

David Christoffer Lier

The Practice of Neoliberalism:

Responses to public sector restructuring
across the labour-community divide
in Cape Town



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NIBR-Report 2009:12

Title: **The Practice of Neoliberalism:**
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restructuring across the labour-
community divide in Cape Town

Author: David Christoffer Lier

NIBR Report: 2009:12
ISSN: 1502-9794
ISBN: 978-82-7071-783-5

Financial supporter: University of Manchester

Abstract:

This thesis examines the politics of municipal work and service delivery in Cape Town, South Africa. In particular, this study analyses the concomitant processes of employment casualisation, commercialisation of services and depoliticisation of industrial relations. The research conducted has focused on how different groups of workers have been affected by these neoliberal public sector reforms and, importantly, how they have responded as organised labour.

Summary: English

Date: March 2009
Pages: 360
Price: NOK 350,-

Publisher:: Norwegian Institute for Urban and Regional Research
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Telefax (+47) 22 60 77 74
E-mail: nibr@nibr.no
<http://www.nibr.no>

Printed: Nordberg A.S.
Org. no. NO 970205284 MVA
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Preface

This report is David Christoffer Lier's thesis submitted to The University of Manchester for the degree of Doctorate of Philosophy. David was based at the Geography Department of the School of Environment and Development in Manchester from 2005 to 2008, before being appointed as a senior researcher at the Norwegian Institute for Urban and Regional Research in October 2008.

The topic of the thesis, reforms in municipal services and local government in urban Africa, has become subject of international debate in recent years. The particular focus on the way in which these politics plays out in the post-apartheid governance of South African cities places this work firmly in line with the interests and research experience of several staff members in NIBR's international department. By linking these debates to the perspective of organised labour and political mobilisation on the ground, this study is also positioned within a wider framework of local civil society dynamics in the global South, another of NIBR's fields of expertise.

The issues raised and the analytical approach taken in this academic work warrant the publication of this thesis as a part of the NIBR Report series.

Oslo, March 2009

Marit Haug
Research Director

Preface

This thesis is the end product my years at the University of Manchester studying for the degree of PhD Geography. From 2005 to 2008, I did my research based at the School of Environment and Development (SED), which proved to be a stimulating environment for studying the politics of labour and the state in a South African city.

I am grateful to the University and to SED for the human and financial resources that I have benefited from during these three years. The research has been funded by a three-year Graduate Teaching Fellowship (GTF) and a two-year Overseas Research Studentship (ORS) from the University of Manchester. I was very lucky to work closely with a supervisory team consisting of Dr. Neil Coe and Professor Noel Castree, and the academic community of young researchers and prominent scholars in the field of human geography in Manchester gave me encouragement and backing throughout the process.

An important part of my PhD project was the 6 months that I was able to spend doing fieldwork in Cape Town. This period of intensive qualitative research – conducting interviews, digging my way through piles of documents and visiting workplaces and offices – was only made possible with the active support of a number of accommodating individuals. I couldn't have written any of this without the support the South African Municipal Workers' Union (SAMWU) offices in Athlone, and in particular Lance Veotte, Stanley Yisaka, Leon Johannes, Peter Africa and Mario Jacobs. Many other unionists also deserve thanks. Equally important was the goodwill of the City of Cape Town. David Beretti showed me incredible hospitality and a genuine interest for my project, which literally opened many doors in local government. Yolanda Scholtz, Allizon Sangster, Ivano Mangiagalli

were also very helpful. The University of Cape Town, and in particular Sophie Oldfield and Sue Parnell at the Department of Environmental and Geographical Sciences, provided me with institutional support and good advice which I am grateful for. Likewise, Jonathan Grossman, Nicholas Henwood and Jan Theron have been very helpful as conversation partners. The Mennen family gave my wife and I a wonderful place to stay during my fieldwork semester. Thanks also to Valencia, Thanduxolo, Kathrine and our other Capetonian friends.

I owe the Department of Sociology and Human Geography at the University of Oslo thanks for continuing to show an interest in my academic work since I left them, and to Kristian Stokke and Marianne Millstein for getting me interested in Capetonian politics in the first place. The Norwegian Institute for Urban and Regional Research deserves thanks for their facilitation of my PhD viva and the printing of this thesis.

Finally, I should give credit to my family and friends for having been there for me, and to my wife – and sometime fieldwork companion and transcribing aide – for making these three years a much less selfish experience than it could have been.

Oslo, March 2009

David Christoffer Lier

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Summary

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The contested politics of municipal work and service delivery in Cape Town, South Africa illustrates many of the dilemmas facing organised labour in times of state restructuring. Parallel processes of democratisation and neoliberal reform have reconfigured the City of Cape Town as a municipal institution, and this has fundamentally transformed the workplace of municipal employees – as well as restructuring service delivery systems in the city. In particular, this study examines the processes of casualisation of work, commercialisation of services and depoliticisation of industrial relations. Conceptualised as *neoliberal restructuring*, the research conducted has focused on how different groups of workers have been affected by these reforms and, importantly, how they have responded as organised labour.

This theoretically informed case study links ongoing debates around labour, space and capitalism with a particular context where workers have been challenged by state restructuring. A review of recent conceptual advances in labour geography is coupled with a discussion of the relevance of state theory approaches to the politics of public sector work. This thesis also asks whether this Anglo-American academic framework is applicable to the post-apartheid context. Making use of qualitative methods, different political actors have been interviewed and various sources of documentation have been analysed in order to give an in-depth understanding of the contested restructuring processes in the City of Cape Town (CoCT) since 2000. Attention

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is directed to the strategies and reflections of employee representatives and senior management in the municipality.

Several key insights flow from this thesis. Firstly, it addresses the need for developing labour geography as an analytical framework to understand the challenges of workers in the world economy. More specifically it offers some conceptual tools to better explain the impacts of neoliberal state restructuring on public sector workers. Secondly, it explores the scalar dilemmas posed to local government actors, when political crises at other spatial scales are displaced to the local labour market. Thirdly, it sheds light on the concept of fragmentation, as experienced by workers in their workplaces and communities. By so doing, this case exemplifies how neoliberalism threatens worker solidarity and shuts down spaces for progressive community politics. Fourthly, it highlights one of the key contradictions of neoliberalism in local government: namely, how the potential for union-community mobilisation against commercialised service delivery is jeopardised by the concomitant casualisation of municipal jobs, a process that pits different groups of workers against each other in competition for employment opportunities in a neoliberal labour market.

Abbreviations

AEC	Western Cape Anti-Eviction Campaign
ANC	African National Congress
APF	Cape Town Anti-Privatisation Forum
BEE	Black Economic Empowerment
CBO	community-based organisation
CCMA	Council for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration
CEE	Central and Eastern Europe
CMA	Cape Metropolitan Area
CoCT	City of Cape Town
Concerns	Concerned Residents' Forum
COSATU	Congress of South African Trade Unions
CTMWA	Cape Town Municipal Workers' Association
DA	Democratic Alliance
DLG	Development Local Government
EPWP	Expanded Public Works Programme
FEDUSA	Federation of Unions of South Africa
GDP	gross national product
GEAR	Growth, Employment and Redistribution plan
GM	General Motors
IHRG	Industrial Health Research Group
ILRIG	International Labour Research and Information Group
IMATU	Independent Municipal and Allied Trade Union
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IDP	Integrated Development Plan
J4J	Justice for Janitors
KWNS	Keynesian Welfare National State
LGNF	Local Government Negotiation Forum
LRA	Labour Relations Act
Metro branch	Cape Metropolitan Branch of SAMWU
MSP	Municipal Services Project

NBCRFI	National Bargaining Council for the Road Freight Industry
NEDLAC	National Economic Development & Labour Council
NGO	non-governmental organisation
NP	National Party
NPM	New Public Management
NUMSA	National Union of Metal Workers of South Africa
PPP	Public-private partnership
PUP	Public-public partnership
RDP	Reconstruction and Development Programme
RED	Regional Electricity Distributor
RED1	national RED pilot project in Cape Town
SACP	South African Communist Party
SALGA	South African Local Government Association
SALGBC	South African Local Government Bargaining Council
SAMWU	South African Municipal Workers' Union
SANCO	South African National Civics Organisation
SMI	Social Movement Indaba
SWPR	Schumpeterian Workfare Postnational Regime
TEDCOR	The Entrepreneurial Development Corporation
UDF	United Democratic Front
UK	United Kingdom
US	United States
WFAC	Water For All Campaign
ZAR	South African rands

1 Introduction

1.1 The politics of water and waste

Every morning, before many Capetonians wake up, the streets outside their houses are getting busy: refuse trucks and other equipment are set in motion to keep the city clean. During the night, many of the households have had their toilets emptied and cleaned – after all South Africa is a country where waterborne sanitation is still a luxury. All this work is, obviously, done by workers. So is reading electricity meters and fixing water leaks. Without their labour, some of the most basic needs of their fellow inhabitants would remain unattended. This is why this work is often labelled ‘public services’. Many public services are reliant on localised systems of delivery and distribution, and those who carry out this work have traditionally been employed by local government and given status as ‘municipal workers’. Municipal workers in Cape Town have a fascinating story to tell. Some parts of this story, such as the role they played in the anti-apartheid struggle, are shared between most of them. But at other points in this narrative, their experiences diverge. This is the case with the ‘bin man’ in the Kuilsriver community who has been working on a municipal refuse truck for many years, but without the salary level and the benefits enjoyed by the other workers on his truck. Another untold story is that of the workers in Khayelitsha who are collecting toilet containers at night, dressed in old council uniforms – but without an employment contract. These individual stories of powerlessness are important, because they reveal a public sector which has marginalised groups of workers in the post-apartheid period.

But municipal workers in Cape Town can also tell tales of collective strength. Many of these workers are organised in trade unions or are actively engaged in community politics in their neighbourhood. The most visible of these organisations is the local branch of the South African Municipal Workers' Union (SAMWU) with a membership of 10,000 workers. Their collective strength is wielded when workers feel that their work is not valued as it should be. Even those who are lucky enough to have a proper 'council job', feel that their future employment prospects are jeopardised by an employer who seems to prefer contracting out the work they are doing, rather than making use of their labour power. Managers in the municipality and the private companies, as well as some politicians, argue that this is a part of a change that has been necessary to give a better and more affordable service to all Capetonians. But many workers are not convinced by this argument, feeling that many services have not improved and that paying their bills is getting more expensive. No wonder this frustration has given rise to a whole variety of political expressions, particularly in the areas where people of colour have only been allowed to express their democratic opinion freely for less than two decades.

This thesis explores the politics of municipal work and municipal services in Cape Town, South Africa. As is evident from this introduction, it is a topic which directly affects workers hanging onto their refuse trucks as they move through the streets. At the same time, it is a study of the political and managerial elite in local government, whose thinking shape the way this work is managed. Finally, a handful of people in a worn-down office in a suburb of Cape Town are granted particular attention. Their role as local SAMWU officials is to represent these workers, backed by more than a hundred shopstewards across the city. But they do not see their duty ending when their members are getting a decent wage. Rather, they want to build a political organisation that addresses the questions of municipal work and service delivery as a concern of the entire working class. They are the ones who have made street sweeping, water meters, refuse collection and toilet cleaning into a burning political issue in Cape Town – an issue worth fighting for and an issue worth studying. These trade union activists have managed to mobilise political opposition by employing a language of 'privatisation' and 'anti-privatisation'. This

thesis, however, focuses on the different yet related concept of 'neoliberalism'. One of the objectives of this introduction is to attribute this term with meaning and show its applicability to the study of public sector unionism in South Africa.

1.2 The practice of neoliberalism

The title of this thesis deserves some explanation, which also offers an opportunity to introduce four underpinnings on which the analysis of 'the practice of neoliberalism' is based. The term 'neoliberalism' has become a keyword in social sciences. It has been used to refer to a specific economic theory penned by a handful of economists, but also to a post-war political project implemented by certain state leaders in the Anglo-American world, a development paradigm promoted by international financial institutions and an analytical framework to describe a set of economic restructuring processes (Larner 2007). Precisely because of this widespread and varied use, a clarification is necessary. In this text, neoliberalism will primarily be treated as a set of processes which can be categorised as neoliberal because they in one way or another facilitate "the liberalisation of trade, the privatisation of state assets, the use of market proxies in the public sphere, and reduced welfare spending" (Larner 2007:7). In contrast to popular accounts of neoliberalism as a historical epoch (Harvey 2005; Klein 2007), this project does not deem processes as neoliberal because they can be traced to certain thinkers, politicians or institutions, but rather insofar as their effects in the real world correlate with the definition given above. Hence, the first connotation of the title of this thesis is that neoliberalism is something which is *practiced*.

Secondly, the practice of neoliberalism should not be understood merely as an agenda implemented by practitioners: neoliberalism is always a *contested* practice. Neoliberal processes often involve a range of actors from the political elite, private companies and civil society organisations. Because this is a study of municipal work and service provision, certain actors are more prominent in the analysis than others. Recent work in human geography has highlighted the role played by workers and organised labour in contesting the practice of neoliberalism. Often labelled as 'labour geography', this stream of research has not only documented how

neoliberal processes prey on workers' wages, working conditions and social networks – but also how workers organise to engage with, and resist, these practices. To actively make use of the insights from this approach, this thesis contains an in-depth literature review and theoretical critique of labour geography. The key insights flowing from this discussion are embedded in the subsequent analysis of the case study.

Possibly as a result of neoliberalism's connotations of state withdrawal, there is tendency to treat neoliberal contestations as something happening independently from the state. This is a problematic notion, and leads onto the third tenet of this analysis, namely that the contested practices of neoliberalism are *intimately linked to the state*. The state is here understood both as an institutional apparatus which implements and regulates neoliberal processes, as well as a site which hosts the struggles over these political projects. To give these assumptions a proper conceptual treatment, a theoretical framework is needed that perceives the state as playing different roles in economic restructuring processes – while at the same time being influenced and shaped by other social actors. Therefore, this thesis includes a discussion of Jessop's (1990) strategic-relational approach and of contributions in human geography that have elaborated on this theory and made it more applicable to contemporary debates within the discipline.

Finally, the practice of neoliberalism should be understood as a *set of spatial practices*. This is an important point for several reasons. Neoliberal restructuring processes involve a reorganisation of space, which give certain actors, scales and places prominence at the expense of others. This means that the contestations which are at the centre of this study must also be understood as spatial: as struggles between constituencies, political scales and locations in the political economy. Neoliberalism is also spatially practiced as an analytical tool because the sophisticated framework that has evolved in social sciences around this concept is grounded in particular cases which, in turn, are grounded in particular historical-geographical experiences. This is a caution for all researchers trying to adapt the framework of neoliberalism to contexts outside the 'comfort zone' of this academic research agenda. South Africa represents one such example, and this thesis offers a sympathetic critique of the applicability of this theoretical framework in the South African post-apartheid reality.

1.3 Research objectives

Even though the emerging stream of research that is referred to as labour geography still encompasses relatively few authors and texts, it nevertheless reflects a divide that also characterises studies of labour outside geography; namely, the distinction between the debates around the political dynamics of organising, on the one hand, and the more structural analyses of labour markets and economies, on the other. The analysis which is presented in the last chapters of this thesis tries to bridge these two foci. It does so by tracing a process of neoliberal restructuring in the City of Cape Town (CoCT) from the realm of policy-making – understood as state interventions into the labour market and the sphere of reproduction – to the sphere of community politics and industrial relations which awaits such a political project as soon as its implementation creates repercussions in the lives of working people. The main objective of this thesis is to uncover the impact of neoliberal restructuring on workers, their social reality and their political opportunities.

The scope of this research project could be defined as the political economy of a particular section of a particular labour market, namely the municipal labour regime in Cape Town. Following from this, particular attention is given to the public sector. It is a basic tenet of this thesis that the work (and the politics of work) in this sector is worth scrutiny in its own right. Firstly, this context is interesting due to the interconnections between the state-as-employer, the service delivery systems managed by local state structures and the state as a political apparatus accommodating democratic practices. As will emerge from the empirical findings, organised labour can potentially confront the local state in any of these capacities. This produces a multi-relational and utterly complex political dynamic. Complexity here pertains not only to the situation of those involved in public sector politics, but also to any researcher trying to make sense of the relationship between organised labour and the state. One of the objectives of this research is to map these dynamics between actors in the Cape Town case, to see how they are related to other political actors and scales – and to assess its relevance for our understanding of labour geographies in the public sector.

Secondly, the location of municipal workers in the political economy does not only put them in an ambiguous position *vis-à-vis* the local state, but also in relation to the communities around them. Again, multiple roles describe this relationship: family members and dependants, fellow users of basic services, neighbours, members of community organisations. The list goes on. What begs attention in the analysis of public sector unionism is the way in which organised workers confront their communities as political subjects. Community organisations can be allies in struggles around service delivery and other issues that go beyond the workplace. This potential for joint mobilisation has been emphasised by progressive unionists and radical academics in debates and literature on new forms of organising (see, for example, Moody 1997; Wills 2001). Other case studies have revealed – and this will be a key theme of this analysis – that there are also social issues which put public sector unions in more problematic positions in relation to other groups of worker and community members. This thesis will examine the potential for progressive solidarity alliances, and the contradictions which these will need to overcome, in the case of local state restructuring in Cape Town.

1.4 Thesis outline

The thesis is structured around two main rationales. The first half presents a theoretical, analytical and methodological framework which prepares the ground for a theoretically informed case study of municipal reforms in CoCT, constituting the second half of the thesis. The field of labour geography is explored in *Chapter Two*. Based in a Marxist understanding of the politics of labour, this chapter establishes links between workers under capitalism and the key concepts of contemporary geography – such as space, place and scale. As suggested above, it traverses from the conceptualisation of local labour markets to the role of *labour agency* in the geographies of capitalism. The scalar strategies of labour, from labour internationalism to community-oriented unionism, are discussed with regards to the industrial relations between employers and employees as well as in relation to the wider sphere of social reproduction that all workers are embedded in. The chapter provides a framework for understanding how workers – in

times of economic restructuring and neoliberalism – are presented with *new geographies of work* and how organised labour employ different socio-spatial strategies to confront these challenges.

Chapter Three introduces the other theoretical foundation of this thesis: state theory in general, and the dynamics of public sector restructuring in particular. Key concepts of regulation theory are introduced in relation to Jessop's strategic-relational approach, as well as the notions of hegemony and corporatism as ways of securing capital accumulation through political means. The discussion moves from the conceptual to the contextual, discussing the political dynamics of the state and capitalist accumulation as it has evolved over time, and created a variegated landscape of state regulation across the world. It is thereby acknowledged that this conceptual framework cannot be transferred in an unaltered form to national contexts beyond the Anglo-American world (such as the South African case). The latter half of the chapter contains an in-depth discussion of the concept of *neoliberalism*, and specifically the relationship between neoliberal processes and certain subnational scales: the local state and the urban political economy. These theoretical reflections on the state are brought together at the end of the chapter, as the dynamics of local state restructuring and public sector reform are addressed. By doing so, the chapter brings the conditions of labour back into the discussion, by locating public sector workers within a neoliberal political economy.

Chapter Four serves to concretise and complexify the preceding chapters by bridging this conceptual framework with the reality of post-apartheid South Africa. Two perspectives take centre stage in here: the historical experience of the South African labour movement and the transformations of the South African state. Key concepts which have been introduced in the previous chapter – such as *hegemony* and *corporatism* – are revisited in the South African context. The post-apartheid local government system is given particular attention, both as an institutional structure and as a political issue which has been subject to intense contestation in recent history. The potential for political agency by municipal workers emerges as a critical aspect, both in relation to their role in South African trade union politics and with regards to their location in the urban political economy. The journey from theoretical debate to a concrete case is completed with the

presentation of the research questions at the end of the chapter. As a logical next step, the methodology of this project is presented and discussed in *Chapter Five*. Based on certain philosophical underpinnings, notably critical realism and dialectical thinking, the theoretically informed case study at the core of this thesis is outlined. The chapter details the qualitative research methods that were used in the data collection, with a particular emphasis on interviews and documentary analysis. The chapter is concluded with some reflections concerning the practice of doing research in a politicised field.

Chapter Six presents a detailed background of the restructuring processes which have taken place in the Cape Metropolitan Area (CMA) since the days of apartheid. It maps the spatial amalgamation of a highly differentiated, and racially segregated, regulatory landscape from the chaotic dynamics of the political transition to the highly institutionalised system of local government which has emerged in Cape Town since 2000. With particular reference to the sectors of electricity, water and waste, the chapter focuses on how these changes have impacted on service delivery: corporatisation of service directorates, the introduction of cost recovery mechanisms and outsourcing of delivery functions are given particular attention. But the institutional restructuring of CoCT also had profound impacts on the municipal labour regime, and this chapter traces the institutional and bureaucratic reforms in the municipal staffing system. The chapter ends with an analytical separation between all post-apartheid institutional and political change, on the one hand, and those elements which can be conceptualised as *neoliberal restructuring*, on the other hand.

The social impacts of this neoliberal restructuring are examined in *Chapter Seven*. The most evident processes in this regard are the commercialisation of service delivery, the casualisation of municipal work and the depoliticisation of labour relations. Separated analytically, the social impact of these processes are interwoven and create significant repercussions in the lives of workers, in the relationships between different groups of workers and in relation to the political representation of these groups. The chapter uses three local subcases within the metropolitan area as a lens to examine the contradictory pressures of casualisation on particular groups of workers in Cape Town communities. It also

contains a discussion of the relationship between community groups and unionised workers, and how the neoliberal restructuring has challenged the interaction between them. Finally, it highlights how institutional change has been accompanied by deunionisation in the municipal labour regime, and what this means to workers and their political representation.

Chapter Eight sees these structural changes in light of the intense political contestation which has engulfed political restructuring in Cape Town. While a range of social actors have been involved in these politics, the chapter looks particularly at the local union organisation, the Cape Metropolitan branch (the ‘Metro branch’) of SAMWU. The political strategies of the Metro branch are seen in relation to the social impacts of restructuring outlined in the previous chapter. In this way this thesis, which starts with a discussion of the agency of labour, is brought back to its point of departure. The relationship between the union and other civil society actors is treated as one of three strategies characterising the politics of the union since apartheid. This form of social movement unionism is flanked by attempts to recruit private company employees, while maintaining open channels of communication with the CoCT as an employer and a political authority. By maintaining this multi-faceted profile, the union attempts to fight commercialisation, casualisation and depoliticisation at the same time. The empirical and theoretical contributions of this thesis are brought together in *Chapter Nine*, which is the final chapter. It concludes with some reflections around the limitations of this research, and proposes areas for future research and analysis.

2 Labour geographies

2.1 Introduction

Labour, capitalism and space are central concepts within the critical geography tradition. Their interplay constitutes the theoretical entry point of this thesis. The concept of labour has interested economic geographers for a long time, but more often as a cost that influences investment decisions than as a social force in its own right. Recently, however, geographers have begun putting the politics of labour at the forefront of their analysis. Herod argues that this conceptual development of labour from a locational factor in a neoclassical economy to an active spatial agent in the making of geographies, represents a shift from 'geographies of labour' to 'labour geographies' (Herod 2001:12). Throughout the last 15 years or so, labour geography has emerged as a discernible strand of research within a wider Anglo-American Marxist-inspired geography tradition. Labour geographers are occupied with the related tasks of understanding how capitalism constitutes the spatial conditions of workers – their geographies – and how workers themselves and their organisations take part in shaping these geographies.

While the researchers who identify with this field might have found an interest in labour for many different reasons, some underlying explanations can be identified of why the geography discipline in the 1990s became increasingly attentive to the *agency* of workers: firstly, economic shifts have put the trade unions on the defensive which has sparked debate in the union movement and amongst radical scholars as to how these challenges should be tackled; secondly, there has been a growing frustration in the social sciences with the perceived failure to recognise the agency of social

actors; and thirdly, and related to the previous point, economic geographers were still largely engaging in structuralist Marxist analyses with an empirical focus on firms, not workers. Interest in organised labour as a subject of geographical scrutiny can be traced back to Clark's (1989) study of deunionisation in the US, as well as a debate set off by Martin *et al.*'s (1993) article on union decline and local union traditions in the UK (see also Massey and Painter 1989; Massey 1994; Painter 1994). These early studies dealt with broad geographical changes in union membership and union density at a national level, often by making use of union membership records and quantitative analysis. More recent studies of unionism in geography, however, have favoured qualitative case studies of particular places and union campaigns. The latter trend emerged in the US during the 1990s, much helped by the influential contributions of Herod (see, for example, Herod 1997; 1998). By focusing on the organised expressions of workers, labour geography as understood in this narrow sense does not constitute a complete geography of work. Moreover, it exists parallel to – and, I would argue, as a useful supplement to – the renewed interest in class processes under the ‘new working class studies’ heading within the geography discipline (Stenning 2008; Wills 2008).

This chapter aims to show how this tradition has contributed to an understanding of workers under capitalism. It is not an exhaustive review of the literature, as it emphasises contributions with particular relevance to this study. Section 2.2 serves as a general introduction to the theoretical framework by bringing in some key concepts of Marxist labour theory and shows how these can be understood geographically. The ties between labour and place are discussed in Section 2.3, with a particular focus on the regulation of labour markets. The remainder of the chapter directs attention to the politics and strategies of labour. Section 2.4 follows the theoretical evolution of the ‘labour geography’ approach as it has re-conceptualised labour agency. Sections 2.5 and 2.6 explore the concept of scale as a point of entry to understanding the political opportunities of unionism. As a counterpoint to questions around national and international union strategies, Section 2.7 returns to a focus on place, workplace change and patterns of consumption. As a response to these new geographies, Section 2.8 concludes the chapter by mapping the geographies of community-oriented

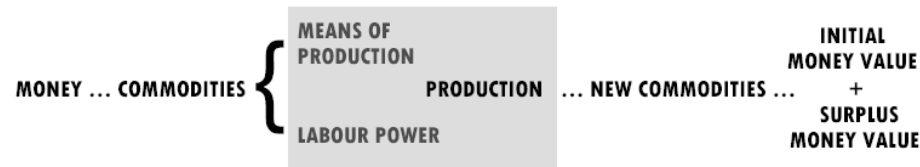
organising, through looking at how certain union strategies make use of spatial and social strategies to resist and shape these changing geographies of work.

