neoliberalism by constitutionally entrenching the rights of capital. The existence of these provisions created the opportunity for the waste pickers and their legal team to argue that their human rights were violated when they were precluded from competing for the contracts. But the decision to frame their case this way was a political choice rooted in the lawyers' and the movement's acceptance of neoliberal restructuring of the state. While Petro tried to use the need to include waste pickers within the waste management system as an opportunity to reverse privatization and remunicipalize

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6 Personal communication with Federico Parra, December 13, 2013.

waste, he could not, therefore, rely on legal precedent established in the waste pickers' cases, as they had strengthened, instead of undermined, the centrality of the right to compete. The way the waste pickers' framed their cases therefore bolstered the Inspector General's claim that Petro's withdrawal of the provision of waste services from the market undermined free competition. Indeed, the main lawyer who represented the ARB adamantly opposed Petro's plan and argued that waste services should not be provided by the state.[7]

In sum, the formal inclusion of waste pickers in Bogota's waste management system was undeniably an important victory that has transformed the state by integrating waste pickers in a way that recognizes their service and on terms that improve their incomes and the conditions of their work. It did not, however, fundamentally undermine neoliberalization of the state. While the formal inclusion of waste pickers opened a window for Petro to attempt to remunicipalize waste, the arguments on which the waste pickers predicated the motivation for their inclusion potentially aided the Inspector General's attempt to close the door on this more radical transformation of the local state—or at the very least did not counter it.

Conclusion

This paper critically analyzed approaches to integrating waste pickers into municipal waste management systems in Belo Horizonte, Pune, and Bogota, in order to explore whether and how the informal economy can be included in municipal service delivery in ways that challenge, as opposed to facilitate, neoliberalization of the state. Together, the initiatives in the three municipalities did so in a number of ways.

Rather than engaging in a privatized expansion of the public sector that dispossessed waste pickers of a sphere of accumulation they had created informally (Samson 2009a; 2013), the three municipalities expanded the public sector to include a new service (collection of recyclable materials) in ways that granted waste pickers official control over this activity. Instead of being exploited as a source of cheap, informal labour, waste pickers in both Bogota and Pune are paid for the service they provide and still earn an income from the sale of recyclables they collect. This has dramatically increased their monthly incomes as well as their income security. The Belo Horizonte agreement does not include payment to individual waste pickers, but by providing a subsidy to their cooperatives, it has boosted organizational capacity to develop collective initiatives (such as joint sale of recyclables in order to achieve higher prices and the building of a plastics recycling plant) that allow the waste pickers to increase their work security, move up the value chain, and improve their incomes (Dias and Cidrin 2008: 30).

Even before KKPKP, the union, negotiated for the cooperative SWaCH to be officially contracted by the municipality in Pune, the union established that waste pickers who work informally provide an important municipal service and should therefore receive benefits from the state (Chikarmane and Narayan 2005: 14–16; SNDT Women's University and Chintan Environmental Research and Action Group 2008: 49). This was an important recognition that municipal employees were not the only people who provided municipal services, and that the state bore responsibility for people performing municipal work even if it did not employ them. It established an important principle not only for other informal workers but also for workers employed by privatized and subcontracted companies delivering municipal services. Additionally, it expanded the notion of what constitutes a municipal service, and laid the basis for KKPKP to negotiate formal agreements with the municipality by establishing both that recycling is part of the municipal waste management system and that waste pickers founded this service.

This expansion of the understanding of what constitutes a municipal service was taken even further in Belo Horizonte, where the municipality not only included collection of recyclables within the waste management system, but transformed its very conceptualization of waste management services. Through engagements

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7 Personal communication with Federico Parra, 13 December 2013.

with Asmare and the waste pickers, the municipality came to understand that rather than just being a technical issue, waste management services are social, cultural, political, and economic (Dias 2011a; Samson 2009a).

Once the municipality had re-imagined the service in this way, it needed to reconceptualize and restructure how delivery of the service was governed. It developed structures of collaborative governance, including a Collegial Board with representatives from Asmare and NGOs to oversee selective collection, followed by a fully inclusive Waste and Citizenship Forum. Including all stakeholders in the governance of the service ensures that it correctly identifies and meets the real needs of communities receiving the service as well as of the workers delivering it (Dias and Cidrin 2008: 32-3). Most creatively, it established the Social Mobilization Unit within the waste management department. Staffed by social scientists from a range of disciplines, the unit was charged with building the capacity of waste pickers and their organizations and transforming how they are seen by and relate to the city's residents (Dias and Cidrin 2008: 28, 32; Dias 2011a: 3–4; Horn 2008: 2–3; Samson 2009b: 55).