2.2 Workers and the geographies of capitalism

Workers are integral to every aspect of capitalism, and are instrumental in shaping its geographies. Human geographers have made important theoretical contributions on the connections between labour, capital and space, by drawing on a long and rich tradition of Marxist capital analysis (Harvey 1982; Massey 1984; Smith 1984; Lefebvre 1991 [1974]). Capitalism is here understood as a dynamic, albeit contradictory, process that occupies and produces space. The survival and growth of the capitalist system is secured in place – through social and political infrastructure and the built environment – and across space, through geographical expansion. The geography of capitalism is one of unevenness between and within regions, where pre-existing spatial arrangements are used to produce new scales to overcome the internal contradictions of capital accumulation. The conceptualisation of labour in Marxist geography is closely linked to Marx's development of the labour theory of value in *Das Kapital* (Marx 1976 [1867]). Marx saw labour power as a fundamental category in capitalist production. Waged workers and capitalists are mutually dependent upon each other through the employment relation, where labour power is purchased as a commodity in exchange for money, i.e. workers' wages. The capitalist system of production is based on the purchase of two forms of commodities: *labour power* and the *means of production*, the latter being machinery, materials and everything else which is necessary for labour to produce. Labour power and the means of production come together in capitalist production to produce new commodities, which can be sold for money. For capital to accumulate, the sale of these commodities must generate surplus value in addition to the initial money value (Hudson 2001; Castree, Coe et al. 2004). As this money is reinvested in commodities, what Harvey (2001 [1985]) refers to as 'the primary circuit of capital' is complete. When capitalist production becomes the dominant system in a society, the workers are forced to sell their labour power to

survive. From a Marxist perspective, this leads to the capitalist exploitation of the working class.

Figure 2.1 *The primary circuit of capital*



Source: Harvey (2001 [1985]:312)

Although workers sell their labour-power as a commodity, workers themselves are not real commodities. They are sentient and social beings, and products of a society they themselves have been instrumental in creating. Because they have the capacity to work, and can (or are forced to) sell their labour-power as a commodity, labour can be seen as a *pseudo-commodity* (Hudson 2001). The relationship between employee and employer is a contested one, but the latter maintains the upper hand by dominating the production process. In contrast to slavery, capitalists purchase workers' labour-power and not the workers *per se*. Still, capitalist production is subject to continuous social struggle and negotiation. In the study of capitalism, one fact remains as obvious as it is important; namely that the drive for capital accumulation takes place within capitalist societies. Hence, capitalist production should be analysed as a socio-political – as well as an economic – phenomenon. For Marx, a capitalist society was essentially a class society structured around the fundamental conflict between the bourgeoisie (the capitalist class) and the working class. While contemporary capitalist societies are more complex than this dichotomy suggests, capitalism continues to create class processes leading to social inequality and conflict.

Marxist geography emerged in the early 1970s arguing that 'geography mattered' to the dynamics of capitalism. This argument is not merely another way of saying that economic processes are happening in space. Rather, Marxist geography argues that capital accumulation is – in its very nature – a spatial process. In other words, capitalism can not be understood properly without looking at it as a set of spatial dynamics. One of the central insights to

emerge from this perspective is that the process of capital accumulation is *inherently expansionary*. “Geographical expansion”, says Harvey (1982:428), “provides a strong basis for sustained accumulation”. The search for new markets and ways to make profit, as well as the constant need to overcome its own internal crises, leads capitalism to spread out across space. Hence, an increasing number of workers and places around the world are brought into the same capitalist system of exploitation and interdependence (Smith 1984).

But expansion pertains to more than the geographical spread of capitalism (Hale and Wills 2005:4-5, my emphasis):

“Since the 1970s, technological, political and economic developments have conspired to propel a powerful new form of capitalism into view. Characterised by its *networked form* and *global reach*, this model has profound implications for labour.”

The capitalist system is now not only global in reach, but also increasingly globalised in terms of the functional integration of the production process itself (Dicken 2003). The politics of production are therefore neither confined to the workplace nor to the industrial relations of the nation-state. Socio-economic processes at the global scale often impose fundamental limitations on seemingly local issues. As stated in the quote above, the networked nature of the global economy brings workers from different corners of the world into connection with each other. This can happen through being employed by the same transnational company, located in the same commodity chain or by taking part in global patterns of consumption. Potentially, this could create new webs of solidarity between workers across space. The expanding nature of capitalism has implications for the underlying relationships between the workers of the world as a whole. Hence, from an *analytical* point of view – as a *class-in-itself* – the deepened spatial integration of the world economy implies the emergence of a global working class.

Capitalism is also fundamentally shaped by another spatial characteristic. It is *inherently uneven*. In fact, its unevenness can be said to describe the very nature of its geographical expansion (Smith 1984:155):

“Uneven development is both the product and the geographical premise of capitalist development. As product, the pattern is highly visible in the landscapes of capitalism as the difference between developed and underdeveloped spaces at different scales: the developed and the underdeveloped world, developed regions and declining regions, suburbs and the inner city.”

Following from this, waged workers often find themselves in contradictory (and competitive) relationships with each other, and are often dissociated from fellow workers. Seeing the workers of the world as comprising a global working class might be analytically helpful, and a politically powerful polemic, but for the majority of the world’s waged workers this is not an experienced reality. Therefore, the working class as a *political* entity – as a *class-for-itself* – and the prospects of a global class-based movement might be said to be seriously challenged by the uneven development of capitalism.

This general look at the spatiality of the capitalist system, then, reveals an array of cleavage planes and axes of cooperation for labour (Hudson 2001). The global working class represents a diversity of people of different age, ethnicity and gender. Analytically speaking, workers are divided even before they enter the realm of capitalist production. Furthermore, Gough (2003) argues that worker differences within the production-side often have been left unexamined. Firstly, workers are divided by sector or industry. Different forms of capitalist production are subject to different material and political conditions which also affect the employment conditions and security of their workers. Many workers are also only indirectly related to capitalist production as portrayed in Figure 2.1; as their sector is occupied with the distribution and/or exchange of commodities. All in all, workers face different employers and different sets of regulation from one sector to another. Hence, the particular political issues and problems workers are facing might at any given time vary considerably between sectors. This has led union movements in many countries to establish sector-based trade unions, sometimes united at the scale of the nation-state in national union federations. Secondly, workers are divided through their different location within the labour process. These divisions are often exacerbated

through workplace restructuring such as intensification of the labour process, as it often unfolds unevenly and leads to increased exploitation of certain groups of workers (Gough 2003). Workers are also divided by competition between particular capitals. In other words, workers employed by competing firms can potentially perceive workers in other firms as rivals rather than allies. As will be shown below, this might also be the case with groups of workers living in different places which are fighting to attract the same source of investment. The working class is divided along several distinct dimensions, but Hudson (2001) is right in pointing out that these different divisions are experienced in their totality. Deconstructing them is an analytical, yet necessary, task in order to understand why certain groups of workers build strong links of solidarity and why others fail to do so. Such analyses could in turn be useful for the political strategies of the labour movement.

Just as the social world is in a process of constant change, these lines are also changing. As mentioned above, changes in the world economy mean that workers are connected through more extensive and complex networks than only a few decades ago. Also, a growing number of previously permanent workers find themselves under less secure, casualised and precarious working conditions. Furthermore, there are more women participating in the formal economy as wage-workers than ever before (Munck 2002). The list goes on. None of these aspects are non-spatial. Rather, they create intricate geographies which both labour and capital must navigate in order to defend their interests. From the standpoint of labour, a central insight here is that all working class organisations must continuously strive to understand and adapt to these changing conditions in order to represent working class interests to their full capacity. In many cases, this requires an evaluation of their political basis – be it a particular sector, a certain group of workers or a type of worker identity. Many trade unions have acknowledged that their membership base no longer reflects the socio-economic reality of the kind of work they are set to represent. Consequently, they are not in the best position from which to defend the interests of the working class. Following this train of thought to its natural conclusion, there has been recognition within the labour movement that there are certain boundaries to be transcended: be it across territorial borders, beyond defined sectors, or into other layers of the working class.

Of course, recognising this in word and writing is one thing; translating it into political practice is a far greater challenge altogether.

2.3 Regulating labour in place

As shown above, the injection of *space* into the analysis of capitalism is an important step towards understanding the connections and divisions between groups of workers. But another spatial concept – *place* – has been equally significant in conceptualising the geographies of labour. True, processes of economic globalisation have made processes in any given place more vulnerable to processes across capitalist space. But this is not to be confused with the assumption that places are of less importance in the context of globalisation. On the contrary, as capitalist production is increasingly being relocated; “*where* production occurs is becoming more rather than less significant” (Hudson 2001:255, emphasis added).

Places often mean quite different things to capital and labour. For labour, places are more than merely points of location for production. Places are where workers live and learn, and where they consume, socialise and reproduce. Workers are, for all of these reasons, based in places which they develop feelings and attachment to (Hudson 2001:263):

“[S]uch attachments are strongly indicative of the ways in which people live their lives as socialized human beings with ties of community, friends, and family and not merely as the abstract commodity labor-power.”

Employers might develop strong attachments to place, just like wagedworkers do. But in some cases, capital is more mobile than labour and can move investments from one location to another if it is perceived as more profitable to do so. Hudson (2001) argues that capital, in contrast to labour, can treat locations merely as temporary resting places and the decisions behind industrial location are often largely founded – one-dimensionally – “on their capacity to yield profits” (Hudson 2001:263). But capital does not just use space. It creates space by investing in and shaping the physical and social infrastructure. This paradoxically ties capital

more closely to place. As far as these ties are 'sunk costs' (Clark and Wrigley 1997), they might represent some security to workers in particular places. However, the dynamic nature of capitalism makes this security a temporary one – a “suspended animation” (Hudson 2001:261). Both capital and workers are vulnerable to devaluation (e.g. plant closures) during crises of profitability.

By coming together in place, labour and capital make capitalist production possible. But place is not an empty arena in which production is set up. Capitalist production can only make use of wagedworkers in socially constructed spaces that can supply the appropriate kind of labour-power – continuously reproduced at a reasonable price. Capital purchases labour-power in the context of the labour market, whose dynamics have been analysed and elaborated in the work of Peck (1996). He argues that every local labour market is a unique social space, with a particular kind of production and the social processes and regulatory structures which surround it.

From the employers' point of view, the labour market population should ideally provide enough labour-power at all times. Also, the social and professional characteristics in the working population should correspond with the labour skills needed in the production process. Moreover, capital needs to ensure that the perceived performance potential of the purchased labour-power is actually realised as labour. These processes are politically contested and subject to social regulation, as they concern the politics of unemployment, retirement, education and welfare (Peck 1996). In the workplace, the politics of production are often institutionalised through the organisations of capital and labour. Negotiations between them influence and enforce the terms of labour control, as they both manufacture consent and possess coercive powers (Peck 1996:32-33). Organised labour, typically in the form of trade unions, engages in the labour contract both by articulating collective claims and by disciplining workers into following the premises of this contract. Industrial relations form part of the “social relationships through which labour market processes are mediated”, and are critical in the study of labour (Peck 1996:34). In its totality, “the coordination and cooperation of social actors other than through markets” is what Gough (2002:406) refers to as the *socialisation* of capitalist societies.

Capitalist production – or the *sphere of production* – is dependent upon the ways in which workers consume and biologically reproduce, and how they learn, socialise and are being cared for – the *sphere of reproduction*. These two analytically separate spheres are in reality closely intertwined. Processes of reproduction happen for all kinds of reasons, but are often reliant upon and related to waged work. The fact that capitalist production, in turn, depends upon social reproduction of labour-power makes the analysis of one of these spheres incomplete without the other. The production process benefits from labour having developed social and technical skills outside the workplace, and the system of capitalist production often relies upon processes of exploitation in the domestic sphere. Peck (1996:38) exemplifies this by pointing out how stereotypical “women’s work”, such as waitress and care work, involve social skills developed in the domestic sphere. These jobs are typically low-paid, indicating that gendered exploitation in the spheres of production and reproduction tend to reinforce each other in the form of capitalism and patriarchal power.

As shown above, the geographies of labour are shaped by strong, place-bound links between production and reproduction. But the concept of place is also central to understanding how labour is *regulated*. Labour markets are complex and unruly. What goes on in the workplace is affected by what goes on in people’s homes and in public life. As the sphere of reproduction operates relatively autonomously from the demands of capital, capital cannot coordinate and control the reproduction of labour solely according to its own needs. In addition, capital itself is made up of a multitude of competing firms. Consequently, conflict is an inherent part of the capitalist system, as it follows a “knife-edged movement along a crisis-prone trajectory” (Hudson 2001:22). While the systemic failures of labour markets “implies the necessity of social regulation” (Peck 1996:42), the ways in which they are regulated, and by whom this is done, are context-specific and contingent. Production, reproduction and political control are too big and complex issues for even the biggest individual firms to manage in a socially acceptable way. Due to its size, its legal powers and monopoly of force, the state functions as the main institution for the social regulation of the labour market. A state can be relatively autonomous from the social forces of capital and labour. While this arguably makes it a suitable institution for

regulating the politics of production, this does not mean that the state is predetermined to intervene. Neither is it capable of solving, once and for all, capitalism's proneness to crises.

Analytically speaking, it is possible to separate abstract labour markets in need of regulation from the potential institutions and mechanisms regulating them. Historically, however, labour markets and labour regulation have developed together (Peck 1996). Local labour markets are unique, socially constructed spaces that generate uneven and varied geographies, even within the boundaries of the nation-state. The difference between local labour markets is accentuated by the deregulation and decentralisation of national labour market regulation. National governments' renewed emphasis on local economic strategies is, in Peck's opinion, complementary to global neoliberal trends of deregulation, flexibilisation and decentralisation. Peck draws on Burawoy's (1985) concept of *hegemonic despotism*, referring to the tendency in former Keynesian welfare states to localise labour regulation, fuelling local-local regime competition. This allows increasingly mobile capital investments to take advantage of place-bound and locally regulated labour, and effectively "putting labour in its place" (Peck 1996:232). As a provocative contrast to Peck and Burawoy's accounts, Walker (1999) argues that labour's inability to challenge the present situation is less a result of the actual global economic success of mobile capital over grounded labour. Rather, it is the result of capital's political success in depoliticising global competition and portraying the labour market as a natural dynamic, and hence convincing political actors that opposing these inevitable processes is pointless. Frequently, then, the main problem is *perceived* capital mobility rather than *actual* capital flight (Walker 1999:276-77):

"At the same time the unions were shrinking, companies became increasingly adept at using the threat of plant closure, relocation and global competition to extract concessions from workers. While corporations often had no intention of going anywhere, their threats were backed up by the evidence of massive foreign direct investment and some dramatic instances of moving factories abroad."

As Coe and Kelly's (2002) study of labour relations in Singapore indicates, the state can play a key role in maintaining this image of capital as mobile and labour as place-bound through discursive and representational strategies. The Singaporean state were making active use of a discourse of 'exogenous forcing': portraying the dictates of regional competitiveness and the need for 'up-skilling' as imperative, at the expense of a "short-term" lowering of employment conditions (Coe and Kelly 2002:368).

Although the post-Keynesian era is usually associated with the power asserted by capital moving freely in space over labour 'put in its place', processes of spatial restructuring may actually encourage capital to become more locally involved. While the 'rational tyranny' of capital mobility circumscribes local labour markets and disciplines collective worker interests, Jonas (1996:335, emphasis added) also sees capital's role in this picture as contradictory:

“Whereas *capital-in-general* is interested in the free and unlimited exchange of labour power, *particular capitals* are sensitive to the local contexts in which that exchange takes places.”

Jonas, like Peck, begins with the assertion that capital needs to influence the conditions under which labour power is reproduced and is integrated into the labour process. Deregulation of national modes of social regulation has increasingly exposed these conditions to the contingencies of the local labour market. Hence, capital must sometimes actively facilitate for “relations of reciprocity to develop around relatively autonomous sites of consumption and labour reproduction” (Jonas 1996:335). His conception of the *local labour control regime* explains how an intricate combination of mechanisms and actors regulates production and reproduction, hence (temporarily) producing relatively stable institutional frameworks for local labour relations (Jonas 1996; Jonas 1997). These regimes are products of struggle, which directs attention to the role of labour struggles and the politics of consumption, as well as the active agency of capital. By referring to the actions of US maquiladora owners in Mexico after the devaluation of the peso in 1995, Jonas shows how this approach is useful in explaining the seemingly contradictory role taken on by capital. In the wake of a devaluation of the peso, foreign

employers in Mexican border towns were supplying workers with food coupons and cash benefits to bypass the ceiling put on wage increases by state regulation. Here, capital directly intervened in the reproduction of labour (Jonas 1996).

Jonas makes a useful distinction between forms of restructuring that have implications for labour. In geographical terms, capital pursues two main strategies in order to increase labour control and exploitation. On the one hand, firms might choose to restructure *in situ*, and in the process externalise and socialise their labour costs. Firms can exploit the social divisions created by uneven development in urban labour markets through labour control enclaves. On the other hand, capital might choose to relocate. Jonas argues that there is a fundamental tension between particular capitals and capital-in-general which leads to intermitting strategies of restructuring *in place* and restructuring *across space* (Jonas 1996:328):

”To the extent that these practices are locally-specific, the labour needs of capital depend upon intra-locality relations of reciprocity as much as inter-locality variations in labour market conditions”.

Workers and their unions, then, must defend their jobs on two fronts. They must prevent their jobs from being *moved to other locations* where labour-power is cheaper or non-unionised, as well as stopping their jobs from being *moved out of their firm* or out of their legislative framework into the realm of casual labour. A better understanding how workers resist these restructuring processes requires a conceptualisation of labour agency within capitalist structures.

2.4 The spatial agency of workers

Herod (1998) argues that economic geography historically has gone through substantial shifts in its perception of workers' role in capitalist societies. The move from *neoclassical industrial locational studies* to *Marxist economic geography* entailed an ontological shift in the study of labour, as labour was no longer reduced to a mere cost in the production process. Still, he points out that what both these approaches had in common was a rather static view of

labour in capitalism. Admittedly, the Marxist turn entailed an understanding of waged workers and their labour-power as integral to the logic of capitalism. Still, however, workers seemed to be depicted as an oppressed class prohibited from actively creating the geographies of capitalism. Marxist economic geography asserted “capital as the primary maker of the geography of capitalism”, and thus left workers’ struggles “being somewhat secondary to the actual process of producing space” (Herod 1997:9-10). In other words, workers were not seen to produce geographies. If anything, they were only capable of modifying them.

As a counterpoint to this capital-centric tradition, Herod and other geographers have, in the last decade or so, attempted to recast labour as an active maker of social space. Labour geography provides some important insights into the agency of workers. Labour occupies many overlapping roles: as abstract labour in capitalist production, as organised labour in industrial politics, as income-earners and as social actors in relations of reproduction. Herod’s emphasis here is on how workers are proactive agents of change – as they “*actively produce economic spaces and scales* in particular ways” (Herod 2001:46, emphasis in original). Herod labels this approach ‘labour geography’, as opposed to what hitherto has merely focused on the ‘geography of labour’.

The call for a ‘labour geography’ also implies a politically motivated methodology. Labour-oriented research and theory certainly have a performative potential. In acknowledging worker agency in the theorisation of capitalism, a rather fatalistic discourse can be challenged (Herod 2001:36):

“Recognizing that different groups of workers may have, in very real ways, different options as a result of differences in where they quite literally stand in the world – global north or global south, for instance – provides something of a corrective to accounts that present workers either as inherently powerless and condemned only to follow the dictates of (global) capital or as simply dupes of capital.”

This argument is an important one. Labour geography represents a step in this direction, by depicting labour as active agents, whose actions generate new social and economic landscapes. But when

taking up this challenge there are also several pitfalls to avoid. Firstly, one should be careful not to separate the geographies of labour from the geographies of capital. Herod's point on whether worker politics *create* geographies "on their own" rather than *modify* the production of capitalist space can be read as a rhetorical rather than a substantive point. As Marx and Engels (1951) famously stated, the histories that workers make are not conceived under circumstances of their own choosing. This also applies to labour geographies. Workers worldwide might face very different circumstances in their struggle for a time and a space of their own, but one thing that does unite them is the fact that they find themselves (albeit at different locations) within capitalist space. In fact, labour geography case studies also show that the spatial strategies of labour are often most successful when they understand and make use of the spatial configurations of capital. Exposing and exploiting the weaknesses in capital's space production can indeed be a very effective way of creating labour geographies. Secondly, when labour geographers call for recognition of the agency of workers, it also begs the question: *which* workers are recognised as active spatial agents? This raises several related challenges. Echoing postcolonial and feminist critiques in general, labour geography must consciously include in its analytical framework often-neglected groups, voices and places. Thirdly, a narrow focus on the agency of workers and labour's spatial fixes runs the risk of neglecting the significance of the social embeddedness of labour agency. In particular, this regards the relationship between unions and other social actors, which will be considered in the final section of this chapter. The fourth point is related to all the above: researchers also face the risk of reducing workers to being just workers. The agency of workers can spring out of other identities, based in family relations, community structures, ethnicity and gender. As Castree (2008) argues:

“[T]he best kind of labour geography analyses the geographies of employment and labour struggle not in themselves but as a window onto the *wider* question of how people live and seek to live.”

The fifth and last point that is worth mentioning in this regard is how Herod's framework tends to overlook worker agency which is not articulated as collectively organised, political strategies. For example, as Castree *et al.* (2004:186) point out, “many

contemporary labour researchers do not discuss migration at all'. This is perplexing as migration is a spatial strategy employed by millions of workers to counteract the unevenness of capitalism. Like capital, labour can also be mobile, and labour mobility is a phenomenon that has received more attention in geography recently (e.g. Samers 2003). Labour migration is sometimes *collectively organised* (Jones and Pardthaisong 1999) and can give rise to particular forms of collective mobilisation (Mitchell 1996; von Holdt 2003). Moreover, it has an important cultural dimension: as workers migrate, they construct new worker identities and cultures that connect their old and their new homes. But workers have an ability to do more than travel through space. They can also play a proactive part in ordering this space in certain ways.

2.5 Scaling labour: social constructions, political tools

As was argued in the previous section, not only the socio-economic environment of labour should be understood geographically but also workers' own actions – their agency. By expanding the range of spatial terms – beyond *space* and *place* – the concept of *scale* contributes to this analytical framework by asking how social space is ordered, and how this order is contested. The term has been subject to much debate in human geography, and the last leg of this debate has even seen a call for abolishing the term altogether (Marston, Jones III et al. 2005). This argument rests in part on the concern that, by using the language of scale in academic analysis, one contributes to reifying a hierarchical and vertical ordering of space. Notwithstanding the potential performativity of a scalar approach, it can be argued that the scale concept remains useful in understanding the dynamics of economic processes, their regulatory arrangements, and the political strategies of various social actors in relation to these. Hence, scale can be seen not only as a *methodological tool* – in that it refers to the different levels of analysis – but also as a *theoretical concept* that can explain how real social practices are constituted in relation to each other. Scales are often associated with a hierarchy of levels, like the constitution of many modern states into municipal, provincial and national tiers of government. In everyday language, the local, national and global scales are commonly

referred to. But using these terms does not reveal the underlying dynamics of these scalar hierarchies. Intuitively, it often seems as if the higher geographical resolutions impose conditions on the lower, in a 'top-down' fashion. But this, as Jonas (2006) rightly points out, need not be the case. The struggles of social actors in establishing or breaking up scales mean the particular power configurations of different scalar arrangements are contingent; in many cases local scales can determine and exert power over the shape and content of other, translocal, scales.

Smith's (1984) understanding of the production of scale is a good point of entry, both to the conceptualisation of the scales of capitalism as such and as an introduction to the concept's historical development in the human geography discipline. Smith's main focus is the *urban scale*, where he argues "the centralization of capital finds its most accomplished geographical expression" (Smith 1984:136). In other words, capitalism has historically transformed towns from playing a simple market function to becoming the arena in which fully integrated capitalist production is allowed to operate. But the capitalist economy is also structured around other scales. Smith understands the deepened integration of the world economy at a *global scale* as being driven by capital's urge to universalise the wage-labour relation by levelling "the world's labour power to the status of a commodity" (Smith 1984:139). While the wage-labour relation was formally integrated into the global economic system of trade and colonialism, it is only through the functional integration of global production networks that the real spatial subordination of wage-labour is accomplished (Smith 1984). Between the global and the urban, there are other more or less fixed spatial scales that serve functions central to the capitalist dynamic. In particular, with the global emergence of nation-states in the 20th century, the *national scale* became the main regulatory scale for the circulation of different capitals, by defending relatively immobilised productive capitals competing on a world-market (Smith 1984). This scalar hierarchy was given a metaphorical twist by Taylor (1982), wherein he categorised the global as the 'scale of reality', the national as the 'scale of ideology' and the urban as the 'scale of experience'.

Essentially, geographical scales are *socially constructed* and should always be understood in relation to other scales. Labour markets, for example, can be seen as socially constructed scales based on

the sale and purchase of labour-power, the localisation of production and the regulatory framework of these processes. But they are intrinsically woven into other scales, such as national regulatory frameworks and processes of reproduction at the scale of the household. Swyngedouw (2004) applies this relational approach to the concept of globalisation, which he argues in reality is a process of ‘glocalisation’, entailing new roles for both the global *and* the local. This tension between the scales of regulation, on the one hand, and the ‘scales of networks’ – meaning the organisation of the economy – on the other, empowers some actors with access to certain scales while it disempowers other actors whose “command of scale is more limited” (Swyngedouw 2004:38, 41). Rather than being reduced to faceless contestants on a global economic arena, economic actors and regulatory regimes therefore often focus on the construction of place identities and images to assert their global competitive advantages.

In line with Herod’s notion of labour geographies, geographical scales are also *politically contested* phenomena which cannot be dictated by capital alone. Gough (2004:190) warns against understanding scalar construction as solely driven by “capital’s ability to command space”. He uses the example of the European Union, where there has been a constant negotiation between a neoliberal and a social democratic project to establish the EU as a transnational scale (Gough 2004). In short, these are class politics with scalar consequences. Gough argues that geographical scales are constructed, not only by *projects of capital*, but also by *projects of class relations*. A shift from one scale to another will often be infused, simultaneously, with the political projects of different class-based forces, such as particular factions of capital and organised labour. Furthermore, as Marston and others have showed (e.g. Marston 2000; Marston and Smith 2001), scale can only to a certain extent be understood through the dynamic of capitalism. Marston exemplifies this point through the evolution of the modern American household during the rise of the mass consumption society in the 20th century. Here, the institutionalisation of the nuclear family household as a social scale emerged in interaction with processes of capitalism, and in relation to existing (patriarchal) power relations in the domestic realm. By blurring the lines between the public and private sphere, and by establishing the household as a significant site of mass

consumption, women managed to access social power and resources in the process (Marston 2000).

2.6 Labour's scalar strategies

With these explorations of the scale concept in mind, the next step is to explore the links between political scales and trade unionism. Different social actors' interests in different spatial configurations make scale production a political project. Scales are politicised in different, yet related, ways. Firstly, the *construction of particular scales* – be they local labour markets, the nuclear-family household or the nation-state – are continuously contested and subject to regulation (Marston 2000; Gough 2004). Secondly, *reconfiguration between scales* is often encouraged and resisted by various actors, as exemplified by the relegation of labour market regulation from the national to the local scale in certain national contexts (Herod 1998; Swyngedouw 2004). Thirdly, social actors can employ *scalar political strategies* for certain objectives to be achieved. Cox (1998) argues that the ways in which different actors engage politically in the production of space is determined by how they are connected to place. All social actors depend on certain locally embedded social relations for material well-being and social reproduction. Cox calls these relations – “upon which we depend for the realization of essential interests” – *spaces of dependence* (Cox 1998:2). In addition to these relations, social actors also construct networks “to engage with other centers of social power” (Cox 1998:2). This process can involve an upwards movement of ‘jumping scales’ – for example by seeking influence in the public sphere at the national scale, such as with government agencies and the mass media. These are what Cox labels *spaces of engagement*.

Capitalist production certainly represents one of the ties that bind workers to the places in which they live and work, but it does not determine the individual experiences of these ties (Cox 1998:4):

“For workers a particular local labor market may be a necessary condition for them being workers. But for one it may be a question of spousal employment, for another a house that would be difficult to sell and for yet another, an age close to that of retirement, which

makes not simply leaving a particular place but a particular employer highly problematic.”

Spaces of engagement are therefore also sought at the local, as opposed to the global, scale. Following from this, ‘jumping scales’ may refer to a downwards, as well as an upwards, movement. Instead of seeking alliances with workers in other places – i.e. *across space* – Hudson (2001) demonstrates how workers often opt to *defend places* through campaigns to attract investments or to resist relocation. Castree *et al.* (2004) illustrate how the dynamics of worker mobilisation vary between the local and the translocal, both in terms of the scale of its organising efforts and the subjects they are intended to support. Four ideal-types are identified in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1 *The spatial strategies of labour*

		<i>Targets of solidarity</i>	
		LOCAL NEEDS	NON-LOCAL NEEDS
<i>Scale of action</i>	LOCAL	e.g. defensive, place-based campaigns and coalitions	e.g. consumer boycotts targeting labour practices elsewhere
	TRANSLOCAL	e.g. workers supporting their families through labour migration	e.g. global union campaigns for rights, standards and wages

Source: Adapted from Castree *et al.* (2004:118-9).

Whether labour’s participation in place-based alliances is understood as regressive or progressive – in other words, whether they engage in competition with other workers – can vary from case to case (Hudson 2001; Castree, Coe *et al.* 2004). Mobilising worker localism is often made possible by conscious efforts to *re-present* places and the construction of place-based identities, and

by so doing legitimising cross-class solidarity and loyalty. From a class solidarity perspective, this dilemma is what Johns (1998:252) calls a conflict “between class and space”. While the success of place-based alliances can temporarily secure the ‘spaces of dependence’ for both capital and labour, they are essentially “predicated upon capital having a continuing interest” in producing in these particular places (Hudson 2001:268).

While some groups of workers choose to mobilise around local scales and interests, others’ seek to ‘scale up’ their political actions. Harvey (1993:24) warned that place-based struggles will be reduced to ‘militant particularisms’ unless they are articulated on a higher scale. For workers, this relates to the threat of labour being ‘put in place’ (Peck 1996). The notion of an ‘up-scaling imperative’ for trade unionism has been much debated in labour geography. Of course, as a political idea, it can even be traced back to the early days of the labour internationalist tradition and the final sentence of the *Communist Manifesto*: “Working men of all countries, unite!” While the basic point – that processes of ‘globalisation’ have reconfigured the spatial organisation of capitalism – is generally accepted, the labour geography literature suggests that workers employed in globally networked corporations potentially can have increased leverage over their employers.

Herod has provided two useful examples in this regard. An interesting case in the early 1990s started when the Ravenswood Aluminum Corporation declared a lock-out of 1700 workers at their smelter in West Virginia, following a dispute over workplace safety and pension schemes (Herod 1995). A local and national legal and media campaign was supported by an international component which involved an investigation of the corporate structures of the employer and criminal records of its partners, resulting in consumer boycotts and political demonstrations affecting 28 countries on 5 continents. This proved absolutely instrumental in the resulting victory of the smelter workers, and illustrates how workers employed in globally networked corporations can put pressure on multiple nodes in a corporate structure, dependent upon where they are most vulnerable. In other words, the Ravenswood case workers chose to mobilise *across space* to put pressure on their local management. Herod (2001) found a contrasting case in Flint, Michigan. Here, a local industrial dispute had global ramifications in the production chain

of the automobile giant General Motors (GM). Through local union action at a node of the production chain which was vital in supplying the remaining GM network, workers were able to paralyse an entire global production network for weeks. While the so-called “just-in-time” supply chains are often understood as ‘lean and mean’ (Harrison 1994; Peck and Miyamachi 1995; Moody 1997), the Flint case shows how these systems’ reluctance to stock up supplies can represent the Achilles’ heel of the capitalist firm. When globalised production capital proves vulnerable to disruption in particular localities, labour can turn capital’s spatiality against itself. The two case studies above identify two different geographical potentials of labour agency. Analytically speaking, the Flint case runs as a counterpoint to the Ravenswood case; the Flint workers exerted power *in place* against a globally integrated corporation.

Labour geography calls attention to the geographical possibilities of labour action. But the overall picture is less rosy. Firstly, these particular cases are far from representative of workers worldwide. Not only do they concentrate on multinational employer structures, but on those employees within these global networks who, through their particular position in these systems, have the potential to exert pressure on their employers. Still the daunting task remains of mapping the possibilities of those millions of workers who are not employed in similarly strategic position in production networks, and therefore stand in a less privileged position *vis-à-vis* multinational capital. Secondly, successful examples of ‘jumping scales’ are often impossible without pre-existing organisational infrastructure at the local and national scale (Castree 2000; Tufts 2007). Labour internationalism should therefore not be seen as a substitute for national and workplace worker politics. Rather, it can – as a strategic alternative – in some cases represent viable ‘spaces of engagement’ for workers and their struggles. Thirdly, labour internationalism is not *per se* progressive (Herod 2003; Castree, Coe et al. 2004). Johns’ (1998) study of US unions’ transnational solidarity campaigns show that the intentions and consequences of labour internationalism can range from protectionist policies, which are regressive in class terms, to what she labels ‘transformatory solidarity’ that transcends place-based interests “in favor of their wider class interests in the international economy” (Johns 1998:270).

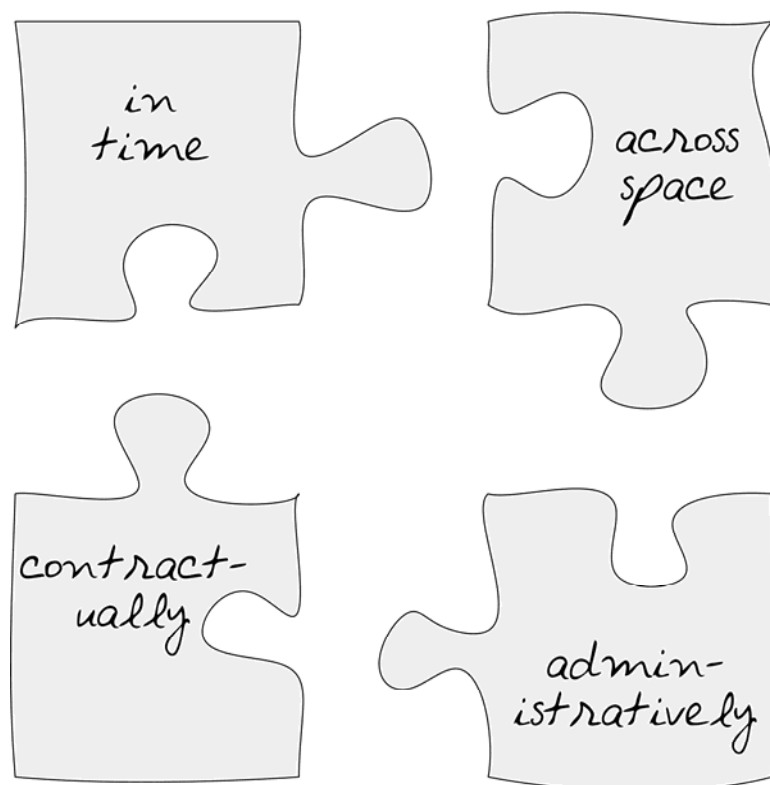
2.7 New geographies of work

So far, this discussion has mainly been concerned with the strategies of trade unions in the traditional sense, and their potential as ‘makers of geographies’. But as capitalist societies and the world economy as a whole are in a process of constant change, the representatives of labour must adapt accordingly. In the following section, the focus will be on the ways in which economic restructuring and changes in class composition affect workers. These changes present workers with new geographies, and trade unions with new challenges. After years of union decline and widespread paralysis amongst labour movements, these challenges are now being taken on by several trade unions. Even though many of these changes can be identified as part of global tendencies, they are experienced by workers in the places where they live and work; and as the research of many labour geographers shows, they can also be tackled at this scale. Geographers have often preferred to analyse the role of *places* and the relationships between them in regional and global networks. But changes in the world economy also create fundamental changes within places, and geographers also have a role in explaining the *microgeography* of economic restructuring, as it unfolds in workplaces and communities. In the following, two central aspects these new geographies of work will be considered: the fragmentation of the workplace and the political nexus of production, reproduction and consumption.

Increasingly, workers face the problems posed by a set of spatial dynamics which can be loosely grouped under the concept of *fragmentation*. Fragmentation relates to how, where, when and by whom work is organised. Processes of fragmentation in low-paid service work have received some academic attention (Allen and Henry 1997; Reimer 1998; Wills 2005). Even so, Gough (2003:15) has a point when he notes that “theorization of the tensions between fragmentation and collectivity of workers has been thin”. The national trade union structures during Fordism were organised on the premise of large workplaces and more or less homogeneous workforces. Since the late 1970s, new forms of workplace and work-time organisation have emerged as a part of the economic and technological restructuring often referred to as ‘post-Fordism’ (Amin 1994; Dicken 2003). These changes are often the results of

employers seeking to increase productivity, reduce costs and combat the power of organised labour through outsourcing and subcontracting of services. The consequence for workers is often a multi-dimensional fragmentation of workplaces and employer-employee relations, as represented in the jigsaw puzzle of Figure 2.2.

Figure 2.2 *The fragmentation of the workforce and the workplace*



Workers are fragmented *across space*, i.e. organised in smaller, isolated units – hence they are separated in real distance from their formal employers and in social distance from other colleagues (Savage 1998). The elusive network of direct employers, contractors and subcontractors leads to an *administrative* fragmentation of employees. Relating to this is a *contractual* fragmentation, meaning the customisation and individualisation of employment contracts (Allen and Henry 1997). Consequently, even workers in the same workplace are differentiated across a ‘formal-informal continuum’ (Samson 2004). While this can be

seen as a strategy by capital and individual capitalists to reinforce their power over the labour process, it is also a strategy that has become widespread in the state sector and at the scale of local government (Reimer 1999; Reimer 2003). New organizational principles introduced across the service sector have also fragmented and separated workers *in time*; shift-work and short-term engagements make recruitment and collective action difficult (Wills 2005).

What all these processes have in common is that they make unionism in the traditional union-shop sense less effective. The growing gap between permanent, full-time employees and casual workers and workers in informal economies represents an obstacle to building working class solidarity. This has posed a key challenge for trade unions, which traditionally have based their political strength in securing the conditions of the former group of workers. Paradoxically, this cleavage plane can be said to have been shaped, and often cemented, by the politics of trade unionism (Hudson 2001). Moreover, the prospect of a career path for each individual worker might also hinder solidarity in the places where they work. Upward mobility and white-collar positions represent a strategy for individual workers to achieve a better standard of living without achieving this through class-based struggle. It is important to understand fragmentation as a political and highly contested process. These lines of conflict are not naturally given, but socially constructed. The interests of capital – as employers or regulatory institutions – regularly exploit these cracks as a convenient way of keeping workers from building collective strength. Unfortunately, worker fragmentation is in many cases left acquiescently unchallenged by organised labour. Thus one of the main motivations for revealing divisions between workers – at least from the standpoint of progressive researchers with working class sympathies – is for trade unions to use this knowledge to overcome them.

Changes in the social composition of the workforce and the geographies of labour markets often reinforce the picture depicted above (Hudson 2001). Historically, the working class has always been socially and culturally divided along gender and ethnicity lines. Even so, the diversity of workers in many localities has dramatically increased due to labour migration and socio-cultural diversification. Nowhere is this more evident than in the so-called

'global cities' (Tufts 2007). Wills (2005) illustrates this point in a case study from the hotel sector in London, where an organising drive by trade unionists was facing a marginalised and fragmented workforce. The workers themselves consisted of "mainly young, female labour", many of them being "minority ethnic, and often migrant, staff" (Wills 2005:147). In addition, the tourist industry employed large numbers of tourists and students whose job prospects were short-term and resultantly showed less commitment to politically challenging the work conditions on a longer-term basis. While labour is always to some extent embedded in place, such a diverse and fluid social base have often not developed cultural ties to the place in which they live, which also can undermine the unity of workers as a group. That being said, worker identities and cultures should not be seen as negative *per se*; the ideal situation is not one where the workforce consists of faceless, identical and undistinguishable workers. Worker identities bind workers together, and strengthen working-class solidarity (albeit on an exclusionary premise). Case studies of migrant workers in Johannesburg represent a telling example of how powerful worker mobilisation can arise in such circumstances, and that this in turn can result in broad, diverse alliances (von Holdt 2003).

Another important angle from which to approach the question of new work geographies is the *politics of consumption*. Firstly, consumption has become an increasingly central issue to labour as the networked capitalist system links workers to other places in new and complex ways. Hartwick (1998; 2000) explore the relationship between workers and consumers and the political spaces of consumption via the lens of *global commodity chains* (see Gereffi, Korzeniewicz et al. 1994). Commodity chains – understood as the numerous nodes between the places where commodities are produced and where they are consumed – create links between workers on different continents. Hartwick argues that the social, spatial and natural conditions of production must be understood as part of the materiality of the commodity. But at the consumption end of the commodity chain, the link between *us* (the shoppers) and *them* (the workers) is distorted by the advertising imagery of the *object*. This hinders solidarity and class consciousness. This understanding resonates with Johns and Vural's (2000) understanding of spaces of production and spaces

of consumption as places of struggle. In line with the discussion of capital mobility – the actual or perceived ability of buyer-driven capital to relocate between sites of production – they state that the locus of power in commodity chains often lies closer to the point of sale than the point of production. This power geometry has strong implications for labour agency and strategy, but is complicated by geographical distance (Hale and Wills 2005:8):

“The geographical distance involved in networked capitalism means that workers are not only isolated from their ultimate employers but also from the consumers of their products.”

However, as Hale and Wills (2005) point out, not only does vast geographical distance separate these two nodes, but attempts by labour to connect these networks are circumscribed by an institutional vacuum.

While these transnational networks of consumption are relatively new and rapidly expanding, other forms of consumption have very different geographies. Municipal services represent a good example in this regard, as “services are typically contracted, provided and consumed in a shared geographic location” (Hale and Wills 2005:8). Hence, workers are in a geographical proximity to the consumers of the services they deliver. In fact, they are themselves consumers of these services. Geographies of consumption thus vary significantly between sectors, and pose very different challenges for different groups of workers. But there are other analytical differences between subcontracting in textile manufacturing and subcontracting of municipal services. Firstly, while workers in subcontracted textile industries are manufacturing commodities, workers in municipal services are producing services. Secondly, whereas the commodities of the textile industry are bought or sold according to market mechanisms, the services produced in the public sector are often basic services produced for collective consumption (Carter 1997). These services and goods play a fundamental role in the social infrastructure of capitalist societies. In other words, struggles around public services are as much about the *politics of reproduction* as they are about the politics of consumption. Struggles around consumption and reproduction are themes that have close links to Jonas’ (1996) above-mentioned concept of local labour control regimes, where he showed capital

to be actively involved in the realm of consumption. Jonas argues that while the sphere of consumption is relatively autonomous from the sphere of production, the erosion of welfare systems in the post-Fordist era has resulted in further conflation of the two. The mutual dependency of processes of production, consumption and reproduction has implications for the relationship between capital, labour, the state and the community (Jonas 1996:332):

“Indeed, threats to interests in consumption may encourage labour and community groups to conjoin in struggles around production issues.”

And, one should hasten to add, vice versa.

2.8 Geographies of community-oriented organising

After having explored these new geographies of work, it is time to look at labour’s responses to them. If labour internationalism and transnational union activities represent the *extension* of political scale for labour, then community-oriented unionism (like place-based inter-class coalitions) might be said to represent the *intensification* or thickening of scale – as unions and workers involve themselves actively in civil society. Calls for labour to ‘go social’ – as opposed to (or, rather, in addition to) ‘go global’ – is often associated with the terms *social movement unionism* and *community unionism* (Moody 1997; Lambert and Webster 2001; Waterman and Wills 2001; Munck 2002; von Holdt 2003). Community-oriented unionism is here understood as the range of ways workers and unions mobilize politically in concert with other civil society actors on the basis of social disempowerment and overlapping political interests. Using such a wide definition is intentional, and Staeheli (2008) is right when she argues that it is problematic to make rigid academic claims about what community (or *the* community) is or why various actors choose to engage politically in community struggles. That is, of course, no reason to avoid this very important political space as a field of research.

Calls for articulation between worker- and community politics, and more specifically between trade unions and other groups in civil society, have their roots in long-running debates on the Left and in

contemporary social theory (Harvey 1996; Fraser 1997; Moody 1997; Waterman 1999; McDowell 2000; Munck 2004). Marxist notions of class struggle have been challenged, as post-structuralist ideas on discourse and deconstruction have criticised class theory for being dichotomous, determinist and essentialist (Fraad, Resnick et al. 1994; Gibson-Graham 1996). Developments in feminist theory in general, and its critique of the relationship between gender and class, have also generated thought-provoking debates (Foord and Gregson 1986; McDowell 1986). These theoretical developments have been influenced by parallel societal changes. Class mobilization in North America and Europe has often been overshadowed by other expressions of protest. Demands for the acknowledgment of identities and cultures, alongside material claims, have lead observers to refer to the politics of these so-called new social movements as *identity politics* (as opposed to the 'old' trade union movement). Scholars have tried to analytically accommodate identity politics into a framework of historical materialism and class struggle (Young 1990; McDowell 2004). This old/new dichotomy is problematic, however. Not only does it obscure the diversity of the 'old social movements', but it has proved difficult to pinpoint what exactly is *new* about the 'new social movements'.

Still, as Harvey (1996) and others have pointed out, there can be real differences between class-based politics and identity politics, and bringing them together represents an intellectual as well as a political exercise. With particular reference to contemporary popular mobilization in North America and Europe, scholars have debated whether claims for *redistribution* (class) and claims for *recognition* (identity) can be reconciled in struggles for social justice (e.g. Fraser 1997; Young 1997). But even if these demands could be analytically conceived as mutually progressive, formulating such an agenda would only be possible if the aspirations and demands of specific groups were brought together in practical-political contexts (McDowell 2000). The question, then, is where do such possibilities present themselves? Wills suggests that the emerging community unionism in North America and Britain represent such political spaces (Wills 2001:468-9):

“[C]ommunity unionism is about finding common cause between unions and those groups cemented around affiliations of religion, race, gender, disability

and sexuality, with those providing a particular community service and with those fighting for a particular political cause. As such, community unionists are in a position to foster unity on the left, linking the struggle for redistribution with that over recognition, the universal with the particular, the economic with the cultural.”

An interesting case study-based literature has emerged in labour geography focusing on union-community initiatives. Most of them have in common a focus on relatively local campaigns, often at the scale of the metropolitan area. While still consisting of relatively few journal articles, these case studies examine a diverse set of sectors and contexts, as indicated by Table 2.2.

Table 2.2 *Studies of community-oriented unionism in human geography*

MAJOR SECTORS	SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONTEXTS
<i>Health care/ hospitals</i> Moon and Brown (2001); Savage (2004); Cohen (2006)	<i>Deindustrialisation</i> Castree (2000); Ellem (2003)
<i>Hotel/ cleaning services</i> Savage (1998); Tufts (2006; 2007); Bezuidenhout and Fakier (2006); Cohen (2006); Herod and Aguiar (2006); Ryan and Herod (2006); Evans <i>et al.</i> (2007)	<i>Low-paid service work</i> Savage (1998); Wills (2005); Ryan and Herod (2006)
<i>Public and municipal services</i> Tufts (1998); Walsh (2000); Pastor (2001); Lier and Stokke (2006)	<i>Privatisation and public sector reform</i> Tufts (1998); Savage (2004); Cohen (2006); Lier and Stokke (2006)
<i>Textile industries</i> Johns (1998); Johns and Vural (2000); Hale and Wills (2005)	<i>Outsourcing and subcontracting in private firms</i> Allen and Henry (1997); Savage (1998); Smith (1998); Gray (2004)
<i>Mining/ agriculture</i> Mitchell (1996); Ellem (2003); Sadler (2003); Jepson (2005)	<i>Sweatshop factories and homework</i> Tufts (1998); Johns and Vural (2000); Hale and Wills (2005)
CAMPAIGN TYPOLOGY	GEOGRAPHICAL FOCUS

<i>Community unions/Social movement unionism</i>	<i>North America</i>
Alliances between unions and community groups (Wills 2001; Ellem 2003; Lier and Stokke 2006)	Mitchell (1996); Savage (1998); Tufts (1998); Johns and Vural (2000); Walsh (2000); Pastor (2001); Savage (2004); Jepson (2005)
<i>Living-wage campaigns</i>	<i>Australasia</i>
Campaigns to establish a living wage ordinance in a geographical area (Walsh 2000)	Tonkin (2000); Ellem (2003); Sadler (2003); Cooper and Ellem (2006); Ryan and Herod (2006)
<i>Corporate campaigning</i>	<i>United Kingdom</i>
Exerting pressure on shareholders of companies (Herod 2001; Sadler 2003)	Moon and Brown (2001); Wills (2001); Wills and Simms (2004)
<i>Consumerist campaigns</i>	
Exerting pressure on consumers and retailers (Tufts 1998; Johns and Vural 2000)	

As Table 2.2 shows, the literature has an emphasis on unionism in the low-paid service sectors and textile manufacturing, and the processes of outsourcing, subcontracting and privatisation that has further immiserised workers in these sectors. While there has been attempts to typologise the forms of mobilisation in these case studies as shown in Table 2.2 (see also Sadler 2003), unions often employ hybrid strategies which change over time. Similarly, it proves difficult to generalise the researchers behind these studies. Overwhelmingly political-economic in their approach, some cases have also been analysed in relation to other socio-geographical dimensions, such as the *discursive* representations of place (Moon and Brown 2001), the *role of ethnicity* in regional mobilisation (Pastor 2001), *gender aspects* of trade union politics (Jepson 2005), and the relationship between *environmental* and labour concerns (Sadler 2003). The worker subjects that take centre stage in these studies range from low-paid women, workers of colour and migrant workers to male mining workers. By doing so, they demonstrate labour geography's commendable progress in taking seriously the challenge of transcending the traditional worker stereotype. Still, very little attention has been given to this kind of politics outside the Anglo-American world. While a growing engagement with labour geography can be seen in German geography (Berndt 2000; Berndt and Fuchs 2002), the diversity of union politics in the

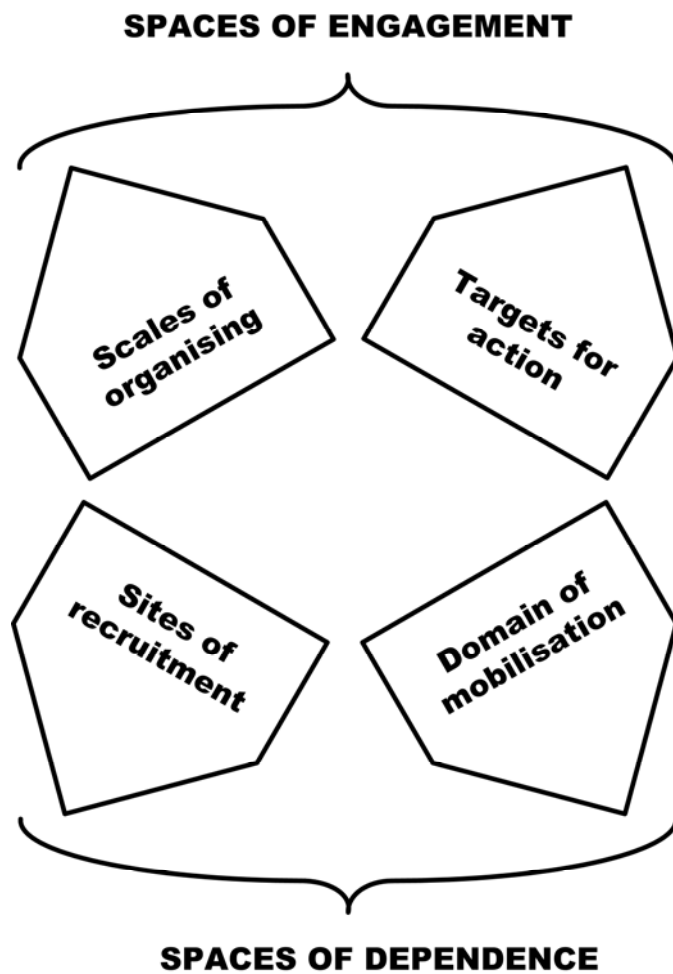
former Eastern Bloc and the global South has, with very few exceptions (Wright 1997; Hale and Wills 2005; Lier and Stokke 2006), not been brought into the fold.