Drawing on the work of Judith Butler (2004) I argue that transforming how waste pickers are seen by themselves, residents, and the state is a crucial preliminary step to processes of formal integration, as without such an "ontological insurrection" they are dismissed as "scavengers" who do not have the right to appear in the public sphere, let alone negotiate formal agreements with the state (Samson 2009a: 18). Normally, this ontological insurrection is fiercely waged by waste pickers against the state as they struggle to be accepted as legitimate stakeholders in municipal waste management and important negotiating partners. Significantly, in Belo Horizonte the state expanded its own mandate to make the public administration responsible for working with the waste pickers to achieve this insurrection and ensure that waste pickers could claim their place in the public sphere (2011a 3). To a lesser extent, the Pune municipality also accepted this role (SNDT Women's University and Chintan Environment Research and Action Group 2008: 108). Failure of the municipality in Pimpri Chinchwad to engage residents on the important contributions of waste pickers is a primary issue behind the failure of the initiative to formally integrate waste pickers in that municipality (de Brito 2014: 13-14).

Transforming how waste pickers are seen by residents is important on a number of levels. It is crucial in ensuring they are not harassed, marginalized, and victimized and are able to do their work. In Pune, where waste pickers are paid directly by residents, it also increases payment rates. But most importantly, it transforms the nature of the public service by forging new, respectful social relations between workers who provide services and residents who benefit from them. The KKPKP made a strategic choice to have residents pay waste pickers directly, and to be responsible for overseeing service delivery, precisely in order to help facilitate the forging of these new bonds. This is seen as an important aspect of transforming how the state, workers, and residents relate to one another and are all involved in the provision of public services (KKPKP 2009; Samson 2009a; SNDT Women's University and Chintan Environmental Research and Action Group 2008).

None of the municipalities explored above democratized and expanded the public sector in all of the ways identified in this paper. The one commonality between all three municipalities was that the processes to formally include waste pickers were driven by waste picker organizations that explicitly sought to transform the public sector and their place within it. There is, therefore, an important relationship between progressive transformation of the public sector and public sphere and the existence of strong, democratic waste picker organizations with the capacities to develop political demands rooted in clear visions for the transformation of the state, an understanding of the nature of the state, and the political context that allows them to develop successful strategies and to mobilize to achieve their goals.

As further elaborated below, in the three cities these capacities were shaped by a number of factors, including: the historical development and nature of the municipal waste management systems; the political orientation of the political parties in power locally and nationally; national policy and legislation related to waste management; local governance and regulations; the strength and nature of broader social

movements and how waste pickers related to them; the extent and nature of support from government, NGOs and other civil society organizations; the political orientation of these external supporters; and, ultimately, the political orientation, vision for the state, and strategic and tactical decisions of the waste picker organizations themselves.

The development of formal waste management systems has followed different trajectories in different cities. This has had profoundly different implications for the types of labour performed by informal waste pickers and the strategic choices they face as municipalities seek to include recycling in their waste management systems. In Pune, the municipality had not historically conducted door-to-door waste collection. Waste pickers could therefore begin to deliver this service without negatively affecting existing municipal workers or narrowing the public sector (KKPKP 2009). However, in Bogota, the municipality had a long history of collecting waste from residences (Ruiz-Restrepo and Barnes 2010). By agreeing to be contracted by the municipality to provide this service, the waste pickers in Bogota therefore undermined existing municipal workers and fed into the privatization and neoliberalization of the local state. Due to the more confined historical scope of the waste management system in Pune, waste pickers in that city were not faced with this strategic and political dilemma (Samson 2009b).

The wider political context also shapes the political openings available to waste pickers as well as their political visions for transformation of the state. The strength and orientation of political parties and social movements are particularly relevant, as is the legislative context. Waste pickers in Belo Horizonte benefited tremendously from the rise to power of the PT, first within the city and then nationally. The PT was born of an alliance with social movements and had an explicit political agenda of democratizing the state, transforming society and the economy, and ensuring that the state engages with flourishing left social movements in Brazil and meets the needs of the oppressed and marginalized. Strong, radical social movements in other sectors (such as the Landless People's Movements) provided inspiration and solidarity for waste pickers, and the national waste picker movement (the MNCR) is explicitly committed to a leftist agenda and democratization of the state, economy, and society. The decentralization of power and authority to municipalities created the space for the local council to undertake initiatives to expand the public sector and public sphere to include waste pickers, and once the PT took power nationally, it passed legislation that bolstered local initiatives to formally integrate waste pickers and improve their status and conditions (Dias and Cidrin 2008: 16–7; Samson 2009a: 4, 5, 86, 87).

By contrast, waste pickers in Bogota function in a context in which power is highly centralized around an extremely repressive, right wing political oligarchy; trade unions and social movements are violently suppressed. In the country with one of the highest murder rates of trade unionists in the world, it is not surprising that the waste pickers prefer to form cooperatives and associations. It is harder for waste pickers to imagine a radical democratization of the state—they have fewer allies, and, until Petro was elected, they faced local and national governments that opposed their claims. Unlike in Brazil, they had neither a government willing to partner in a transformative project nor progressive legislation to bolster their claims. The one legal avenue readily available to them was a Constitution rooted in neoliberal new constitutionalism (Gill 1998). This political context shaped the tactical and strategic choices of the ARB to rely on Constitutional litigation that did not fundamentally challenge neoliberalization of the state.