These new forms of organising have also attracted considerable attention outside the realm of geography, in disciplines such as sociology, political science and history. A rich literature in both North American (Carter, Fairbrother et al. 2003; Clawson 2003; Lopez 2004) and South African (Baleni 1996; Bezuidenhout 2000; Buhlungu 2003; von Holdt 2003; Webster 2006) sociology on union renewal in their countries' respective union movements testifies to this. This debate extends beyond the realm of academia and the labour movement itself has, not surprisingly, produced some of the most intriguing material on these forms of political mobilisation (see, for example, Congress of South African Trade Unions 1997; Public Services International 1999). The relationship between unions and social movements has also been central in some of the literature on globalisation (Moody 1997; Munck and Waterman 1998). Here, the concept of *social movement unionism* is often referred to as a globally articulated popular resistance movement to neoliberal globalisation. While some researchers tend to focus on the emergence of new social movements and measure labour's successes against their *involvement in these new formations* (Waterman 1999; Munck 2004), others point to a significant *transformation within the trade union movement* such as the development of the 'organising model' in the US labour movement (Brecher and Costello 1990; Bronfenbrenner, Friedman et al. 1998; Lopez 2004). Contributions based in critical geography tend to follow the latter approach, which is also reflected in the objectives of this thesis.

There is inarguably a real breadth and diversity in this strand of labour geography. But for the purposes of theory building, the crucial question is whether this string of case studies has explanatory power aside from their insight into each and every case. This author argues that they have, and that they bring this research agenda closer to an analytical framework of the *geographies of community-oriented organising*. Not yet a coherent theory, perhaps, but a reading of this literature nonetheless exposes some concepts which are very useful if we are to understand some general traits of community-oriented union strategies. As is the case with most geographical interventions, this literature has directed attention towards the spatial nature of these political struggles. In other

words, labour geographers have particularly focused on how community-oriented unionism can be understood as a response to the socio-spatial obstacles posed by economic restructuring, such as fragmentation of workplaces and the socio-geographical alienation between producer and consumer. These responses represent geographies in their own right. Figure 2.3 outlines four movements, or socio-spatial responses, that can be identified in the diverse cases of community-oriented unionism.

Figure 2.3 *Community-oriented unionism in 'four movements'*



As indicated by the figure, Cox' (1998) notion of 'spaces of dependence' and 'spaces of engagement' are used here as

sensitising concepts. The two lower movements can be said to correspond with the former, as they relate to the relatively localised social relations forming the basis of trade unionism. Firstly, this orientation can benefit unions more directly in the form of increased membership figures when they establish new *sites of recruitment*. This links directly to the discussion in Section 2.7 on workplace fragmentation, which has been recognised as an obstacle to recruitment drives in the traditional sense (Wills 2001). Seeking contact with potential members in sites beyond the workplace can allow unions to get in touch with otherwise unreachable groups of workers. The Janitors for Justice (J4J) campaign, which is a long-running campaign by the Service Employees' International Union (SEIU) around living wage and community issues for low-wage workers in the US, is a good example in this regard (Savage 1998). In a context of deunionisation in the service sector, the organisers of this campaign made use of community arenas such as churches, residential blocks and community centres to recruit workers which during their hours of work were spread and isolated in high-security worksites downtown. This study also found that many service workers employed in the same firm were closer to each other geographically and had more social interaction in their time off work than during work hours, as many of them lived in the same buildings and had been recruited through personal networks and cultural ties. The problems of worksite unionism in this situation is obvious, a notion that is supported by Cobble (1991). Cobble argues that processes of outsourcing emerging in post-industrial societies require blue-collar service unionism to return to a tradition of 'occupational unionism' which was prevalent in the US during the early part of the 20th century. Occupational unionism entails a strategy where unions attempt to organise the entire occupational workforce rather than along firm or workplace lines. The J4J campaign represents a contemporary extension of this tradition.

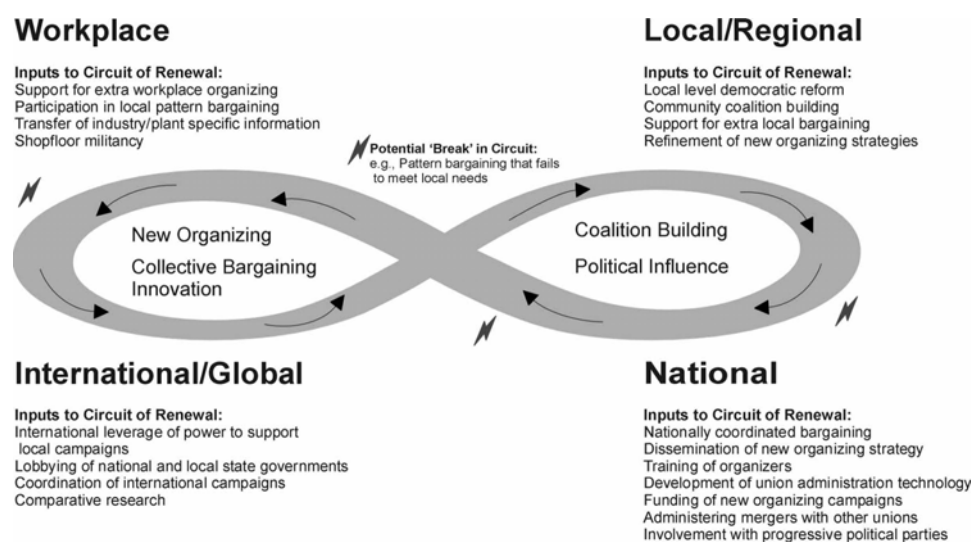
Secondly, and related to the first point, most of these cases have in common an orientation towards what can be described as an expanded *domain of mobilisation*. Many of the trade unions referred to in this literature show willingness to mobilise politically in other constituencies and arenas than the sphere of production; either to rally political support for their own causes or to give leverage to

the political struggles of others. In contrast to the first point, this does not necessarily refer to an increase of the actual membership, but rather an expansion of the union's political base through alliance-buildings and coalitions. This might lead unions into contact with religious organisations and women's movements, and it might cause them to get involved in issues around environmental hazards and conflicts around ethnicity and race. In some cases, this is a question of coordinating and bringing together already mobilised constituencies, whereas in other cases union campaigns actively create political consciousness in relatively quiescent communities. In times where deunionisation threatens the position of organised labour in many sectors, community involvement is often seen as a direct source of political strength. Bringing together different types of socio-economic struggle – such as the workplace politics of a trade union and the social agenda of a neighbourhood association or a church – often presents the participants with the challenge of framing different local political issues as relevant to each other and to wider issues such as urban poverty and multi-ethnicity (Pastor 2001).

Returning to Cox' (1998) distinction, the upper two movements in Figure 2.3 refer to the political 'spaces of engagement' in which trade unions tries to exert influence. Here, the concept of scale is again useful, through the notion of *scales of organising* (Walsh 2000; Savage 2006). In other words, unions weakened by decentralised bargaining, fragmented worksites and complex employer relations might find new geographical 'spaces of engagement' through an involvement with community actors. Walsh's (2000) analysis of the living-wage campaign in Baltimore depicts how the scale of organising was changed from workplaces to a metropolitan scale. Only then was it possible for workers from different workplaces to force their wages 'out of competition' by compelling the city authorities to pass a living-wage ordinance. The Baltimore case echoes previous calls for 'geographical unionism' (see for example Wial 1993). A significant lesson to be learnt from the Baltimore case is that targeting the metropolitan area as a 'scale of regulation' was impossible without establishing a parallel 'scale of organising'. This, in turn, could only be done through a campaign grounded in, and driven by, communities. While the urban scale can provide a framework for union-community organising, it is not the only geographical scale at which community unionism takes place.

Community unionism campaigns around plant closures, for example, have been organised at neighbourhood scales, as have political disputes between university institutions and their host communities (Brecher and Costello 1990). The particular role social movement unionism played in the anti-apartheid struggle in the 1980s in South Africa, on the other hand, suggests that this union strategy can also be articulated at a national scale, as a revolutionary movement (von Holdt 2003). Walsh' study is also significant in that it looks beyond the local focus characterising many of these case studies to discuss how these local initiatives can be *translated across space* – not at a national scale, but rather across national territories. In addition to this, the relation *between* various scales of organising is as important, as argued in Tufts' (2007) recent exploration of the 'spatial circuit of renewal', as represented in Figure 2.4. Tufts emphasises the mutually reinforcing effects of organising at different scales. Hence, community-oriented unionism is best understood as a multiscale phenomenon, and the four movements depicted in Figure 2.3 can, in principle, all occur at a variety of political scales.

Figure 2.4 *The spatial circuit of union renewal*



Source: Tufts (2007:2387)

The last dimension taken from Figure 2.3 is conceptualised here as alternative *targets for action*. In short, this refers to a reorientation in

terms of which actors are singled out as the main targets for particular campaigns. The case study literature reveals some interesting union strategies in this respect: the organizing efforts of the J4J campaign enabled workers to exert pressure on the building owners instead of their subcontracted employers (Savage 1998); the Baltimore living-wage campaign targeted the city-level political authorities (Walsh 2000); and in the case of garment homeworkers in Toronto, a campaign by the International Ladies' Garment Workers Union was directed at the retailers instead of the producers (Tufts 1998). Recalling the discussion about consumption above, buyer-driven commodity networks often have their locus of power situated with powerful retailers. Action at the point of sale, then, serves to bring political struggle into spaces of consumption.

This 'geographical take' on community-oriented unionism should not be seen as an insistence of geography being the key explanatory factor in these particular cases. Moreover, a typology for the sake of a typology takes this framework nowhere. The strength of these dimensions is that they correspond to some central tenets of a wider critical geography tradition of theorising labour. Such a typology, then, can explain how the different geographies of unionism relate to the new geographies of work. For example, there seems to be a clear relation between new scales of organising and the deregulation of labour markets and labour control (Peck 1996). Furthermore, new sites of recruitment should be seen in relation to the increasing fragmentation of the workplace (Reimer 1999). Likewise, alternative targets for actions can be seen as labour's response to the alienation and spatial separation between the sphere of consumption and the sphere of production in certain commodity chains (Hartwick 1998; Johns 1998).

Interestingly, there is also a lot to be learnt about the *temporal aspects* of union organising from reading these case studies, although this point is often understated in the literature. While theorisations of the historical context and the wider economical and political shifts certainly play a significant role in understanding these politics, these aspects have in many ways been covered by disciplines such as labour history and economic approaches such as regulation theory. A different angle from which to approach the temporal dimension is to look at issues around *timing* and *time-as-process*

which, in many cases, are of crucial explanatory significance. Firstly, it is important to understand the timing of particular union struggles in relation to external circumstances. Herod (2001), for example, acknowledges that the success of the Ravenswood campaign to a certain extent relied upon the national umbrella body the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO) making it a *cause célèbre*. In other words, the prospects to succeed for labour struggles located in similar spatial-economic hierarchies in the US could possibly depend on whether they occurred before or after the Ravenswood case as a test case. Echoing the critique of labour geography's regional bias – the tendency to look at labour struggles in some regions rather than others – a related concern can be voiced with regards to *selectivity in time*. This simply means that most case studies tend to concentrate on points in time when organised labour has been able to effectively display their power. What happens to workers in the period following victorious struggle? Secondly, the temporal dimension is also important with regards to the internal dynamic of labour mobilisation. Here, Wills' (2005) study of the Dorchester Hotel campaign is helpful, as it introduces another temporal concept, namely the *learning process*. The point made here is that unionism is based on trial-and-error and a reorientation of strategies might need time to develop 'in place' before being politically effective. Thirdly, the relationship between internal and external processes is crucial as they change over time. When union strategies are articulated in relation to external processes of various kinds – and neoliberal restructuring is a good example in this regard – labour agency evolves in a dialectic relationship to these.

2.9 Conclusion

This chapter has traced the conceptualisation of the 'geographies of community-oriented unionism' back to their origins in a critical geography tradition. Labour markets and the politics of the workplace are here examined through the terms space, place and scale. What emerges from this narrative is a concept of labour as integral to the capitalist system, and indeed as a factor that can help explain some of the changes in the world economy. At the same time, understanding workers' attachments to the places in

which they work by analysing the political dynamics of production and reproduction in the local labour market, is crucial to a theory of labour. But perhaps the most important insight here is that workers are sentient beings who make choices about their lives. In other words, labour is a social force that proactively shapes geographies. Labour geography has given us a new understanding of how workers go about doing this, and in particular how trade unions create new scalar configurations in the world economy. Building on this foundation, the recent literature on community-oriented unionism expands the conception of labour agency into new spheres of social life, and by doing so captures a real shift in the political strategies of many unions around the world. Approaching this kind of politics explicitly from a geographical point of view, sweeping economic restructuring processes are seen as presenting labour with *new geographies of work*. Outsourcing, privatisation and deregulation of social infrastructure can be experienced by workers as a *fragmentation* of their workplace – in time and space, as well as through contractual and institutional arrangements – and transfers risk onto the worker and his/her social networks. Against such socio-spatial obstacles, community-oriented unionism is a response that serves to unite workers and communities based on identities and spaces beyond the shop floor. Community-oriented unionism has attracted increasing interest in the labour geography discipline, and – even in its adolescence – this strand offers some useful conceptual tools with which to analyse the relationship between unions and communities.

However, there are some crucial biases and shortcomings which must be overcome to make this analytical framework more apt in explaining unionism – in theory as well as in each and every case of workers in struggle. Firstly, as the discussion on agency in labour geography indicates, a holistic approach should be taken towards workers. This entails directing the focus of research not only onto the politics of industrial action, but also on other aspects of labour agency. Workers are political beings, and can *act* politically, without being told to do so by union leaders. While the literature on community-oriented unionism has been more successful than early labour geography interventions (there are, of course, honourable exceptions such as Mitchell 1996), this nonetheless remains a challenge. Secondly, as Lopez (2004:12) pertinently points out, studies of political mobilisation “suffer

from a tendency to tell success stories”. In the case of labour geography, a similar criticism can be levelled at the bias towards workers whose “potential impact at the heart of the world economy gives these workers a uniquely strategic position” (Moody 1997:280), and thus have been able to use capital’s spatiality against itself (Herod 2001). But one should be careful not to confuse political success with analytical importance. Rather than looking for successful campaigns that further illustrates Herod’s point of ‘labour’s spatial fix’, it might be time for case study research in areas of the economic landscape where the spatial-strategic potential might be less promising, or just merely different. Through case studies of union-community interaction in various contexts of economic restructuring and political dynamics – including those many struggles which do not necessarily yield great victories – the possibilities and realities of these strategies can be mapped out. Thirdly, as already mentioned, the literature remains in large part geographically limited to the Anglo-American world and the so-called ‘neoliberal’ states of the US, the UK, Australia and New Zealand. Hence, understanding how union-community interaction works in other geographical areas, such as in the global South, represent a key challenge. This is important for several reasons, not only because there are long traditions of community- and social movement unionism in other regions of the world, but also because these cases could provide different socio-economic contexts in which labour-community dynamics are played out. South Africa, which represents the national context of this research project, can be said to be a bridge between these neoliberal heartlands and the global South. Fourthly, labour geography suffers from a noticeable sectoral bias; the twin processes of *de*- and *re*-industrialisation have provided the backdrop for research on economic restructuring and the politics of industrial decline in manufacturing. Correspondingly, the low-paid work in the private service sector which emerges in these areas has provided the context where community-oriented unionism has been best understood. This study, however, seeks to make its contribution in another socio-economic context where community-oriented unionism is emerging, namely in municipal services. To do so, a conceptualisation of the politics of service work in the public sector is required. The theoretical framework around capital accumulation and economic restructuring of industries, mainly based in economic geography, is therefore

insufficient. This, in turn, calls for a theoretical examination of the state, which will be the main theme of the next chapter.

3 Neoliberal state spaces

3.1 Introduction

Understanding the politics of municipal services and local government unionism requires a theorisation of labour, as provided in the previous chapter, but it also calls for a conceptual analysis of the state. The state features in relation to the case study of this thesis through its political apparatus, its service delivery mechanisms and its employer status. Moreover, recent processes of state restructuring have emerged as intensely contested by different social actors, not least in relation to public service delivery. At a global scale, state restructuring is closely linked to broader shifts in the organisation of capitalism. The complex relationship between states and economic processes calls for a theoretical exploration of the *capitalist state*, examining the roles taken on by the state institutions and state power in relation to capital accumulation. At the same time, such an approach should be careful not to reduce the state to a simple tool for capital accumulation or certain class forces.

Starting with a general outline of state theory in Section 3.2, the characteristics of the capitalist state and the role it plays in capitalist accumulation are discussed in Section 3.3 drawing on Jessop's (1990) strategic-relational approach. Section 3.4 looks at the political dynamics between the state and capital accumulation and considers; first, the relationship between the state and social forces through hegemony and corporatist arrangements; second, how these dynamics have gone through important historical shifts over the course of the last few decades; third, how these shifts create new geographies and lead to conflicts over space; and, finally, how the scale of the local state has played a particular role

in the mediation of crises in state regulation. State restructuring has increasingly been linked to the concept of *neoliberalism*, which is the focus of Section 3.5. Neoliberalism is here discussed both as a political phenomenon and as an academic concept, but first and foremost as a set of processes that transform the state and its role in society. Particular attention is paid to neoliberalism's urban expression, and the contested nature of neoliberalism in these urban areas. Finally, as a synthesis of the discussions of Chapters 2 and 3, Section 3.6 approaches the state as an *employer* and a *deliverer of services*. The public sectors in many countries have gone through substantial restructuring in the last few decades, and these changes can be traced back to structural and ideological changes. This last section concludes with a discussion around the issues that most directly relate to the case study of this thesis, namely the politics of public sector work and municipal service delivery.

3.2 Theories on the state

Understanding and conceptualising the state is a complex task which, depending on the theoretical point of departure, can lead to very different outcomes and insights. Historically, forms of state institutions can be traced back to ancient Mesopotamia, but it was with the emergence of the 'absolutist state' in 17th Century Europe that the concept of the state began to develop in the western world. Weber was one of the first, and certainly one of the most influential, in defining the *modus operandi* of the modern state. He emphasised its organisational aspects and its ability to deploy (and monopolise) means of coercion and physical force (Hay and Lister 2006). This Weberian perspective is evident in institutionalist and statist approaches, especially the focus on state institutions and state managers as potentially autonomous agents in society (see for example Skocpol 1979). But in response to the Weberian notion of the internal make-up of an autonomous state, other traditions in state theory have directed attention to the role played by social forces in shaping and determining its role in society. The *pluralist* approach places emphasis on groups in society, which, in order to influence politics must articulate their interests and harness state power. Pluralism represents a long tradition and a continuous influence on state theory, from liberal pluralist thought in the early 20th century through to the American and, later, British adaptation

of pluralism in modern political science (see Truman 1951; and Richardson and Jordan 1979, respectively). The *elitist* approach has traditionally been occupied with the co-evolution of governmental and economic elites, and in particular how the relationship between them constitutes state power (Mills 1956). Contemporary elitism focuses on policy-making processes at a range of geographical scales, from the ‘epistemic community’ approach (Adler and Haas 1992) – which theorises international regimes – to the local processes conceptualised by so-called ‘urban regime theory’ (Stone 1993). Together with Marxist theories, pluralism and elitism are seen by Hay and Lister (2006:15) to comprise ‘the classical triumvirate’ of state theory. But global developments in the social world have raised new and provocative questions concerning the nature of the state. Social scientists, and in particular human geographers, have been occupied with the ways in which states are reshaped by complex processes of globalisation: cultural globalisation and migration challenge traditional assumptions of citizenship and the functional integration of capitalist production through transnational corporations challenges nation-states and assigns them with new roles and meanings in the world economy (Dicken 2003).

Our understanding of the state – as a subject of academic scrutiny – has also been influenced by new insights in the social sciences. Economics has gained recognition as an academic discipline, and its impact on policy-making is ever-increasing. In political analysis, this influence can be seen in the popularity of public choice theory (see for example Buchanan 1984). Public choice theory’s point of departure is the liberal assumption that all people are rational and utility-maximising. This principle, public choice theorists argue, also applies to the actions and behaviour of politicians and state agencies. While public choice theory has been associated with market-oriented approaches and the rise of the New Right, state theory has also been challenged from radical quarters. Firstly, poststructural thought, and in particular the theories of Foucault (1977; 1991), have in fundamental ways redefined the ontology of state power. Foucault was instrumental in showing how control and power over people were exerted through an ensemble of state and non-state institutions and discourses in society, including the medical, educational and punitive spheres. He also problematised the notion of state power emanating from a coherent authority.

Foucault's concept of 'governmentality' conceived the source of state power to be dispersed throughout society, contributing, in different ways, to the creation of norms, routines and codes of conduct that dictate the behaviour of subjects in modern societies. Secondly, feminist theories have directed attention to the ways in which states – as institutional structures and by virtue of their actions – are gendered and produce and maintain discourses, institutions and policies that affects people in particular ways according to their gender and sexuality (Stetson and Mazur 1995). Thirdly, examinations of the state from an environmental point of view can be seen in what Hay and Lister (2006) label 'green theory', which particularly has questioned the potential of states to sustainably regulate the environmental impact of society.

States are immensely complex phenomena, arguably the most complex organisations of all. Different theoretical approaches yield different, and valuable, insights into the nature of statehood and its theoretical underpinnings. In what follows, I will mainly discuss Marxist theories of the state. This choice of approach can be justified in two ways. Firstly, it can be argued that processes of state transformation and restructuring cannot be fully grasped without a proper consideration of the relationship between state institutions and economic processes, that is, between the state and capitalism. Here, a Marxist perspective on capital accumulation provides some useful tools for understanding these tangled relations. Secondly, it allows for a synthesis with my approach to labour geography in the previous chapter, which also made use of a Marxist framework. While Hay (2006:65) argues that Marx himself never developed a "consistent, single or unified theory of the state", several attempts to do so can be found amongst scholars based in a Marxian tradition. There seems to be a consensus, stretching all the way back to Marx, that states play a central role in sustaining the capitalist system. However, Marx understood society to be based in the fundamental conflict between capital and labour, hence implying that states played a secondary or peripheral role in capitalism. As a result, Marxist state theorists have had a challenging task when conceptualising the state in an abstract sense. Marx and Engels saw states as *instruments* of the ruling class, and Lenin (1917 [1970]) conceptualised the state as inherently an organ of class rule and oppression which, resultantly, had to be met by force and eliminated. Since these early

and crude attempts to theorise the state, Marxist scholars have analysed the particular *functions* states play within capitalism. Two notions seem to be particularly central to these contributions. Firstly, the interests of individual, competing capitalists are in conflict with the collective need of capital to secure its own reproduction. Because the sum of individual capitalists is unlikely to take on these responsibilities, capitalism requires the state to perform the role as the ‘ideal collective capitalist’. Secondly, as the class conflict that underlies capitalist societies is too unstable to provide a basis for capitalist accumulation, the state is needed to create social cohesion between classes. In this sense, the state represents a ‘crisis displacement’ of the contradictions of capitalism. Against this backdrop, Marxist state scholars have tried to avoid the pitfalls of, on the one hand, an instrumentalist depiction of the state as a tool for class oppression and, on the other hand, functionalist explanations of states as determined by the internal dynamics of capitalism.

3.3 The capitalist state as a social relation

A main challenge for the theoretical framework of this thesis is to construct an understanding of the state which grants a key explanatory role to the dynamics of class struggle and to the process of capital accumulation through labour exploitation (as examined in Chapter 2). Jessop’s seminal work (1990; 2002) on state theory represents a conceptualisation which, in his own words, is “commensurable with the fundamental categories of Marxist political economy” (Jessop 1990:10). Jessop tries to stake out a middle ground, bridging the conceptual schism between instrumentalism and functionalism (or structuralism) that he finds in the existing literature, exemplified by the well-known Poulantzas-Miliband debate (Jessop 1990; Hay 2006).

Instrumentalism, which Jessop detects in the writings of Lenin (1917 [1970]), Schmitter (1981) and even in parts of Poulantzas’ theories (e.g. 1970 [1974]72-88), tends to reduce states to tools used by class forces – “transmission belts of interest which are fully determined elsewhere in society” (Jessop 1990:149). By so doing, the inconsistencies and contradictions within the capitalist class, and between different social classes and actors in determining more or less consistent state policies, are ignored.

While Jessop builds his theory in part on Poulantzas, he also criticises the latter's inconsistent conceptualisation of the state, which Jessop argues traverses from instrumentalism to the other extreme, namely structuralism (Poulantzas 1969:67-78; see also Althusser 1971). Structuralist approaches tend to ascribe to the state 'structural selectivity', which refers to the "in-built, *form-determined* bias that makes it more open to capitalist influences and more readily mobilized for capitalist policies" (Jessop 1990:148-9, emphasis in original). If that is the case, the state is already from the start – by virtue of its given form and organisation – preordained to favour the forces of capital (cf. Offe 1975).

Jessop's middle-ground is what he labels the *strategic-relational approach*. While acknowledging that certain structural factors do favour capital accumulation at the expense of other social needs, he sees these as contingent characteristics. This allows him to consider the impact of social struggle and political strategy in both the evolution of the modern state and its role in capitalist societies. Insofar as states are form-determined, this is the historical outcome of the struggles of social forces. The state apparatus, as an ensemble of institutions, cannot in itself exercise power. But because "the state is a social relation", its discourses, its apparatus and its form represents a "condensation of the balance of forces" (Jessop 1990:149). The state is therefore not capitalist *per se*, but only insofar as it "creates, maintains or restores the conditions required for capital accumulation" (Jessop 1990:117). Jessop thus rejects the notion found in state-centred analyses of the state being an independent actor with isolated effects on society (cf. Skocpol 1985; Cerny 1990). Political forces in society shape the state and cannot themselves "exist independently from the state but are shaped in part through its forms of *representation* and *intervention*" (Jessop 1990:116-7, emphasis added). As a modification of 'structural selectivity', Jessop proposes the concept of 'strategic selectivity' which sees the state both as a site and an object of strategic elaboration. In other words, the anatomy of the state is a product of, and continuously subject to, social struggle. In this way, the strategic-relational approach explicitly rejects, and offers an alternative to, economically determinist accounts of the state within a Marxian framework. Jessop (1990) is careful to adopt an explicitly open-ended understanding of the economic sphere. Here, different societal systems are not seen as subsumed under

one dominant system – such as the capitalist economy – but rather are *structurally coupled* to their surroundings. The system that manages to develop the highest level of complexity and flexibility will dominate other systems, through so-called ‘ecological domination’. In modern societies, that is generally the economy. Economic determination – rather than economic determinism – is a contingent (as opposed to a necessary) characteristic of society.

Even though the end of the Cold War signalled the global dominance of capitalism, states are not necessarily capitalist (historically, periods of feudal states and slave-owning states are examples of other state forms). Moreover, capitalist states cannot be reduced to their role in capital accumulation. Still, Jessop argues that capitalist states do share certain characteristics (Jessop 1990). Capitalist societies are organised around the *value form*, meaning the complex processes of money exchange, value-adding through production and the commodification of labour-power that makes capital accumulation possible. For the capitalist type of state, the value form serves as “economic matrix of its activities” (Jessop 1990:355). But it is the need for extra-economic conditions of reproduction and regulation that, above all, necessitates the existence of states in capitalism. The capitalist state is also, according to Jessop, based in its own fundamental form. The core characteristic of the *state form* is its *particularisation*, meaning its institutional separation from the core of capitalist production. The capitalist state bases its authority in the combination of this particularisation and its constitutional claim to a legitimate monopoly of coercion. While this relative autonomy enables capitalist states to function as tax-states – i.e. as redistributors and regulators of capital – they are themselves regulated by law and administered by the rational-legal bureaucracy.

Capitalism, as a socio-economic system, is based on the exploitation of labour. Following from this, the particularisation of the capitalist state is closely linked to the role of labour in capitalism (Jessop 2002:36):

“This separation is rooted in the generalization of the commodity form to labour-power so that coercion can be excluded from the operation of labour markets, and is also required to manage the unstable balance between the inherent capitalist drive to ever greater

commodification and its dependence on non-commodity forms of social relations.”

While formally separated, the exact boundaries between the state, capital and other social forces are fluid and contested. While state systems do discriminate different social forces and their political opportunities, they do so in an inconsistent way. Both *particular capitals* and *capital-in-general* are dependent on state regulation and intervention, but there is inherent friction between particular capitals (competition) and the ways in which their interests converge or diverge from the interests of capital-in-general. Jessop (1990) argues that while capital-in-general cannot be an economic agent, it is still a real structure with specific effects. Furthermore, capital-in-general is not the sum of the interests and actions of particular capitals, a ‘will of all’, but is rather a ‘general will’ reflecting the conditions that must be met for the capitalist system to survive.

With regards to labour, the relative autonomy and the monopoly of power that the state possesses are important in processes of labour control. The capitalist state regulates capital’s relations to formally free labour. Jessop (1990:153) asserts that state regulation is required to mediate the capitalist system’s dependence on social relations that are not “organised in value-terms”, relating to the conditions of labour reproduction, infrastructure and energy supply. Also, capital accumulation and circulation is dependent on a legal framework and a monetary system. The state regularly takes on regulatory functions as a response to these conflict tendencies but it is not, Jessop emphasises, a permanent solution to these problems. As a regulatory system the state is subject to political struggles. These politics are in turn affected by “the state’s own distinctive failures and crisis-tendencies, rooted in the distinctive nature of politics in capitalist societies” (Jessop 2002:48).

3.4 The politics of state regulation

The previous section offered some useful tools for uncovering the conceptual nuts and bolts of capitalist states. This section will build on this rather abstract starting point to establish middle-range concepts that have a greater explanatory power in empirical research on state restructuring in capitalist societies. Much

attention within political economy has been directed towards understanding the fundamental transformation of the world economy since the Second World War, and how restructuring processes in capitalist economies can help explain this change. The regulation approach, developed by French Marxist economists (e.g. Aglietta 1979; Lipietz 1987), has been very influential in this regard. Regulation theory bases its conceptualisation of the state on the function it fulfils in regulating crisis tendencies in the capital relation. The state – together with the wage relation, financial systems and other mechanisms and norms – comprise the *mode of regulation* which secures macroeconomic systems of capital accumulation in spite of their internal contradictions. Modes of regulation are required for particular combinations of production and consumption to reproduce over time, and the structural coupling of particular modes of regulation and accumulation systems create *accumulation regimes*, which can be transnational in reach (Jessop 1990). But regulation theory, as Hay (1995:401 emphasis in original) points out “is not, and furthermore *lacks*, a theory of the state”. Jessop argues that his approach differs from the French regulation theorists by not reducing the state to one of several regulatory factors in the economic system. State institutions and state discourses represent the contested and incomplete realisation of the *state projects* of various social forces, meaning the ways in which the state should be organised as an institutional apparatus. In addition to these state projects, there is contestation over how the state should intervene in matters of accumulation and social reproduction, representing the *state strategies* of different political actors. A state’s role in securing capital accumulation is shaped by the ability of different fractions of capital to formulate models of economic growth. Jessop terms the development of such models *accumulation strategies*. An accumulation strategy must, in order to be successful, establish itself along several axes of power relating to the circuits of capital. The economic domination of certain fractions of capital is required in order to impose its interests and strategies on other fractions of capital as well as articulating this logic with the extra-economic realm.

3.4.1 Hegemony and corporatism

So far this exploration of the state has focused on the ways in which the state facilitates capital accumulation. But how, then, can

political agency be conceptualised within this framework? And if states are understood as sites of struggle, how then can they accommodate more or less stable political regimes based on a ‘condensation of the balance of forces?’ To answer these questions, it is useful to evoke Gramsci’s use of the concept of *hegemony* (see for example Gramsci 1971). Gramsci elaborated the somewhat crude concept of hegemony found in Lenin’s theory of the revolution (Lenin 1917 [1970]), which referred to a revolutionary coalition and its ability to seize power through capturing the state. Gramsci, however, saw state power as only one of several conditions for hegemonic rule. His concept of hegemony referred to the ways in which any given ruling class managed to hold on to its power. A ruling bloc establishes strategic alliances with other forces of society, and transcends its own class’ interests through granting economic concessions to other groups and classes. Moreover, the ruling class seeks to consolidate their hegemony in the political and economic sphere by winning the *consent* of the people and providing moral leadership (Sassoon 1980; Simon 1991). However, when the strategy of winning consent fails, the actual and perceived ability of the state to use *coercion* strengthens hegemonic rule. Because hegemonic struggles first and foremost take place in civil society, the Gramscian notion of the state operates with a porous boundary between civil and political society.

Jessop sees hegemony as an essential condition for a stable capitalist state. Economic hegemony must be constructed by the elite to establish popular support or general acceptance for certain accumulation strategies as politically legitimate. While capital accumulation can also take place in societies where domination and hegemony are not established, it is the combination of these economic and political processes that enable “the relative subordination of an entire social order to the logic and reproduction requirements of capital accumulation” (Jessop 2002:23). This broader process is what Jessop labels *bourgeois societalisation*. As mentioned above, Jessop does not see the state *per se* as favouring capital over any other class. However, structural privileges can be inscribed in the state form to reflect the needs and interests of particular classes. Following from this, a certain unity must be established in the state system to make hegemony possible. As Jessop notes, the unity of the state is constituted

politically in two ways: through “securing the substantive institutional unity of the capitalist type of state” and by “infusing this institutional unity with a definite class unity” (Jessop 1990:8). A particular class fraction and its spokespeople also use the state to establish hegemony through establishing a *national-popular programme* which advances the long-term interests of the hegemonic class and privileges particular *economic-corporate interests* compatible with this programme. Hegemony is also secured through material concessions – such as welfare schemes – which strengthen the support and consent of subordinate forces (Jessop 1990). Interestingly from a geographical point of view, hegemonic struggles are often conflicts over space. This spatial argument has two main aspects to it. Firstly, class forces trying to establish national hegemony are often rooted in particular regions, or carry an explicit cosmopolitan or metropolitan stigma. Thus the struggles for hegemony are regularly infused with conflicts between place-based cultures. Secondly, hegemony can be established on other scales than the national. One good example in this regard is the so-called ‘Washington consensus’: this term refers to the hegemony of the development paradigm championed by global financial institutions in the last few decades. This global hegemonic project shapes – but in turn also shaped by and grounded in – the practices of social actors at the national and local scale (Peet 2002; 2004).

One important way in which organised labour can engage with and legitimate – but paradoxically also at the same time resist – hegemony at the scale of the nation-state, is through *corporatism*. Corporatism refers to the representation of organised social forces in political-economic systems. Workers face a daunting task in representing their collective interests without some kind of external regulation, and the gamut of negotiation forums, collective bargaining agreements and other channels of influence offered by corporatist systems in many capitalist societies represent an attractive strategy for participation. Rather than reducing corporatism to a phase in history, or a regional curiosity limited to Western Europe, Jessop (1990:136) sees it as an “always tendential” characteristic of modern societies. In capitalism, the organisations of capital and labour and their engagement with the state through corporatist arrangements are often operating as supplementary mechanisms to the parliamentary system. The

parliamentary system has its representational basis in the concept of individual citizenship. Corporatism, Jessop argues, addresses the failure of parliamentarism to effectively mediate the fundamental conflict between the social forces of production. It requires these forces to organise on the basis of the division of labour. By so doing, these organisations and their members can have considerable political influence on the operations of the state. Corporatist arrangements illustrate how social forces can shape the institutional make-up of the state, but in turn place specific restrictions on their organisational constitution and political strategies.

3.4.2 Changing forms of governance

As shown above, capitalist states secure capital accumulation through political means. It is now time to focus on concrete, historical changes in the relationship between state regulation and capital accumulation. Based on an analysis of the industrialised Western states after the Second World War, Jessop (2002) provided a detailed typology of their capital accumulation strategies, and how they have changed over time. He describes the rise of a particular type of welfare state which he labels the *Keynesian welfare national state* (KWNS). KWNS is seen as being not only the mode of regulation but the practical materialisation of Fordism. Fordism was the dominant accumulation regime of the post-war era in North America and Western Europe and created, aided by the emergence of the KWNS, a sustained period of growth through economic and social policies aimed at full employment, mass production and mass consumption. This mode of regulation operated through demand management, expanded welfare rights and collective bargaining. The state was seen as the main source of compensation for market failure. Furthermore, economic and social policy-making mainly took place at the national scale through a centralised state. While this state model enabled most Western capitalist states to achieve economic growth and social stability quite successfully for several decades, its subsequent demise in the 1970s and 1980s was in part triggered by external conditions such as the 1973 oil crisis. Essentially, however, it is argued that Fordism went into crisis due to internal failures in these economies: low productivity rates were hard to change due to inflexibility in the organisation of production, and a

continuing rise in the wage levels of unionised workers was made impossible by falling profit rates (Aglietta 1979). According to Jessop (2002), several social and economic deficiencies in the KWNS sucked the states in these Fordist economies into crisis: bureaucratic inflexibility, fiscal crises, a lack of political legitimacy, and the pressure of growing immigration to the Western welfare states. Consequently, the KWNS went through a process of fundamental change.

The dismantling of the KWNS produced diverging outcomes in different contexts. Still, Jessop identifies a certain tendential shift across Europe and North America, signalling a move away from the KWNS depicted above to what Jessop refers to as the *Schumpeterian workfare postnational regime* (SWPR). The SWPR is characterised by: a shift from full-employment policies to more open and flexible regimes emphasising innovation and competitiveness; the substitution of demand-side management by supply-side policies; the subordination of social policy to an expanded notion of economic policy – *workfare* – and a parallel attack on collective bargaining arrangements and welfare rights; a downward pressure on the ‘social wage’, meaning that the Keynesian notion of wages as a source of domestic demand is left in favour of perceiving wages as an international production cost; and, finally, the above-mentioned scalar transformation of the state accompanied by a rearticulation of the relationship between the state and society (Jessop 2002:252).

Jessop’s typology of processes of state restructuring in the advanced capitalist economies of the global North has been influential, but it leaves blank spots on the map which either remain unexplained or merely mentioned in passing. Jessop (2002) argues that contemporary nation-states have gone through different degrees of restructuring worldwide, ranging from moderate *policy adjustments* in certain Northern European welfare states, via the *regime shifts* of Thatcher and Reagan, to the *system shifts* that followed the collapse of the Soviet bloc. Although left out of this classification, the *postcolonial states* of the global South have by no means been unaffected by restructuring processes. This raises some interesting questions with regards to the theoretical approach outlined above. Developing states have not experienced the rise and fall of a relatively coherent, international mode of regulation such as Fordism. Nevertheless, explaining restructuring

processes in these countries is impossible without taking into account the relational dynamics between postcolonial states and international economic processes. In fact, the legacy of imperialism and colonialism that continues to circumscribe development in the global South is directly linked to historical processes of capital accumulation driven by, and benefiting, advanced capitalist economies, paving the way for the economic success of Fordism and the Keynesian welfare state.

While all capitalist states might share certain basic characteristics between them, the hierarchical power relations between different nation-states and the dependency of the postcolonial states is “making a mockery of any theory of the state as a monolithic, unitary phenomenon” (Harvey cited in Glassman and Samatar 1997:168). This is not to say that links between states in the global South and processes of capital accumulation are weak. Rather, postcolonial states are to a great extent shaped by *external* processes of capital accumulation, both during and after colonial rule. Hence the mutually reinforcing effects of social policy and economic growth found in Keynesianism are lacking in these states, often referred to as social and sectoral disarticulation. “[T]heir inability to buy legitimacy through policies producing higher wages or more social benefits”, argues Glassman and Samatar (1997:170), “means that such states may more frequently need recourse to overt forms of repression in order to maintain social order.” The weak links between the accumulation function of the state and its legitimation function stand in contrast to the hegemonic and corporatist forms of state power in advanced capitalist countries. Related to this, the lack of productive links with civil society and social actors is conceptualised by Evans (1995) as a lack of *embedded autonomy*, which makes states vulnerable to clientelism, private rent-seeking and military rule. In sum, attempting to identify a transition from Jessop’s KWNS to a SWPR in these national contexts is less fruitful, and highlights the need for alternative frameworks for the analysis of postcolonial states.

Beyond these basic characteristics, it should be noted that postcolonial states comprise a heterogeneous group, ranging from the classic colonial countries of Latin America, Africa and Asia via the internally colonised state structures in Gaza or Tibet, to the break-away settler colonialism of South Africa (Sidaway 2000;

Radcliffe 2005). But in spite of all these differences, some generalisations can be made as to how postcolonial statehood has gone through historical change. Watts (1993), for example, identifies two different phases in the evolution of African states since independence. First, a period of growth where many independent states transformed their single-commodity colonial economies into planned economies with extensive levels of state intervention. Second, when drought, famine and plummeting commodity prices drove these state-led modernisation projects into crisis by the beginning of the 1980s, Africa entered its 'lost decade' where externally imposed structural adjustment programmes were designed to rescue these economies from debt crisis, but in the process led to "currency devaluation and public sector cutbacks which produced something close to a total economic collapse" (Watts 1993:182).

3.4.3 Geographies of state regulation

The geography of state regulation refers not only to the map of the various forms of restructuring occurring globally. It is also worth paying attention to the spatial dynamics of these processes as they unfold in particular states. It then becomes clear that the geographies of capital and labour are mutually dependent on the scalar and territorial organisation of the states they exist in. Jessop (2002) has started outlining these geographies. He identifies the *relativisation of scale* as one of the most distinct features of the transformation of contemporary welfare states. State activities in the post-war period had, to a large extent, been coordinated at the national scale. The relativisation of political and economic scale implies that no single scale is becoming dominant in place of the nation-state. Rather the state is reconfigured along two main dimensions: the *denationalisation* of statehood and the *destatisation* of the political system (Jessop 2002). On the one hand, this entails that the state itself is becoming increasingly multiscalar. Often driven by national governments, supranational state systems and local or regional state structures gradually take on functions previously served by the national state apparatus. On the other hand, this process is accompanied by a redrawing of the public-private divide where non-state actors are being allocated tasks as substitutes or in partnership with the state. This latter process has been labelled the move from *government* to *governance* (Jessop 2002).

Brenner's (2004) reworking of the strategic-relational approach takes state theory further along a geographical path. It is significant for two reasons: it incorporates Marxist state theory into a geographical framework; and it adds a more explicit and integral spatial dimension to the relational understanding of the post-Keynesian state. Brenner upholds that the state is not only an instrument and a product of political strategies, it is also an *arena* where political contestation is played out. As a result, state spaces should not be seen as permanently fixed, but rather processes of constantly changing geographies and a multiplicity of spatial scales. In line with Jessop's conception of 'strategic selectivity', Brenner argues that states are also endowed with a *spatial selectivity* that is a result of "the relational interplay between the geographies of inherited state structures and emergent strategies to transform and/or instrumentalize the geographies of state power" (Brenner 2004:90).

This spatial selectivity is linked to three spatial concepts which correspond with Jessop's concepts of state form, state projects and state strategies. The *state spatial form* simply refers to the modern states being "territorially centralized organisations, self-enclosed units of political authority in an inter-state system" (Brenner 2004:92). While this point might seem matter-of-fact, it is still the geographical matrix that makes state autonomy and regulatory activity possible. Secondly, *state spatial projects* are the ways in which social forces attempt to shape the institutional and administrative framework of the state and its scalar division from the local to supranational. Thirdly, *state spatial strategies* refer to states' capacity, on the basis of these state spatial projects, to "influence the geographies of accumulation and political struggle", such as industrial developments and investments in infrastructure (Brenner 2004:92). From this theoretical starting point, Brenner goes on to outline a sophisticated matrix of spatial projects and strategies as they are constituted along two spatial dimensions: *territory* and *scale*. His insistence on the theoretically significant distinction of how state policies and institutions are territorially articulated "among different types of juridical units or economic zones" from their scalar articulation "among different levels of political-economic organization within a given territory" brings a much more detailed geographical sensitivity to Jessop's framework (Brenner 2004:97).

Figure 3.1 Brenner's parameters for the evolution of state spatial selectivity

	STATE SPATIAL PROJECTS	STATE SPATIAL STRATEGIES
	<i>Geographies of state territorial organisation and administrative differentiation within a given territory</i>	<i>Geographies of state intervention into socio-economic life within a given territory</i>
SCALAR	Centralisation ↔ decentralisation	Singularity ↔ multiplicity
<i>The scalar articulation of state policies and institutions among different levels of political-economic organisation within a given territory</i>	<i>Centralisation</i> of state operations: tends to concentrate political authority at one overarching scale of state administration (generally the national)	Privileging of a <i>single</i> dominant scale (for instance, the national) as the overarching level for socioeconomic activities
	<i>Decentralisation</i> of state operations: transfers various regulatory tasks away from the central coordinating tier of state power (generally to subnational levels)	Distribution of socioeconomic activities among <i>multiple</i> spatial scales
TERRITORIAL	Uniformity ↔ customisation	Equalisation ↔ concentration
<i>The territorial articulation of state policies and institutions among different types of juridical units or economic zones within a given territory</i>	Promotion of <i>uniform</i> and standardised administrative coverage in which broadly equivalent levels of service provision and bureaucratic organisation are extended throughout an entire territory	Promotion of an <i>equalisation</i> of socioeconomic activities and investments within the state's territorial borders: goal is to spread socioeconomic assets and public resources as evenly as possible across a national territory and thus to alleviate territorial inequalities
	Promotion of patchy, differentiated and uneven administrative geographies in which <i>customised</i> , area-specific institutional arrangements and levels of service provision are established in specific places or geographic zones within a territory	Promotion of a <i>concentration</i> of socioeconomic activities and investments: goal is to promote the agglomeration of socioeconomic assets and public resources in particular locations, places, and regions within a territory

Source: Adapted from Brenner (2004:197).

The matrix in Figure 3.1 makes for a more fine-grained understanding of how the geographies of states have developed. The vertical distinction is useful because it shows how the geographies of state organisation and the geographies of state involvement evolve in different, yet related, ways. The horizontal distinction is valuable also as a response to the calls from some geographers for a more precise use of the scale concept. Brenner (2004) uses these parameters to examine the spatial characteristics of Keynesianism, as an elaboration of Jessop's conceptualisation of the KWNS, as well as the contradictions of this particular mode of regulation. On the one hand, it shows how the *centralisation* of the nation-state as an institution in the Fordist era is related, but analytically distinct, from the scalar *singularity* of the Fordist political economy (e.g. through collective bargaining agreements). On the other hand, the administrative *uniformity* of a state apparatus made up of similarly structured subregions and regional administrations, is analytically distinct from the political content of this uniformity, namely the commitment to *equality* and redistribution across space.

One can easily imagine trajectories where centralisation and singularity, or uniformity and equality, *do not* go hand in hand as was the case with the KWNS. Again, the postcolonial states of Africa provide a contrast to these Western narratives. At the core of the contested geographies of postcolonialism lies what Ramutsindela (2001) refers to as the *territorial problem*. This problem is reflected both between and within states. On the one hand, the international state boundaries drawn up by the colonial powers cut across ethnic divisions and constructed artificial nation-states susceptible to ethnic violence and tribalism. On the other hand, internal divisions were created through racial segregation, dual systems of governance and land ownership and rapid urbanisation. Inequality was exacerbated by an infrastructure with a heavy colonial bias. But there are also some *scalar dilemmas* facing postcolonial states. One of these relates to the (often externally imposed) decentralisation programmes. "Since the 1950s", as Ramutsindela (2001:62) notes, "decentralization in Africa has given rise to a pendulum by which local government swings into favour and out again". While these policies might take inspiration from Western success stories, the decentralisation of postcolonial state territories may increase ethnic and regional

adversity and is often seen by state elites as a threat to national unity (Ramutsindela 2001). In an African context, South Africa represents an exception in this regard, as the capacity of the state was greatly developed (although unevenly and racially defined) during apartheid to include local government structures which, as will be shown in Chapter 4, have played a crucial role in the country's political transition.