The political orientation of, and strategic choices made by waste picker organizations are also shaped by their engagements with external support organizations. Based on extensive research and experience working with Asmare and the MNCR in Brazil, Dias has long argued that NGOs, political parties, religious organizations—I would add lawyers and universities—often play critical roles in catalyzing organizing of waste pickers and supporting their struggles (Dias 2000; Dias and Cidrin 2008), a point reaffirmed by research in a range of other contexts (Chikarmane and Narayan 2005; Medina 2007; Samson 2009a).

Rosaldo also notes the role played by NGOs in forming the ARB and assisting it to win greater support for waste pickers from the state, and argues that this reality challenges the strong version of the NGO-ization thesis that NGO's deradicalize social movements (Rosaldo 2014). Yet, like the NGO-ization literature that

he critiques, Rosaldo pays insufficient attention to the importance of the political orientations of specific NGOs being studied. As the KKPKP Secretariat argues in relation to the emergence of the waste picker movement in India, the approaches that different support organizations take to organizing waste pickers depend on their political orientations and philosophies (Central Secretariat KKPKP 2009a: 37). There is, therefore, a deeper critique, rooted in the need to interrogate the politics of particular support organizations and how they shape and influence the politics and goals of social movements.

For example, although the ARB received significant support from lawyers, key members of the legal team did not support remunicipalization and had a narrower agenda that simply sought to include waste pickers within competitive, private sector service provision.[8] They played a central role in framing the ARB's vision for the inclusion of waste pickers in service delivery as entrepreneurs in a way that did not challenge neoliberalization (Ruiz-Restrepo and Barnes 2010). By contrast, the imprint of feminist academics from SNDT University in Pune committed to Freirian methodologies (Freire 2000 [1968]) and socialist democratization of the state is evident in KKPKP's focus on developing an alternative to contracting models and its demands for social benefits for waste pickers and their children.

Comparative analysis of the social histories of waste picker organizations in the three cities explored in this chapter demonstrates the crucial importance of developing a nuanced understanding of political diversity among support groups and how their particular political commitments inform their approaches to organizing, how they relate to waste pickers, the types of education and capacity building they conduct for waste pickers, the debates and networks they expose waste pickers to, and ultimately how they seek to influence the politics of the waste picker movements.

Waste pickers and their organizations do not, however, passively adopt the political orientations of their support organizations. At times the relationships can be fraught with political tensions, with waste pickers even needing to wrest control of their own organizations away from those who helped form them (Samson 2009a). As Dias notes, frequently waste picker organizations engage with a number of NGOs with different political perspectives, each of which must be strategically engaged by the waste picker organization.[9] While the political commitments of support organizations and the broader political context shape the political orientations of waste picker organizations, they do not determine them. Ultimately, these waste picker organizations determined their own political principles, vision for the state, and the strategies and tactics they employ to achieve this vision. Their internal structures and decision-making processes inform how positions are developed, the extent to which they are supported throughout the organization, and how members mobilize around them. Within every context, waste picker organizations are capable of developing a range of different perspectives on how the state should be transformed, and the approaches they advocate represent political choices. The processes through which they make their strategic decisions therefore need to be critically analyzed.

The waste picker organizations in Belo Horizonte, Pune, and Bogota all relate to one another and a range of other waste picker organizations through the Global Alliance of Waste Pickers. With the support of international organizations such Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO) and the Global Alliance for Incineration Alternatives (GAIA), they have engaged in important processes of sharing their ideas and experiences in conferences and learning exchanges, and have taken inspiration from each others' successes. For example, the Bogota court case presented models of integration from Pune and Diadema, Brazil to argue that there is a precedent for paying waste pickers for the service they provide.

However, experiences cannot simply be transplanted from one city to another. The failure of SWaCH in Pimpri Chinchwad, despite the fact that the city neighbours Pune and the waste pickers are represented by the same union, demonstrates the crucial importance of local political context. Political differences between the waste picker organizations also affect the extent to which different approaches align with and foster

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8 Personal communication with Federico Parra, 13 December 2013

9 Personal communication with Sonia Dias, 14 October 2014.

their own visions for the state, economy, and society. Through engaging with one another and debating and sharing their experiences, waste picker organizations can, however, assist one another to critically reflect on their own goals, strategies, and tactics, and develop new visions for the state and their relationship to it. Taken together, these multiple approaches can assist us in thinking through what it means to undo neoliberalization of the state and to democratize and expand it in the current conjuncture.

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About WIEGO: Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing is a global research-policy-action network that seeks to improve the status of the working poor, especially women, in the informal economy. WIEGO builds alliances with, and draws its membership from, three constituencies: membership-based organizations of informal workers, researchers and statisticians working on the informal economy, and professionals from development agencies interested in the informal economy. WIEGO pursues its objectives by helping to build and strengthen networks of informal worker organizations; undertaking policy analysis, statistical research and data analysis on the informal economy; providing policy advice and convening policy dialogues on the informal economy; and documenting and disseminating good practice in support of the informal workforce. For more information visit: www.wiego.org.

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