3.4.4 Local governance and crisis displacement

The next step in this theorisation of the state is to examine the role of the local state in the political dynamics of state restructuring. Prompted by the emergence of new patterns of local governance in western capitalist societies, and in the UK in particular, an interesting literature emerged in British geography in the 1990s using a critique of regulation theory to approach issues of local state restructuring (Painter and Goodwin 1995; Goodwin and Painter 1996; Jones 1998; Jones and Ward 2002). While this literature is primarily concerned with the UK context, the role granted to local scales of regulation in this transition holds some interesting insights for the purposes of this study. Hay (1995) warned against 'reading off' local governance issues from processes at a national scale (such as the dismantling of Keynesianism) or supranational processes (be they globalisation or the shift from Fordism to post-Fordism). Local government structures actively participate in reshaping state geographies, both as a distinct local scale or tier of government and as a diverse set of local territories. Goodwin and Painter (1996) use concepts from regulation theory in their analysis of UK local government restructuring, and in particular the notion of *crisis* or failure of regulation. They suggest that local state structures were set up as an important part of the Fordist mode of regulation and the Keynesian welfare state via their role in demand management through meeting housing and service delivery needs. In this way, the local state regulated crisis tendencies in capitalism. Its embeddedness in the community made it particularly apt in intervening in the sphere of reproduction and collective consumption. But this form of local state was not a permanent solution to regulation under Fordism. It became increasingly crisis-ridden itself, and consequently in need of crisis management (Goodwin and Painter 1996:645):

“Local government is simultaneously an agent and an object of regulation but the relative significance of these may vary over time.”

Goodwin and Painter exemplify the crisis tendencies of local government by referring to its involvement in collective bargaining agreements in the public sector. While wage increases were made possible in the productive sphere of the Fordist economy through productivity gains and technical change, this was not the case in the public sector where – by and large – the organisation of the labour process did not follow Fordist principles. Hence, a mismatch emerged between the wage increases resulting from collective bargaining agreements and the inability of the public sector to increase productivity correspondingly.

In line with Jessop’s account above, Goodwin and Painter (1996) argue that the dismantling of this form of *local government* led to new forms of *local governance*. But instead of constituting a coherent mode of regulation, post-Fordism is marked by differentiated spaces of regulation. These new modes of regulation are not only mediated through supranational regimes or the deregulation of national arrangements, they also operate directly through local and regional regulatory mechanisms (Goodwin and Painter 1996). They described the British local governance system as moving towards individualised and targeted forms of consumption and a labour relations system characterised by deregulated and a variety of employers, service providers and government agencies. As will be shown below, this also resonates with the South African experience. This rise of local governance in the post-Fordist era can be seen as a regulatory response to the crisis of the Keynesian state. Furthermore, local governance undermined the Fordist mode of regulation by allowing much more differentiated welfare strategies and socio-economic developments, and was therefore also a causal factor in its dissolution.

But this search for local modes of regulation might be misleading. Jones (1998) warned against getting lost in a multitude of different forms of local governance, or what he labelled the ‘geographies of governance’. He calls instead for an analysis of the “*real* regulatory processes used by the state to secure social policy objectives and political unity” (Jones 1998:963). To do so, attention must be paid to the dynamics between different spheres and scales of

government, and their developing interaction with other social actors. This ‘relational theory of the state’ is inspired by Jessop and serves as an apt commentary on the notion of state withdrawal through new forms of governance. Jones agrees that market mechanisms and the private sector do play an increasingly important role at the scale of the local state. However, the interactions between local government and local capital interests also serve to mobilise and institutionalise support for national state policies and ideologies. On the one hand, local government withdraws and opens up ownership, service delivery and political participation to the private sector. On the other hand, this creates a situation in which “the state privileges scales, spaces and places to achieve, amongst other things, political and ideological control” (Jones 1998:983). Private sector-based service delivery and forms of governance at a local scale “can be understood as a form of national *crisis displacement* based on the need to articulate interest groups into the state” (Jones 1998:982, emphasis in original). Within this notion of crisis displacement, two moments can be distinguished. First, when crises in the accumulation regime fail to be resolved through economic restructuring, crisis management moves from the economic to the political arena – “displaced into political/institutional projects and new forms of representation [that] are sought to support the ideological and material effects of policy aimed at ameliorating crisis” (Jones 1998:982). Second, as Jones and Ward argue, the rescaling of the state and the emergence local governance is in many cases a management of crisis tendencies which does not originate in the economy but to “*crises in the rationality and legitimacy of the state and its intervention*” (Jones and Ward 2002:480). Using the terminology of Habermas (1976) and Offe (1975), it is clear that the ‘legitimation crisis’ of the state – which itself functions as an agent of crisis management – requires local governance systems to function as temporary and *ad hoc* solutions. This leads to what Jones and Ward refer to as the ‘crisis of crisis management’ (Jones and Ward 2002).

3.5 Neoliberalism in theory and practice

One way to coalesce the focus on economic processes above with a more explicit focus on political projects as formative of contemporary states is through the concept of *neoliberalism*. Larner

(2008:1) describes neoliberalism as a “[s]hort hand term referring to the new emphasis on markets, minimal states, and individual choice in contemporary political-economic formations”. This concept is not necessarily incompatible with the framework outlined above. Jessop’s concept of the Schumpeterian postnational workfare regimes also places heavy emphasis on deregulation of the existing state infrastructure. However, the concept of neoliberalism is not necessarily tied up in a binary with the Keynesian welfare state. Rather, it has been used to describe state restructuring and regulation changes in as diverse contexts as the Thatcherite revolution in Britain; the wholesale privatisation of state assets in post-Soviet Russia; and the implementation of the Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) plan in post-apartheid South Africa. Clearly, these political processes were entangled in a host of complex social conflicts. Still, what they arguably had in common was the reconfiguration of the relationship between the market, the state and civil society – to the advantage of the former. In this way, it can be said to have certain advantages over the regulation approach in that it is not associated with the dismantling of a particular mode of regulation.

Neoliberalism seems to be many things at once. Firstly, ‘neoliberalism’ can be seen as a historical *political project* championed by national governments and international financial agencies. Secondly, this project has in turn been legitimised by neoliberalism as an *economic theory*, epitomised by the works of Hayek (1960) and Friedman (1962), and the latter’s influence over the ‘Chicago School of Economics’ at the University of Chicago from the 1950s. Interestingly, neither the political actors identified as the key protagonists of the political project nor the intellectuals behind the theoretical development of neoliberalism seem to accept the label. Therefore, Larner (2007) has a point when she labels neoliberalism ‘an oppositional term’ – “deployed by left-wing academics and political activists to criticise a problematic political agenda”. Thirdly, in part as an extension of this last point, neoliberalism has emerged as an *academic concept*, used to explore a range of different objects of governance: nature, economies, institutions, states and individual subjects (Larner 2007). Neoliberalism as ideology and discourse and the contested processes of neoliberal restructuring around the world have been subject to considerable attention in

human geography in the last few years (Brenner and Theodore 2002; Peck and Tickell 2002; Larner 2003; Castree 2006).

The neoliberal political project, and its theoretical underpinnings, has gone through an historical evolution. Neoliberal ideas were initially ‘minority arguments’ formulated as responses to the contradictions of the Keynesian welfare state, in other words, to conditions outside the neoliberal project (Peck and Tickell 2002). As these ideas became ‘majoritarian arguments’ and institutionalised policies they paved the way for fundamental state restructuring, often through initial ‘shock treatments’ of deregulation and privatisation. This in turn forced this paradigm to confront and adapt to the social and economic crises caused by its own policies and, related to this, the internal contradictions of neoliberalism as a theoretical framework (Harvey 2005). Peck and Tickell (2002) suggest the historical evolution of neoliberalism has gone through several phases. In the 1970s, an intellectual *proto-neoliberalism* was gradually implemented through “state-authored restructuring projects” at the end of the same decade (Peck and Tickell 2002:388). Initially starting out as responses to internal crises in the national economy, neoliberal crisis management was soon to be adopted by international lending agencies such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The latter’s Structural Adjustment Programs in the 1980s exemplify how considerable pressure was put on developing countries with little experience of neither Fordism nor welfare state systems to undertake dramatic processes of state restructuring. In all their difference, these shifts had in common a strong emphasis on the dismantling of social regulation and state interventions in the market. This relatively crude process of regulatory withdrawal came with a price, though, as “the perverse economic consequences and pronounced social externalities of narrowly market-centric forms of neoliberalism became increasingly difficult to contest” (Peck and Tickell 2002:388). These socio-economic crises lead neoliberal market economies and international agencies to gradually formulate sophisticated (but *ad hoc*) responses to their own policy contradictions. This signalled a shift in the political paradigm that has been characterised as a move from “*roll-back*” to “*roll-out*” *neoliberalism*, as new market-oriented infrastructures and regulatory mechanisms substituted welfare arrangements or filled the gaps of unsustainable market anarchy (Peck and Tickell 2002).

3.5.1 Conceptualising neoliberalism

Academics, many of them geographers, have attempted to identify the specific characteristics of neoliberalism as a political phenomenon and, by so doing, go beyond simply writing a historical account of neoliberalism. While the development of neoliberalism in some cases can be understood in sequential order – a set of political ideas being translated into national and international policies that facilitate and even force specific restructuring processes to take place – they by no means form a linear causal chain from the abstract to the concrete. Peck and Tickell (2002) depict neoliberalism not as a monolithic political entity – waiting to be implemented – but rather as a web of economic restructuring processes or *neoliberalisations*. These are not ready-made products of ‘the neoliberal project’; rather the ways in which they unfold rather depend on different pressures in different national and subnational contexts. In some cases, neoliberalism can be seen as a response to internal economic crises; in other cases it is, to various degrees, externally imposed – as was the case with the role played by the infamous ‘Chicago Boys’ in Chile after Pinochet’s *coup d’état* in 1973. But in all cases, argue Brenner and Theodore (2002), the process of neoliberalisation is the concrete interaction between already existing regulatory landscapes and emergent policy projects – captured in the term ‘actually existing neoliberalism’ (Brenner and Theodore 2002).

While acknowledging that researchers identify neoliberal change in very different guises, Castree (2006) cautions against the notion of a multitude of ‘neoliberal variants’. Rather, he calls for the study of particular cases of neoliberalisation as an articulation of specific economic restructuring policies with “a raft of *other* social and natural phenomena” (Castree 2006:4, emphasis added). Moreover, these specific policies can in turn be abstracted as ‘neoliberal’ insofar as they correspond with a certain set of characteristics, conceptualised by Castree in the following six ideal-type dimensions: 1) *privatisation* of ownership; 2) *marketisation* of previously unpriced phenomena; 3) *deregulation* and 4) *reregulation* of state intervention in social life and the natural environment; 5) *market proxies* (e.g. user fees and cost-recovery reforms) in the residual public sector; and the construction of 6) *flanking mechanisms* (e.g. development functions taken on by non-profit organisations)

in civil society (Castree 2005:543). The articulation of these ideal-type dimensions is always impure.

As these dimensions suggest, the relationship between the state and neoliberal processes is being reconfigured in more sophisticated ways than was first expected. The notion of ‘roll-out neoliberalism’ – also captured in terms such as ‘re-regulation’ and ‘inclusive neoliberalism’ – seems to counter a view of neoliberal states as retreating, dwindling and bereft of power. In a way, this should not come as a surprise. States and national governments have, after all, been the key drivers of the neoliberal project (Larner 2008). In light of this, it would be naïve to assume that its main effect would be a diminishing of state power. But the question then remains: in what ways do states exert power in neoliberal regimes? There are two, possibly complementary, ways of looking at this dynamic. Firstly, some answers can be found in the concept of *governance*, as discussed in previous sections of this chapter. Neoliberal states might have denationalised and destatised, to use Jessop’s phrase, but this does not necessarily result in the loss of state power. By drawing in other social actors – from the private sector and civil society – to function as partners to the state in service delivery, decision-making and social control, states can potentially secure support and legitimise state policies. In line with Jones’ argument on local governance and crisis displacement (see Section 3.4.4), it can be argued that the shift from Keynesian government to neoliberal governance does not lead to the marginalisation of the state, but rather to new and sophisticated networks and alliances through which the state can exert its influence. Neoliberal governance is further legitimised through the manufacturing of hegemonic consent around the neoliberal solutions (see the concept of Gramscian hegemony in Section 3.4.1).

Other academics have focused on a second set of mechanisms which solidify the power of the state through neoliberal restructuring. By introducing the concept of *governmentality* (as introduced in Section 3.1), Larner (2000:21) advances a neo-Foucauldian approach which rather focuses on the techniques, rationalities and practices of governing – the ‘conduct of conduct’ (MacKinnon 2000:295). Here, neoliberalism is understood as “a multi-vocal and contradictory phenomenon” where the rescaling of the neoliberal state does indeed represent a diffusion of power

into quasi-governmental agencies and the private and non-governmental sectors. However, Larner (2000) argues that states harness seemingly neutral instruments such as budgeting mechanisms, policy targets, performance management and other regulatory practices to become tools for particular political projects. By dispersing these practices throughout and beyond state institutions, the neoliberal project is being performed by a multitude of actors. One consequence of neoliberal governmentality is that neoliberal change is being *depoliticised* (Larner 2007). This process also unfolds at a *discursive level* by portraying it as adjustment to the natural laws of the market or the unavoidable process of globalisation (see, for example, Coe and Kelly 2002); as well as at an *institutional level*, by moving political processes away from democratic structures and dismantling “[e]xisting forms of nonmarket coordination and state regulation” (Gough 2002:410).

3.5.2 The contested urbanisation of neoliberalism

The focus on the neoliberal state, and its implications at a national scale, should be complemented by examining neoliberalism at other scales. Several academics have done so, particularly by focusing on its urban expression. The urban scale can be understood as instrumental to neoliberalism through the new and dominant role of *cities* in this economic order (Swyngedouw and Heynen 2003). This process is described as ‘the urbanisation of neoliberalism’ (Brenner and Theodore 2002:367). In line with Swyngedouw’s theorisation of ‘glocalisation’, studies of neoliberalism assert that relations *between* cities and inter-urban competition are becoming a key dynamic through which the neoliberal growth strategies of urban regimes are framed and legitimised (Harvey 1989; Jones and Ward 2002). Already in the late 1980s, Harvey (1989) argued that the rationale of urban governance was changing its emphasis from provision of local services to an ‘entrepreneurialism’ where city managers acted as entrepreneurs fighting for investments in competition with other urban centres. In relation to their notion of ‘the crisis of crisis management’, Ward and Jones (2002) point out that national government in the UK actively facilitated and institutionalised inter-urban and inter-regional competition parallel to the removal of national regulatory management of uneven development.

Regardless of the successes and failures of particular growth coalitions and particular cities, it seems as if the competition to attract mobile capital investments (Harvey 1989) and/or grants from national governments (Jones and Ward 1998) was allowing neoliberal urban regimes to reconfigure the power geometry between and within urban territories (see also the notion of 'putting labour in its place' in Peck 1996).

Parallel to the increased competition between urban centres, the internal geographies of city regions are becoming increasingly differentiated, paving the way 'intensified socio-spatial polarisation' in the urban landscape (Brenner and Theodore 2002:369-372). Brenner and Theodore (2002) link neoliberalism to the Schumpeterian concept of 'creative destruction', and identify cities as the arenas where the creative destruction of physical and regulatory landscapes are unfolding with the most momentum. They also host the socio-political contestation that infiltrates these changes (Brenner and Theodore 2002). Both the destructive and creative moments of neoliberalism contain elements of economic redistribution in favour of capital and at the expense of other social actors (Moody 1997). The contested nature of urban neoliberalisation bring together issues of socio-economic distribution with struggles around social exclusion and control, and symbolic representations (Brenner and Theodore 2002)

Gough (2002) states that there is a fundamental contradiction between neoliberalism and the socialisation of capitalism (see Section 2.3). On the one hand, neoliberalism seeks to break up forms of existing socialisation as they are perceived as inefficient for capital accumulation. But, on the other hand, historically and spatially concrete forms of socialisation have been instrumental in supplying and reproducing capital with labour power. Furthermore, cities and the local scale have been of particular relevance to this contradiction by creating "locally effective structures" of production and reproduction (Gough 2002:407). The deregulation of these interdependencies through neoliberalisation has a detrimental impact on the working class. This, argues Gough (2002), can lead to mobilisation of the communities of the poor. This social response can be observed on two levels. First, the political mobilisation of urban social movements in an 'oppositional mode' has become a widespread accompaniment to processes of neoliberalisation. As noted above,

political contestation is instrumental in shaping neoliberal change. Second, Gough (2002:417) also observes a mobilisation ‘from above’, which refers to the “sponsored forms of economic and social reproduction organised through voluntary community networks”. Not only does this socialisation through the community represent a flanking mechanism, as listed in Castree’s (2006) ideal-type above, but it also serves to recast civil society actors from being watchdogs to being partners with the state, and thereby manufacturing consent and legitimacy for neoliberal projects.

While it was noted above that neoliberalisation depoliticises political processes, progressive social actors can contribute to *repoliticise* neoliberalism by framing these processes in relation to questions of social justice, class and marginalisation and by creating political spaces for these issues to be addressed. It could be argued that this will only be effective if the individualist emphasis of neoliberal discourse is challenged by collectivist depictions of the effects of neoliberalism. Neoliberalism dispossesses workers – both as a social class and as an organised collective – *vis-à-vis* capital. This is increasingly experienced outside the realm of the workplace and the employment relationship. As Herod and Aguiar (2006:436) put it,

“citizens are redefined as consumers and in which the economic and social risks of employment are more and more assumed by the individual worker, who is increasingly treated as an independent contractor responsible for his/her own healthcare and pension than an employee for whom an employer has some social or economic responsibility.”

Interestingly, organised labour does not always resist these growth strategies. In some cases they can become strategic partners to place-based growth coalitions, and even make strategic concessions to their employers to make the city more attractive for investments. But at the same time, trade unions around the world have been opposed to neoliberalism as a political project and have attempted to resist it in various ways. While these struggles have brought some important victories, organised labour has often found itself on the losing end of these battles. As was discussed in Section 2.7, a key element of neoliberalisation is worker

fragmentation, the dismantling of worker rights and the deregulation of industrial relations – with the effect of putting labour on the defensive both in terms of political representation and organisational strength.

3.6 Public sector restructuring and the politics of municipal services

The last section of this chapter narrows the thematic scope to more directly address the context of this research project. As far as the state is concerned, this means looking at the dynamics of the public sector in general, and service delivery at the scale of the local state in particular. So far, the state has been conceptualised in terms of its role in securing social regulation and capital accumulation, and the consolidation of political power. Now attention will be paid to the state as an *employer* and as a *service provider*. With regards to labour, this entails a limitation of the scope to specifically concern workers in the public sector (as opposed to the private sector) and local government (as opposed to national or provincial government). The theorisation of labour and of the state, constituting the foci of Chapters 2 and 3 respectively, both suffer from a lack of conceptual work on public sector workers. As Carter (1997:73) puts it,

“If employees make few appearances within theories of the state, it is also the case that the state has little presence in labour process theory.”

This section will therefore revisit insights drawn from the theoretical discussion conducted thus far, and attempt to extend them into the realm of public sector employment and the politics of municipal services.

The state is not only the biggest single employer in most advanced economies, but the main arena where political struggles around consumption and reproduction processes have been played out (Jonas 1996). Conceptualising the public sector as an employer and a service deliverer is a necessary task, albeit a very complex one. First of all, the size and functions of the public sector vary considerably between nation-states. For example, whereas the public sector in certain developing countries is minimal and under-

resourced, the public sector of the Scandinavian welfare states is literally present in every aspect of people's lives. Secondly, as most countries of a certain territorial extent have different tiers of government, the functions of the public sector vary between political scales. In the most general sense, the public sector can be defined as "[s]tate general decision-making and its outcomes", which would encompass government consumption, investment and production (Lane 2000:16). The actual government presence in public sector production activities can entail government provision, government ownership and government employment; although none of these are preconditions for each other. Capitalist societies operate with a distinction between the private and the public sector, but after closer inspection it becomes obvious that not only is this distinction increasingly blurred; it should be understood as a set of distinctions rather than a singular one.

If we return to our starting point in the discussion of Marxist state theory above, the relationship between the state and the economy is conceptualised through the state's capacity to create, maintain or restore "the conditions required for capital accumulation" (Jessop 1990:117). This seems to make the state, and the workers employed by the state, relatively autonomous from the capitalist production process. However, as Carchedi (1977) pointed out, state enterprises can also engage in capitalist production – from state-owned mining companies to national telecom industries. What is interesting for the purposes of this thesis, however, is what Carchedi labels 'non-capitalist state activities'. Their *modus operandi* differs from that of capitalist production, argued Carchedi (1977:132, emphasis in original), as a non-capitalist state activity "spends its money not in order to increase it but in order to *meet needs*". He also states that while the commodities produced in non-state capitalist activities share an important characteristic with capitalist commodities – namely the unity of use value and exchange value – it is the use value aspect which primarily constitutes the aim of production, as opposed to exchange value. State employment holds contradictory positions in capitalist societies: many state employees produce use values outside of capitalist production, and by so doing "*perform the function of the collective worker*" (Carchedi 1977:68, emphasis in original); state employees are also (sometimes within the same job function) performing the function of capital, e.g. with regards to labour

control and surveillance. The purpose for exploring the dynamics of public sector employment in this thesis is not, as was the case with Carchedi and other structural Marxists, an attempt to identify the exact class location of public sector workers. While not unrelated, the aim here is rather to reveal the political possibilities and difficulties of workers (in relation to their employers) in certain sections of the public sector, as opposed to workers in other sectors and industries. While one should refrain from categorical statements on public sector workers, there are certain dynamics which can be observed in diverse state contexts.

Public sector work cannot be properly understood through the logic of capitalism alone. “State production of goods and services”, stated Carter (1997:74), should be viewed in relation “both to the capital accumulation processes and the democratic processes”. According to Jessop, the state is formally and institutionally separated from the productive core of capitalism, as it “operates in terms of a *political calculus* which is quite different from the ‘profit-and-loss’ accounting of market forces” (Jessop 1990:145). In other words, whereas capitalist employers’ *raison d’être* is constituted through their ability to make profit, state employers in capitalist democracies are subject to a complex web of interdependencies between bureaucratic institutions, political legitimacy and electoral uncertainty. This obviously impacts on the political position of the public sector workforce in relation to private sector employees, particularly with the relative leverage of public pressure *vis-à-vis* industrial action (Lopez 2004). While employing strategies of public pressure and political leverage might present itself as a promising avenue for public sector unions, there are some caveats to be considered. Firstly, the political scale at which these politics are played out influences the political opportunities of union action. Municipal employees’ close proximity to other service users – and the fact that these workers *are* service users themselves – presents organised labour in local government with a different set of potential strategies than those employed by national government or state-owned enterprises. Beaumont (1992) suggests, with reference to O’Connor’s (1973) theory of fiscal crisis, that urban areas seem to constitute the main arena where the contradiction between capital expenditure (urban infrastructure) and social expenses (welfare services) is being contested, and that public sector unions play a prominent role in these struggles.

Secondly, the relationship between different sets of public sector workers and the 'general public' is a contradictory one. While the previous discussion on community-oriented unionism suggests that strong links can be forged between workers and community groups, this is dependant on the particular political issues at stake. Solidarity between trade unions and community groups cannot be taken for granted. This is highlighted in contexts of neoliberal restructuring, where different social groups often take on contradictory roles.

So far, these concepts have been discussed ahistorically. However, contemporary processes of state restructuring challenge our understanding of public sector politics in two fundamental ways: first, neoliberalisation has relativised the definitions and demarcations of some central concepts, such as the public and private sector; second, it is exactly around these changes that the intensely contested politics of public sector unionism have revolved. In contrast to the general discussion of neoliberalism, the focus here will not be on state restructuring as it relates to the accumulation of capital, but rather in relation to institutional change of the state apparatus as an employer, a local political authority and a deliverer of public services. Pinch (1997) argues that the welfare state system in the English-speaking world has gone through a dual process. On the one hand, there has been a process of 'chipping away at the edges', meaning that the reach of the welfare state has been rationalised, deregulated and, in many cases privatised, resulting in an increase of self-provision and voluntarism. On the other hand, these states have seen a 'hollowing out of the centre', referring to how the public sector itself has been transformed through technological change, intensification and (numerical and functional) flexibilisation of labour relations. It also entails a movement towards the *market*, through commercialisation of service delivery, and towards the *local scale*, through decentralisation and devolution of public sector functions (Pinch 1997). Since the 1980s, processes of public sector restructuring and reorganisation have often been associated with the concept of New Public Management (NPM), which Dibben and Higgins (2004:26) define as follows:

“[A] management approach that focuses on hands-on and entrepreneurial management; an emphasis on performance measurement, output controls,

decentralisation and disaggregation; and the importation from commercial management of competition, private sector styles of management, and doing ‘more with less’.”

Originally an Anglo-Saxon policy regime, NPM has been extremely influential in shaping state restructuring in developing countries. This has happened through a more or less voluntary import of management ideas, combined with the conditionality of the international financial institutions (Baker 2004; Harrison 2006).

NPM reforms entail a remodelling of the relationship between the state and the market, the state and the public, and state-as-employer and state employees (Dibben and Higgins 2004). With regards to the first of these relationships, it is argued that the public sector of many countries has undergone a process of *marketisation*, where private sector actors are drawn into service delivery and the role of the state is reduced from being a ‘provider’ of services to that of an ‘ensurer’ of those services (McDonald and Smith 2002). Marketisation can happen through the *privatisation* of units, public-private service partnerships or through a *corporatisation* of the public sector itself (public sector mimicking a private business) (Dibben and Higgins 2004). The marketisation of public services is linked to a drive to reduce social spending in the wake of the crisis of Fordism-Keynesianism, and NPM often advocates cost-recovery policies as opposed to government subsidisation. While these policies imply a reconfiguration of the redistributive logic of the welfare state to the benefit of capital, neoliberalism and NPM reforms have often been legitimised by employing discourses of ‘quality improvement’ and ‘customer orientation’. The actual relationship between these reforms and their impact on service quality – and whether these changes indeed empower ‘consumer choice’ and ‘consumer voice’ – is far from clear. In any case, these rhetorical and discursive strategies have been instrumental in legitimising neoliberal change (Kirkpatrick and Lucio 1995). It is clear that the assumption of non-capitalist state activities responding to needs, rather than the profit motive, is challenged by this process of marketisation. The main tension in this shift towards *consumerism* lies in the trade-off between the traditional emphasis on the public as *citizens* with rights, responsibilities and participation in local democracy, and NPM’s

way of framing the public as *consumers* of services and *customers* of the public sector (Dibben and Higgins 2004).

Dibben and Higgins (2004) conceptualise the NPM restructuring of the last relationship – the one between the state-as-employer and the workforce – as *managerialism*. Managerialism here is understood as the combination of opening up to competition and the related introduction of efficiency measures to put a pressure on workers to ‘do more out of less’. Performance management and labour control have indeed reshaped employment conditions in the public sector, but the effects of NPM reforms and neoliberalisation on workers in general extends far beyond this narrow definition. As a direct result of privatisation, outsourcing and subcontracting, an increasing proportion of the workforce performing public service tasks are either *externalised* – meaning that they are employed by private contractors – and/or *casualised* – meaning that their employment status rely on short-term or part-time contracts (Samson 2004). As the employment standards of the private sector often are lower than those of the public sector (labour costs are often the main rationale for outsourcing), many workers are consequently both externalised *and* casualised. As a result, some unions traditionally organising in the public sector have started to represent outsourced and externalised workers, signalling a shift from *public sector unionism* to *public service unionism* (Foster and Scott 1998; Public Services International 1999). By revisiting the discussion on new geographies of work in Section 2.7, it becomes clear that the fragmentation of the workforce and the workplace that challenges workers in private service sectors also affects public sector workers in a similar fashion. In relation to the political organisation of public sector workers, a tendency of *deunionisation* has accompanied, and often been the direct result of, this restructuring. Deunionisation is linked to the decline in the public sector workforce, the above-mentioned processes of fragmentation as well as to the dismantling of bargaining arrangements and organisational rights (Beaumont 1992).

Theoretical contributions on neoliberalisation in human geography seem to suggest that the drive to expand markets and reduce state intervention in economic and social life simultaneously affects people as employees, as family members and as citizens. Articulating a joint political response to these changes, however, has often proved to be a difficult task of organisational

coordination and political framing (Lier and Stokke 2006). As a counterpoint to Hudson's (2001) claim that divisions in the working-class are experienced 'in their totality', processes of neoliberal change are experienced by particular groups of workers and communities 'in their particularity'. In other words, the day-to-day problems people face with regards to their utility bills, the quality of service and their job situation are not necessarily recognisable as 'neoliberalism' at face value. Calls by unionists and progressive academics for joint political mobilisation around public services, requires framing these issues into an inclusive political project without losing touch with the social reality of the subjects involved.

3.7 Conclusion

This chapter has served to conceptualise the state, from the abstract theoretical level through to the concrete restructuring processes that have changed the role and organisational make-up of contemporary capitalist states. The purpose of this conceptual work is to address the politics of workers employed by states. In particular, it asks how the political opportunities of these workers are circumscribed by processes of state restructuring. In order to fully comprehend the politics of public sector unions, it is necessary to understand why and how the state changes. The basic premise of this theoretical framework is Jessop's assertion that the state is a social relation. The state fulfils complex and contradictory roles in capitalist societies. It can neither be reduced to these functions, nor does it necessarily fulfil the roles of regulation and social reproduction corresponding to the needs of capital-in-general or any specific group or class in society. The strategic-relational approach offers important conceptual tools for analysing the ways in which capitalist states facilitates capital accumulation while at the same time being subject to social struggle. In fact, the state apparatus is a site which hosts many of these struggles. This understanding requires a broad theorisation of the state – being much more than an institutional apparatus – reminiscent of what Gramsci (1971) referred to as the state *in its inclusive sense*. Economic processes, class forces, social actors and political projects are all constitutive of the state. After decades of post-war development which saw advanced capitalist states in the global

North greatly increase their capacity to regulate and intervene in social and economic life, a neoliberal political project has paved the way for a Schumpeterian workfare regime as a reaction to the crisis of the Keynesian-Fordist state. In other parts of the world where the starting point was different from the welfare states of the West, neoliberalism in the form of deregulation and private sector involvement emerged around the same time, but with different social impacts. While the primacy of the nation-state has given way to a multiplicity of political scales and economic networks, states are in the process of finding new ways and new scales through which to secure growth and regulate social relations. This process is inherently spatial, giving way to uneven, customised and multiscalar state geographies. City regions and the urban scale have been identified as instrumental to the dynamics of economic development, but also as arenas where economic restructuring is most intensely contested. The role of local state structures has also been fundamentally transformed.

New forms of governance have redrawn the relationship between state institutions and other actors in society, in particular through privatisation and public-private partnerships. As a result, the state institutional apparatus – which in our theoretical point of departure was institutionally separated from the economy – is by way of its activities and operational rationale becoming less distinct from economic actors and civil society. In this way state restructuring processes have been instrumental in creating the new geographies of work discussed in Chapter 2. This in particular holds true for the *state-as-employer*. Public sector workers and their unions find themselves in the middle of all these processes, and they experience neoliberal change both in their capacity as state employees, as users of public services and as citizens of the state. Consequently, their political position in relation to neoliberalism is particularly complex – making their union strategies all the more interesting as a subject of academic scrutiny. Relatively little attention has been given to public sector workers, both in the theorisation of the state and in labour studies such as labour geography. The aim of this study is to draw on insights from both these traditions in examining a particular case of local public sector unionism in Cape Town, South Africa. But before doing this, the next chapter will see the general theoretical discussions of Chapter 2 and 3 applied to the national context of the case in question.

4 The state of labour in post-apartheid South Africa

4.1 Introduction

The previous chapters introduced some theoretical debates on the politics of labour and the state, and the ways in which workers are challenged by economic restructuring. Examining labour and the state as abstractions is certainly useful in order to outline some general and critical issues that particular labour struggles around the world are likely to be confronted with. Furthermore, a theoretical treatment of these questions is necessary to establish a theoretically informed case study, which will be task of the following chapters. That being said, it is equally important not to let these discussions *remain* theoretical considerations. In their abstract form, they are rarely directly applicable to specific case study research. Therefore, they should also be looked at through the lens of particular cases and instances of labour struggle and state restructuring. By doing so, the applicability and appropriateness of these concepts can be considered. After all, many of these abstractions have conceived based on research experiences and debates in the UK and the US. Their explanatory power ‘away from home’ should not be taken for granted. Even narrower categories such as *post-colonial states* fail to precisely capture the realities of a particular state, such as the South African state. As South African trade unions and the post-apartheid state represent the national context of this thesis, it is appropriate to revisit some of the theoretical themes – this time from a South African perspective. In truth, the conceptual framework of British and American economic geography is often omitted from geographical research on African countries. This is done quite

conveniently through a division of labour between economic geography and development geography. But faced with contemporary South Africa, it becomes clear that many of the dynamics of state restructuring and labour organising described in economic geography also appear in this context, albeit firmly placed in a reality that is quite different from that of workers in the UK and the US.

The objectives of this chapter are twofold. Firstly, as noted above, it aims to concretise and complexify the theory presented in Chapters 2 and 3 through a particular national context, namely that of post-apartheid South Africa. Secondly, this historical account of the South African labour movement and the transformation of the South African state serves as a background narrative and a conceptual bridge between the previous – rather abstract and placeless – discussions and the case study of this thesis. Section 4.2 traces South Africa's political economy back to its apartheid roots, followed by a look at black trade unions as agents of change in Section 4.3. Section 4.4 turns the attention towards the national political dynamics of the post-apartheid era. Here, the ways in which the political power of the labour movement has been both institutionalised and circumscribed by alliance-building and hegemonic struggles are discussed. Section 4.5 places the emphasis on the underlying economic and structural factors shaping these political dynamics. Some of the biggest challenges facing workers in the post-apartheid era relate to unemployment and informalisation, and this increasingly fragmented labour market presents organised labour with a *crisis of representation*. Section 4.6 turns the focus back to the state by examining the political transformation of the South African state, followed by an outline of the post-apartheid system of local government in Section 4.7. Leaving a detailed treatment of the Cape Town context for Chapter 6, this section looks at the national implementation of a new local government system with particular reference to Beall *et al.*'s (2002) study of urban governance processes in Johannesburg. In Section 4.8, attention is directed towards the surge in social movement activism around service delivery issues at the scale of the local state. Section 4.9 brings all these elements together by answering the following question: how can we conceptualise the political agency of municipal workers in South Africa? Section 4.10

concludes by distilling the research questions that inform the remainder of the thesis.

4.2 The apartheid political economy: The rise and fall of ‘racial Fordism’

South Africa is still marked by the system of racial segregation and exploitation that characterised the apartheid era, lasting from 1948-1994. Of course, racist suppression dates back much further in this country, as it does across the rest of the continent. But the institutionalised injustices of apartheid – particularly through spatial segregation – and the centrality of the exploitation of wage labour to the success of this system led to a deep-seated cementation of inequality. These uneven geographies are still experienced by South African workers today. That being said, labour struggle was also a key decisive factor in the dismantling of the regime. Interestingly, its role in the transition represents not only a victory for South African workers, but also a strategic challenge when staking out the politics of organised labour in the new South Africa.

The relationship between capitalism and the apartheid state has been subject to scrutiny and debate by South African scholars for several decades (see, for example, Wolpe 1972; O'Dowd 1978). The bone of contention in the South African debate has been the relationship between *race* and *class*. The 1948 National Party (NP) election victory and the subsequent introduction of apartheid policies were clearly motivated by notions of white supremacy, but Marais warns against letting the institutionalised racism of the NP government “obscure the *capitalist* character of the apartheid state” (Marais 2001:16, emphasis added). The NP was elected on a programme of Afrikaner¹ nationalism which was a racially framed class project. Through targeted business subsidies and state intervention in core industries, the Afrikaner population gained more control over a national economy which previously had been dominated by British interests. Also, the expansion of the state bureaucracy and the employment of Afrikaners in the public sector gave access to benefits and raised the income levels of a mainly

¹ The term ‘Afrikaners’ is used to refer to white South Africans of Dutch origin.

working-class group hitherto mired in poverty (Marais 2001). But this discriminatory welfare system was only possible in a context of capitalist growth, and capital accumulation during apartheid was based on the combination of the exploitation of black labour and racial oppression in all aspects of social life. The forced spatial segregation of defined race groups made it possible to leave the designated black areas largely un(der)developed whereas other areas were allowed to benefit from the cheap labour of black migrant workers in labour-intensive industries. While the apartheid regime itself came to justify the racial segregation merely as 'separate development', Wolpe's (1972) seminal study showed that the (white) capitalist system "had latched on to subsistence agriculture in the reserves which provided a subsidy in the form of cheap labour power" (Hart 2007:87). Hence, in the apartheid labour market, capital and the state were able to avoid direct responsibility for the reproduction and socialisation of labour.

The apartheid state embarked on an import-substitution industrialisation strategy while the *mineral-energy complex* – extractive industries in gold, copper and diamonds driven by state-subsidised energy and infrastructure – gave access to foreign currency (Bond 2000; Carmody 2002). Gelb (1991) uses the term 'racial Fordism' to describe this system of selective welfare programs, racial oppression and state interventionist industrialisation. Hence this national economy, on the southern tip of the African continent, shared some interesting similarities with Jessop's KWNS (see Section 3.4.2), although its racist foundation lacks comparison in history. While racial Fordism could point to significant success in purely numerical economic terms with an average annual growth rate of almost six per cent during the 1960s, it did eventually run into profound structural problems. Bond (2000:9) argues that South Africa for a long time had been facing an *overaccumulation crisis*, meaning "a situation in which excessive investment has occurred and hence goods cannot be brought to market profitability". South Africa's import-substitution strategy focused on luxury goods production for a limited (white) domestic market. These industries relied heavily on foreign machinery imports and became increasingly capital-intensive, blocking the absorption of surplus labour. Furthermore, a 'colour bar' in the labour market and inadequate education for non-whites resulted in a lack of skilled black labour. Apartheid policies stopped the fruits of

economic growth from being invested in employment and wage rises for the black population, limiting the expansion of the domestic market (Bond 2000; Marais 2001; Gelb 2003).

The state and capital made various attempts at ‘spatial fixes’ to the overaccumulation problem. The government sought to overcome sluggish economic growth by investing in infrastructure and energy supply for capital. They also set up so-called ‘deconcentration points’ on the borders of the homelands, which functioned similarly to export-processing zones, in order to provide a (temporary) spatial fix for the lack of profitability (Bond 2000). In the late 1970s, domestic capital grasped the opportunities given by economic liberalisation and the deregulation of the banking system to orientate outwards and invest in foreign markets. The latter trend might have helped individual firms in the short run, but not the South African economy, which experienced a net outflow of capital as a result. In line with the world economy at large, the growth of the South African economy suffered from the 1970s oil crises and production levels stagnated. Gelb (2004) and others use the concept of crisis to examine the underlying causes of the collapse of the apartheid state. The South African crisis was not confined to the economy. Rather, it increasingly became a ‘legitimation crisis’ (see Section 3.4.4). The added impact of the oil crisis, the political unrest and the consequent capital flight created a structural crisis in South Africa by the late 1970s. In spite of limited attempts to liberalise the apartheid political economy, unrest endured and the economic situation was worsened. The severity of the crisis is evident in the trends in the growth of the gross domestic product and productivity, as shown in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1 *Economic indicators of the structural crisis in South Africa*

	1960s	1970s	1980s
Growth in GPD (per annum)	5.5%	3.3%	1.2%
Total factor productivity growth (p. a.)	2.3%	0.5%	-2.9% (first half of 1980s)

Source: Gelb (1991; 2004:23)

The economy deteriorated further in the 1980s, and as the political mass resistance and the international pressure against the regime

grew in strength, the economic and political basis for apartheid was gone.

4.3 The role of South African labour movement in the political transition

Black trade unions in South Africa, which have existed since 1919 (Baskin 2002), have been marginalised throughout their history – both in relation to capital, and in relation to white (and even Coloured and Indian) trade unions. The formal industrial relations of the apartheid regime only recognised white, coloured and Indian trade unions. Blacks were regarded as *gastarbeiders* from their so-called ‘homelands’ and hence not recognised as ordinary workers. But with the economic crises and social unrest of the 1970s, black labour could no longer be controlled efficiently by crude repression. Through the 1979 Wiehahn Commission and the 1981 Labour Relations Amendment Act, formal trade union rights were extended to black workers and their unions were allowed to participate in the Industrial Council. This move was intended to stabilise the black unions and prevent them from going underground, but the response from labour was a revived union movement that seized the spaces of participation, building shop-floor democracies and recruiting new members (Webster 1994; Marais 2001). Black trade unionism during apartheid, albeit politically curbed, probably benefited from certain structural factors. As the economy was based around a centralised state system and large monopoly capital, workplaces in the mines, in big state-owned and private corporations and in the public sector created large concentrations of workers which in many cases led to strong union cultures (von Holdt 2003).

But the politics of black labour did not evolve in isolation from the general political developments in the country, as the resistance movement grew in strength and militancy. Webster (1994:281) characterises *social movement unionism* as a response to workers being “excluded from the central political decision-making process”. Social movement unionism sprung up at a time when other political resistance activities were underground, exiled and fragmented. The political parties of the liberation movement – in particular the African National Congress (ANC), the Pan

Africanist Congress (PAC) and the South African Communist Party (SACP) – were banned by the regime. Most organisational activity found place in the communities, through neighbourhood and community organisations in South Africa referred to as *civics*. Although there was a lot of debate and contestation around the involvement of the trade unions in the resistance movement, the early 1980s saw successful joint actions between trade unions and other civil society organisations. It became clear that the trade union movement was in a position to bridge geographical scales and organisational differences and spearhead a united resistance (Webster 1994:277):

“It was the beginning of united mass action between organised labour and student and community organisations, with unions taking a leading role. For the trade union movement, it marked a decisive break with economism.”

Shopfloor and community resistance during this era was characterised by tight alliances between trade unions and other civil society organisations, such as civics and churches. These tactics should not merely be seen as strategic policy-making by detached, independent organisations and their leaders. On the contrary, the close ties and the overlapping activities found their explanation in a “a series of networks that linked the popular movement and the trade union, and the meshing of collective identities woven together in the struggle against apartheid” (von Holdt 2003:113). Moreover, the white minority regime and the apartheid policies gave them a common enemy to unite against.

The social movement unionism tradition held strongest amongst mine workers in the Johannesburg area. An influential factor in bringing this strategy to the level of formal, national politics was the launch of Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) in 1985. COSATU was an attempt to overcome political, geographical and sectoral differences in the trade union movement. It can also be seen as a marriage between the shop-floor-based unions and the social movement unionism tradition (Webster 1994; Seekings 2000). COSATU’s participation in the resistance movement was marked by strategic alliance-building, especially with the United Democratic Front (UDF), which acted as an umbrella organisation. The UDF presented the union

federation with an opportunity to establish strong links with the ANC, and hence prepare for the sustained union influence on South African politics in the post-apartheid era. The culmination of the social movement unionism project took place in 1992 when ANC's call for mass action led to the biggest political strike in South African history.

Many of the influential anti-apartheid figures had been arrested and put in jail in the 1960s, as the regime stepped up the persecution of what had become an armed resistance movement. The imprisoned leaders of the resistance movement were released in 1989-90. At this point, the resistance movement was strong and united (although not without its frictions), and when the ban on leftwing organisations was lifted the apartheid system had reached its closing stages. Although popular resistance had grown to massive proportions in the end game of apartheid, the political transition that followed was surprisingly light on popular participation. "Unlike in Eastern Europe", argues Gelb (2004:26), "[mass demonstrations] were a symptom rather than a cause of impending political transition". Bond has famously labelled it an *elite transition*, and it was through negotiations between the NP and ANC leaders and other elites that the white minority rule was gradually dismantled. At the beginning of the 1990s, COSATU and the SACP formalised an alliance with the ANC (the so-called 'tripartite alliance'), meaning that they would throw their weight behind ANC's election campaigns and their quest for state power (Mayibuye 1991). There are many instances of overlapping membership between these three organisations. With such a powerful backing, the ANC won the country's first democratic elections in 1994 by a landslide. They have since solidified their parliamentary position, and strengthened their majority through consecutive election victories in 1999 and 2004.

From the rhetoric of the election campaign in 1993-4 through to the implementation of the *Growth, Employment and Redistribution* (GEAR) plan a few years later, the ANC commenced a substantial shift in their macroeconomic policy. GEAR replaced the original socio-economic framework, the *Reconstruction and Development Programme* (RDP), which served as the ANC's political platform for the 1994 elections. One of the most important contributions of organised labour in this early phase of the political transition was drafting the so-called 'base document' of the RDP. The base

document had clear objectives of redistribution, basic service delivery and democratic socialism. However, by the time the ANC adopted it, leftwing observers claim that the document had “ditched its radical potential in favour of a more ‘realistic’ free-market political economy that has little to offer South Africa’s workers and the poor” (McKinley 1997:132). Over the course of the next few years, the direct influence of organised labour on government policy waned, and the introduction of the GEAR plan in 1996 testified to this marginalisation. Whereas the RDP was born out of dialogue and contestation, the GEAR document was conceived by technocrats and implemented as a ‘non-negotiable’ policy (Marais 2001). The South African economy was fighting itself out of a recession, and there was little patience to wait for democratic processes to deliver. GEAR signalled an explicit embrace of neoliberalism, characterised by strict fiscal control, wage restraints, a liberalised trade regime and an extensive privatisation programme (Marais 2001). The struggle of the resistance movement and organised labour, then, might have paved the way for profound political reforms, but it fell short in face of economic transformation. This highlights what Gillian Hart (2002:17) refers to as the “profound irony of the post-apartheid moment: that political liberation and emancipatory promises coincided with the ascendance of market triumphalism on a global scale, defining the terrain on which the newly elected came to embrace neoliberalism.”

Coming out of a decade where social movement unionism and militancy were common tactics, the union movement struggled with the balancing act of sustaining their community activism and establishing themselves as social partners with the ANC government. Since 1994, the two other main union federations – the Federation of Unions of South Africa (FEDUSA) and National Council of Trade Unions (NACTU) – opted for lobbying as their main political strategies. COSATU, on the other hand, still “relies on a combination of strategic engagement and militant mobilisation” (Webster and Buhlungu 2004:231). But a formal alliance with the party in power inarguably put constraints on the autonomy of COSATU. The bureaucratisation of its union structures and the parallel influx of union leaders into government and business positions weakened the strong links between shopfloor structures and their leadership (Buhlungu 2003; Webster

and Buhlungu 2004). In 1997 COSATU appointed a commission to investigate possibilities for union strategies in the post-apartheid era. Known as the September Commission, this group came to the conclusion that, as a social movement, organised labour was losing touch with its popular base:

“[T]he shift away from grass-roots activity in the Alliance, the widening gap between the ANC and those of its leadership in government, the declining influence of the Alliance in relation to policy-making, all suggest a move away from the politics of transformation, which the working class needs to be aware of and to counter”. (COSATU 1997:np)

But while COSATU acknowledged a need for union revitalisation in writing, translating this resolution into practice proved problematic. In the wake of the 1996 GEAR plan and the 1997 September Commission, COSATU’s political strategies have spanned the tripartite alliance with the ANC and SACP, via strategic alliance-building with certain oppositional civil society groups, to the outright opposition to government policies manifested in the privatisation strikes of 2000, 2001 and 2002. The tripartite alliance has been an arena for intense political contestation *between* the three partners; and many of these conflicts have also been played out *within* COSATU, as well as between and within its different union affiliates. This was highlighted in 2007 by COSATU’s contradictory role taken in the ongoing succession battle in the ANC – where ex-vice president Jacob Zuma and president Thabo Mbeki fought over the ANC presidency – rallying different sections of the tripartite alliance behind them (MacLennan 2007).

Post-apartheid politics clearly have marginalised the social movement unionism tradition. But developments in the South African political economy may, at the same time, create new occasions for this union strategy. One area where this potential has been identified is the topic of this thesis, namely the politics of local government service delivery. In line with the discussion of public sector restructuring in Section 3.6, South African unionists and academics have suggested that a reversal of the neoliberalisation of service delivery is only possible through an alliance between the two groups most directly affected: staff

members and service users (Mayekiso 1992; Ronnie 1996; Xali 2005). But, as will be shown in the next section, alliance-building has proven to be a difficult task for South African trade unions.

4.4 Alliances and hegemony in the post-apartheid political landscape

There seems to be a mismatch between the role of the trade union movement in the liberation struggle and its close ties to the party in power, on the one hand, and its apparent failure to influence the course of the political economy, on the other hand. One way of understanding this unfulfilled potential is through the lens of Gramscian 'hegemony', as discussed in Section 3.4.1. Several scholars have drawn attention to the usefulness of hegemony in analysing post-apartheid politics (Marais 2001; Hart 2002; Peet 2002). In these contributions, particular focus has been given to the strategic alliance-building of the ANC leadership, and the symbolic resources which the political elite made use of to secure its grip on state power. Marais (2001) argues that because the ANC sprung out of a united struggle against an *exclusionary* regime, it developed an *inclusionary* character – which would later help them in realising their hegemonic ambitions. The ANC proved capable of striking agreements with domestic capital and the former regime, while simultaneously maintaining the loyalty of the main organisations of the resistance movement. The most obvious example of this capacity to forge political alliances is the tripartite alliance, which made sure that even the parliamentary base of the government party followed this inclusionary line. The ANC has, through the tripartite alliance, managed to incorporate most of the organised opposition to the left of the government party into its political sphere. Since 1994, many of the most hotly contested political issues have gone through laborious negotiation processes within this political alliance before becoming government policy. This has given the union federation a direct channel to the echelons of power, but it can also be seen as a tool to harness and discipline this potentially powerful social movement. Political positions granted to union leaders have created a sense of shared responsibility, without necessarily resulting in labour-friendly policies.

Beyond the tripartite alliance, the new government has sought to institutionalise their relationship with other organised labour and civil society organisations. The setting up of corporatist forums was instrumental in achieving this. Mirroring the discussion of corporatism and hegemony in Section 3.4.1, they have allowed the trade union movement to directly influence state policies but at the same time served to legitimise government power. While being subject to intense debate in the labour movement at the time (see Maree 1993; Schreiner 1994; Gall 1997), the National Economic Development & Labour Council (NEDLAC) was set up in 1995 with the active backing of COSATU. NEDLAC was based on previous corporatist structures from the apartheid era and the transition period, but with a more inclusive approach to social dialogue. Not only bringing together government, organised labour and organised business, it was notable for also including organised community groups as a fourth constituency of the forum. 1995 was also the year when the new Labour Relations Act (LRA) was passed as a product of tripartite consultations and negotiations. As the social movement unionism of the 1980s had been successful in blocking the repressive 1988 LRA, there were expectations that the 1995 LRA would restructure labour relations in South Africa in labour's favour (Gall 1997). However, this piece of legislation represented certain challenges to labour, as well as certain victories; alongside a limited right to strike was a legal framework that secured employers' right to lock-out, make use of strike labour and sack striking workers (Gall 1997). The 1995 LRA also constrained the political room for manoeuvre amongst organised municipal workers by placing limitations on the right to strike for those workers who were "engaged in an essential service" (RSA 1995:65.1). Open to interpretation, this has presented workers in municipal services with a bureaucratic hindrance on several occasions in the post-apartheid era.

Labour's limited political leverage in the post-apartheid system is also put down to the fact that the government has forged strong ties with different forces of capital. According to Bond's (2000) account of the 'elite transition', domestic capital interests and business-oriented think tanks were instrumental in bringing government policy makers and representatives from the Left into informal workshops which came to have a lot of influence on the discourse of development and growth. In fact, he argues that

“scenario planning became the empirical basis for corporatist deal-making in the sphere of macroeconomic policy” (Bond 2000:55). The ‘coerced harmony’ of these meetings at a crucial point in the country’s political transition, narrowed the discourse of economic transformation on the Left. By doing so, the interests of capital managed to stem the counter-hegemonic discourse of the trade union movement and progressive civil society. Consequently, the leadership of COSATU and the SACP were forced to tone down their claims for a nationalisation programme, and frame a social-democratic agenda within the confines of a competitive, export-based economy. Peet (2002) points to the role of ‘academic-institutional-media’ (AIM) complexes in this hegemonic project, constituted by global actors such as the international financial institutions, universities and mass media. AIM complexes are instrumental in linking neoliberal ideas of development with ‘regional centers of persuasion’ – “in which the universal is converted into the local as discourses are made appropriate to still-differing contexts” (Peet 2002:60). Peet suggests that the direct contact between the ANC leadership and representatives from the IMF, the World Bank and domestic actors such as the South African Reserve Bank, played a crucial role in disciplining the ANC at a crucial stage of political transition.

Organised labour has found itself in contradictory positions in post-apartheid capitalism. Firstly, as many trade unions had set up union investment companies in the early stages of the transition, there were conflicts of interest between their financial concerns and their stance on privatisation. After all, privatisation policies have effectively opened up investment opportunities for these companies. Secondly, contradictions have arisen when individual trade union leaders have been tempted by prospects of upward mobility. While ANC’s embraced business in general, black entrepreneurs have benefited most directly from the regime shift through so-called Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) policies (Southall 2004:326):

“Having acquired political power, the ANC has now embarked upon a more assertive approach to BEE with the objective of promoting a ‘patriotic’ capitalist bourgeoisie.”

Not surprisingly, many individuals in the black business elite – which have received a helping hand on the way to fortune by BEE policies – boast a background in the trade union movement. Through the BEE programme, the ANC state has been “centrally involved in the task of class creation” (Southall 2004:326). BEE policies also helped to legitimise government policy by giving capitalism a multi-racial face (Marais 2001).

The strategic alliances between the ANC, black business and the trade union leadership cannot – on their own – explain why the political position of the government party remains relatively unchallenged in a country where poverty, unemployment and grave inequalities continue to immiserise the majority of the population. The academic treatment of ANC hegemony has also explored the symbolic and cultural aspects of this project (Marais 2001; Hart 2007). Gramsci saw hegemony as much more than state power, political alliances and economic concessions. Cultural production was also essential, and he saw the ruling bloc as capable of intervening “in the ground of common sense and popular traditions” (Stuart Hall cited in Hart 2007:91). Hegemony in post-apartheid South Africa revolves around claims to represent the interests of ‘people in struggle’. The hegemonic bloc led by the ANC leadership has backed this claim with symbolic and cultural resources and their reputation from the liberation struggle (Marais 2001:262):

[I]t managed to deploy an array of ideological precepts and symbols, and assert their pertinence to the lived realities of millions of South Africans. The Freedom Charter was resurrected and popularised as *the* programme for change; the liberation struggle was personified in the form of Nelson Mandela; the colours, flags, songs and slogans of the ANC became ubiquitous features of resistance activities.

Hart (2007:93) argues that by articulating a nationalist discourse to their hegemonic project, they legitimise neoliberal policies and even internalise them in people – “inciting not only the black bourgeoisie but the population more generally to become ‘entrepreneurs of themselves’”. The GEAR plan, then, which has been criticised by the Left for leaving political decisions with economists and technocrats, is thus branded as progressive. Hart

sees this depoliticising of development in relation to neoliberal governmentality (as discussed in Section 3.5.1) and refers to it as “new technologies of rule” (Hart 2007:93). Hence, the ruling power still manages to manufacture consent with the population. Workers are no exception, and this presents the progressive union movement with some sophisticated political challenges.

According to Gramsci, civil society is the main arena for hegemonic struggles. An increasingly polarised civil society testifies to Gramsci’s relevance also in post-apartheid South Africa. ANC hegemony in civil society is based on an intermittent strategy of building consent with the majority, and making use of coercion with dissidents. Through the political transition, many of the organisations rooted in the anti-apartheid movement were folded into the ANC; others were dismantled or reshaped as non-governmental organisations (NGOs) committed to service delivery. But this professionalising and corporatisation of civil society did not include all organisations (Glaser 1997). Civil society organisations which chose more confrontational tactics became known as ‘social movements’ in South Africa. They do not use elections or strikes as their means of influence, but rather mass mobilisation and direct action. Desai (2003:25) has characterised them as “the most relevant post-1994 social force from the point of view of challenging the prevailing political economy”. The manner in which the ANC alliance has responded to this ‘challenge from below’ underlines this picture: authority figures have employed a “polarised political polemic”, branding oppositional movements as disruptive, ‘ultra-left’ and adversarial forces (Oldfield and Stokke 2007:1). State repression, often through the police, has also helped to obstruct and criminalise their activities. In short, dissenting social movements and their activists are increasingly facing what Gramsci described as “hegemony armoured by coercion” (Gramsci cited in Sassoon 1980:110).

For the trade union movement, this divide in civil society has represented a tricky balancing act. The above-mentioned September Commission stated that COSATU should build “alliances with other social movements” (Congress of South African Trade Unions 1997:2.4.vii). It was clear that the unions and these social movements had a shared interest in opposing the ANC government’s neoliberal agenda. COSATU had launched an

offensive with their national anti-privatisation strikes in 2000, 2001 and 2002. But at the same time, the relationship between many of these social movements and the government worsened and there were frequent clashes with local government authorities and police. While COSATU's 2003 National Congress described the popular mobilisation of these social movements as a "wake-up call" to the tripartite alliance, the union federation was still loyal to the ANC (Congress of South African Trade Unions 2003). Hence, a formalised coalition between COSATU unions and social movements at a national level seemed politically unachievable, both due to their political differences and to the fact that the social movements remain poorly coordinated at a national scale (Lier 2007). Still, there are interesting examples of local alliances which represent *ad hoc* bridges over the post-apartheid civil society divide (Lier and Stokke 2006).

4.5 Labour market challenges and the crisis of representation

Exploring the political role of organised labour in post-apartheid South Africa holds some significant insights. Still, some observers warn against reducing this political process to "a morality play in which an egalitarian alliance which overthrew apartheid and formulated the RDP [was] betrayed by politicians and officials who listen to bad advice" (Friedman 2002:26). What is missing in this picture, argues Friedman, is an assessment of structural factors in the economy in general, and in the labour market in particular. Instead of accepting at face value that the political influence of the trade union movement and the left necessarily represents a redistributive and progressive agenda, one should take a critical look at the political representation of different social groups. In other words, which policies benefits which sections of the population? In contrast to labour movements of many Western countries, the labour movement in South Africa – its unrivalled position in Africa notwithstanding – directly represents only a small minority of the country's more than 45 million people².

² COSATU's affiliates could boast a total membership of 1.8 million in 2003. NACTU and FEDUSA, the two other main federations, together represents less than one million workers Buhlungu, S. (2003). The state of trade unionism in

Outside of the union ranks are millions of poor and unemployed. Their role in the labour market and their lack of representation in the political system crucially highlight some of the challenges facing organised labour.

At the heart of South Africa's neoliberal macroeconomic strategy lies the assumption that growth creates employment. The economy was in crisis at the time of the transition, and the period 1990-94 saw a very low level of annual growth in GDP, at only 0.3 per cent. In the following three years, GDP growth rose to 3.4 per cent per annum; however, this growth stalled leading up to the millennium with a 2.1 per cent annual growth rate between 1997 and 2000. Since 2001, growth has slowly picked up, as shown in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2 *Annual growth in the gross domestic product at constant prices*

Year	Average annual growth rate
2001	2.7
2002	3.7
2003	3.1
2004	4.9
2005	5.0
2006	5.4

Source: Gross Domestic Product P0441, available at Stats SA Online (www.statssa.gov.za)

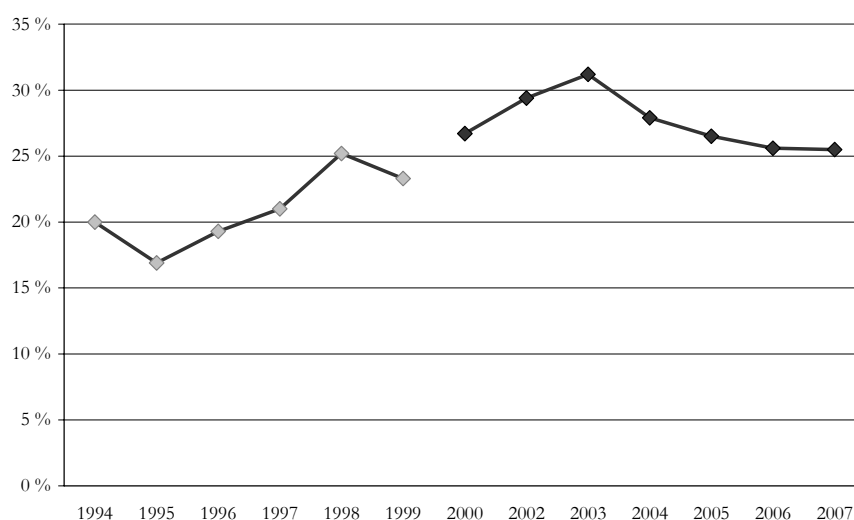
What is worrying for labour in this scenario was the fact that growth seemed to have little effect on employment, and that the limited employment growth that did occur has been insufficient to absorb the growing labour force (DoL 2004). In other words, South Africa seems to have witnessed “jobless growth” (Altman 2004; Barchiesi 2006). Amongst the many pressing challenges that lay ahead for the new political regime at the time of transition, the one that was most directly affecting the trade unions was the restructuring of the labour market. The labour market inherited from the apartheid era was one of grave racial and gender inequalities, one of the highest income inequality levels in the

post-apartheid South Africa. *State of the Nation: South Africa 2003-2004*. J. Daniel, A. Habib and R. Southall. Cape Town, HSRC Press.

world, and a soaring unemployment rate. Moreover, the apartheid education system had perpetuated this injustice and created an acute shortage of skills (Moleke 2003:204). There was an explicit emphasis on job creation in both the RDP and the GEAR documents – as well as in later initiatives such as the Accelerated and Shared Growth Initiative for South Africa (AsgiSA 2006). Still, the post-apartheid labour market has witnessed two processes which has marginalised sections of the South African working class: a *crisis of unemployment* and an increasing *informalisation of work* (Makgetla 2004; Webster and Buhlungu 2004).

Figure 4.1 shows that even by a narrow definition of unemployment, the official figures are extremely high. Unemployment has increased in South Africa since the end of apartheid, reaching a peak in 2003.

Figure 4.1 *The official unemployment rate in post-apartheid South Africa*

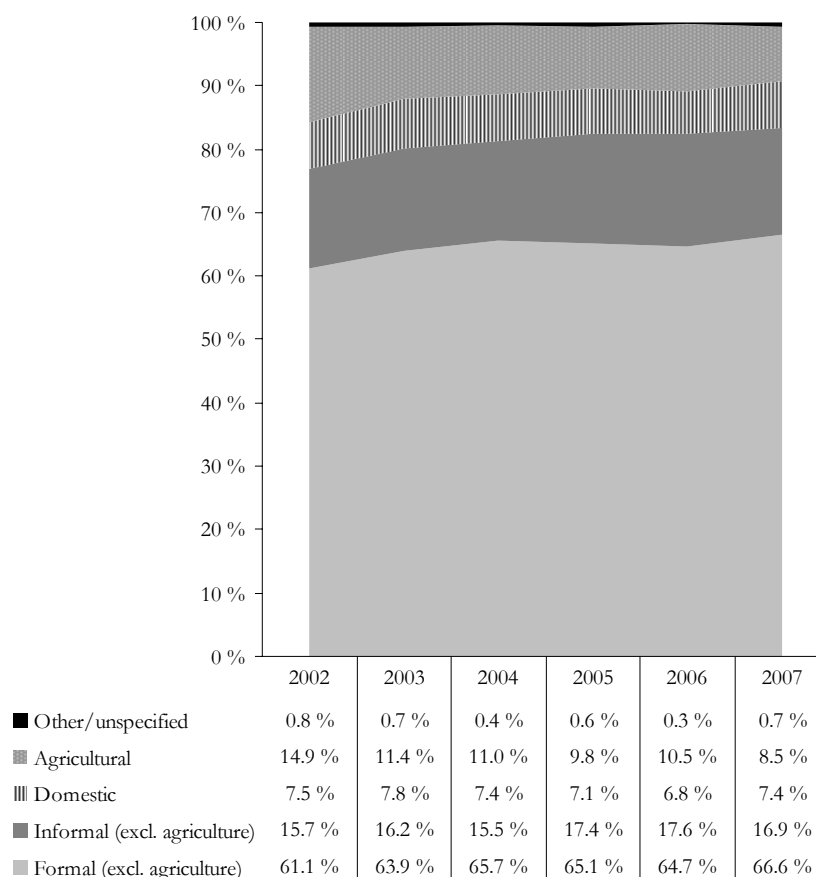


Source: 1994-99, October Household Survey (OHS) in Altman (2004); 2000-07, Labour Force Survey (LFS), available at Stats SA Online (www.statssa.gov.za)

Unemployment is distributed unevenly between social groups, and is particularly prevalent amongst black, female and young people (Altman 2004). It has hit harder in rural areas, leading to a high level of rural-to-urban migration and a fast-climbing urbanisation rate in the post-apartheid era (Pillay, Tomlinson et al. 2006).

Widespread unemployment entrenches poverty, which presents organised labour with political challenges. Trade unions mainly draw their membership from workers in standard employment relationships. As a result of this, Seekings (2004) argues that organised labour mainly have their constituency in the richest half of the population. While the income inequality between the elite and the mainly black working class is extreme, he claims that “South Africa’s poor comprise, above all, the jobless” (Seekings 2004:301). Hence, a social policy which benefits formal employees does not necessarily benefit the poor, and vice versa. This is evident in the debate around social pensions, whose universal entitlements ensure that they benefit those without an income. When these were cut, this was met with “little or no opposition” from unions and other progressive organisations (Friedman 2002:13). Friedman suggests that the reason why many of these pro-poor policies have not won support in the political system is that the poor remain poorly organised. Hence, they lack a voice in decision-making processes. That being said, COSATU in particular has pushed policies in the tripartite alliance that were directed at the non-employed, and supported the proposal to give all South Africans a basic income grant (BIG) which would effectively redistribute resources from the formally employed tax-payers to the unemployed. Still, both Friedman (2002) and Seekings (2004) argue that the structural gap between organised labour and the poor makes an alliance between them unlikely, and that COSATU’s stance on pro-poor policies is, at best, contradictory – in short, they “appear often to speak on behalf of, rather than for, the poor” (Friedman 2002:13).

Parallel to the unemployment crisis is the informalisation of work. Devey *et al.* (2002) states that the number of people working in the informal economy grew from 965,669 in 1997 to 1,873,136 in 2001. In the years following this dramatic increase, however, the formal sector of total employment has grown, as shown in Figure 4.2.

Figure 4.2 *Employment in the formal and informal sector*

Source: Labour Force Surveys (LFS) P0210 from March 2002 to March 2007. Available at Stats SA Online (www.statssa.gov.za)

While this seems to suggest a reversal of the informalisation process, the underlying tendencies are more complex. Informal employment outside the agricultural sector had risen to 2,190,000 jobs in 2007. Hence, while the formal sector is increasing in size and proportion, the informal sector has also increased in size in the last 6 years – and since 2002, the informal sector has showed a proportionate increase from 15.7 to 16.9 per cent of total employment. Moreover, Webster argues that there are concomitant processes at work that complicate the prospects for workers in the labour market. He describes these changes as a two-

pronged attack on standard employment relationships. Firstly, as mentioned above, many workers have been pushed into the informal economy, where unregulated unemployment and a lack of social security create high levels of precariousness and poverty. Secondly, formal employment itself is no longer synonymous with standard employment relationships, as casualisation means that many formal jobs are now casual, part-time and under weaker contracts (as discussed in Section 2.7). Webster estimates that of a total employed labour force of more than 12 million workers in 2006, just over half are now in standard employment relationships, as shown in the four quadrants in Figure 4.3.

Figure 4.3 *The changing social structure of the labour market*

		EMPLOYED			
CASUAL	<i>Quadrant 2</i> Non-standard employment Outsourcing, contract workers 2.1 million	<i>Quadrant 1</i> Standard employment relationships New work order, team work, etc. 6.8 million		FORMAL	
INFORMAL	<i>Quadrant 3</i> Hawkers, homeworkers, taxi drivers 2.3 million	<i>Quadrant 4</i> Small, medium and micro enterprises 0.8 million			
		SELF-EMPLOYED			

Source: Adapted from Webster and Buhlungu (2004:234) and Webster (2006:23)

This picture further complicates the situation of organised labour. The erosion of standard employment relationships in South Africa is also an erosion of the traditional base of unionism. Only in two of COSATU's 21 affiliates is the percentage of members outside Quadrant 1 more than 10 per cent. In line with the discussion above, this implies that not only are the trade unions incapable of speaking for the jobless, they are moreover losing "their capacity to provide a voice for the 'new working poor'" (Webster and Buhlungu 2004:234). This is what Webster and Buhlungu (2004) refer to as a *crisis of representation*, mirroring Seekings and Friedman's concerns above from the standpoint of the union movement. This crisis of representation is likely to continue to erode the political power of organised labour and the empowerment of the poor

unless trade unions revitalise their strategies and manage to successfully organise amongst these growing sections of the working class.

A structural explanation of the limited representativeness of organised labour as a social force is an important commentary on the emphasis on hegemonic struggles and power plays in other explanations of post-apartheid politics. At the same time, this account relies on the notion that there is a direct correspondence between the paid-up membership of a trade union and its political constituency. In effect, it also implies a narrow understanding of workers as political subjects. Suggesting that trade union members constitute a different class than the unemployed is not necessarily useful as an analytical framework (cf. Seekings 2004). Wage workers and the poor are closely tied together through community and family relations. Around the year 2000, there were 2,139,443 households in South Africa which reported having a trade union member in their household, according to the Labour Force Survey. Of these, almost 27 per cent had a monthly household expenditure of less than ZAR 800³, and 44 per cent had less than ZAR 1200. Stats SA operationalised poverty by labelling a monthly expenditure of less than ZAR 600 as “very poor” and ZAR 600-ZAR 1000 as “poor” (Hirschowitz, Orkin et al. 2000:59). In other words, while trade union members are wage-workers, and hence relatively privileged in an economy with widespread unemployment, their lives are not isolated from this poverty. In fact, their income is instrumental in providing social security to the poor. In a context of underfunded public welfare mechanisms, inter- and intra-household support from wage-earners to their dependants is vital to many poor (Seekings 2004). As Tórres (cited in Seekings 2004:309) points out, “there is no doubt as to who is currently carrying the major burden of redistribution, it is the working class.”

4.6 Post-apartheid state spaces

To delve further into an analysis of working class politics in South Africa, it is important to bring the state into the equation. The South African state has undergone a dramatic transformation since

³ *ZAR 10 equalled \$1.391 as of 28.07.2007 according to www.oanda.com.

apartheid and the nature of these changes has, in turn, impacted on the political capacity of South African labour. Two issues which hold particular relevance for this case are the restructuring of the public sector and the establishment of a system of local government – both of which have been hotly contested. The public sector had become one of COSATU's strongholds by the mid-1990s, and COSATU union member density in the public sector grew further, from 43 per cent in 1997 to 61 per cent in 2000. As the political agenda of the new government became increasingly evident, public sector issues triggered some of the key confrontations between government and labour, especially in relation to restructuring programmes, privatisation, retrenchments and casualisation. The establishment of the local government system also presented organised labour with some challenges as its political strength – aside from its considerable success as a national movement – was uneven across political scales, and between and within different trade unions.

So far, the state has been understated as an explanatory factor. But the continuities and discontinuities of the South African state apparatus have had a huge impact on the prospects of the working class to secure employment and access to basic services and for workers to organise and voice their concerns to state authorities. Also, the South African state has been a political arena where social struggles have been fought out. Few academics have explicitly used the strategic-relational approach to analyse the South African political transition (although there are some exceptions, such as Oldfield 2002). But the notion of the state as a social relation is clearly appropriate when examining the post-apartheid state. Therefore, it is worth translating some Jessopian terms (as outlined in Section 3.4) into the South African context. With regards to the concept of *state projects*, it was acknowledged that the form of the state apparatus had to change in order for the country to escape its past. By comparing the apartheid state of the 1980s to the transitional state of the 1990s, one can possibly generalise by stating that many of the social struggles that hitherto had been fought out *between* the state and various social forces have been brought *inside* the confines of the state apparatus. In contrast to the confrontational political climate of the apartheid era, class struggle and the equilibrium of social forces in South African political society is now mediated through an ensemble of state

institutions. For example, the transitional negotiations were officially played out in the Convention for a Democratic South Africa (CODESA). This, in turn, led to the interim government, the Government of National Unity (GNU) where the ANC shared government offices with their apartheid-era enemies in the NP and their ethnic rivals in the Inkatha Freedom Party. Another way of institutionalising social struggle into the state apparatus was through the setting up of corporatist forums such as the above-mentioned NEDLAC, where representatives of the government, domestic capital, organised labour and community groups engage in 'social dialogue' and economic decision-making. Again, Jessop's claim that corporatism is "always tendential" in capitalist states seems to hold true in the case of South Africa (Jessop 1990:193). In other words, echoing Jessop's concept of *strategic selectivity*, the post-apartheid state is very much the product of – but also continuously subject to – social struggle.

It is also clear that the ways in which the post-apartheid state intervenes into social and economic life, or refrains from doing so, is very much the product of a conflict between competing *state strategies*. Both the rivalry between the ideas of the RDP and the GEAR plan, and the friction between the centralisation of state power and decentralisation of democratic participation, can be seen as examples of this. At the foundation of the post-apartheid political economy, state strategies relate to the *particularisation* of the state from capital. In a narrow sense, this concerns the relation between the state and capital control. The establishment of an 'independent' Reserve Bank – meaning the constitutional prohibition of parliamentary control over its operations – represented a victory for capital in subordinating social redistribution to macroeconomic policy (Bond 2000). In a wider sense, the particularisation of the state relates to the direct involvement of the state in capitalist production. The debates around state ownership that emerged around the time of the transition revealed that there was a strong inclination in the resistance movement to view the nationalisation of certain industries as an important tool for redistribution. Mandela even defended the ANC's commitment to nationalise large corporations after his release from prison in 1990. Two years later, however, this stance was abandoned in a speech given at the World Economic Forum in 1992 in Davos, Switzerland (Peet 2002).

While progressive demands for nationalisation were debated around the 1994 elections, the rhetoric shifted as the ideological pendulum swung. Now it has arguably reached the opposite end, as evidenced in the government's contested plans to privatise parastatals and public services.

These different state strategies have spatial implications. Geographers have paid particular analytical attention to the spatiality of the apartheid state, and the patterns of change and continuity that characterise the attempts to deracialise and transform the democratic South Africa. The apartheid era created a society that was not only highly unequal economically, but also marked by segregation and extremely uneven development across space. Residential segregation – enforced through the 1950 *Group Areas Act* and aggravated by highly unequal levels of service provision – together with movement restrictions (influx control) and limited citizen rights for certain race groups, left a mosaic of inequality. Consequently, South African has seen an increase in internal migration to urban areas, especially amongst women looking for work, resulting in rapidly growing informal areas around cities where employment opportunities and living standards are low (Posel and Casale 2003). Inequality not only creates a contrast between urban and rural areas, but has also divided the cities themselves. In a study of the Johannesburg metropolitan region, Beall *et al.* (2002) show the parallel processes of democratisation and economic deregulation in the post-apartheid era in many instances solidified and worsened the inequalities and racial segregation imposed by law during the apartheid era:

“Reconstructing South African cities and towns that were fractured, first by decades of racial Fordism and then by the polarizing trends of post-Fordist development demanded massive economic, political and spatial intervention.”

The emergence of gated communities and spaces of elite consumption (see Section 3.5.2) – aptly described by Brenner and Theodore (2002:371) as the “[r]olling forward’ of the gentrification frontier” – are certainly also prominent features of today’s polarised South African urban landscapes.

By systematising the different features of the post-apartheid state into a geographical perspective, it is clear that the socio-economic landscape of South Africa is subject to a contradictory set of processes. Building on Brenner's (2004) conceptualisation of the dissolution of the Atlantic Fordism, one can begin to draw an analytical map of the relationship between uneven development and the state in the South African context, as depicted in Figure 4.4.

Figure 4.4 *Post-apartheid state spaces*

	STATE SPATIAL PROJECTS	STATE SPATIAL STRATEGIES
	Centralisation ↔ decentralisation	Singularity ↔ multiplicity
SCALAR DIMENSION	<p><i>Apartheid scalar articulation:</i> Strong, centralised nation-state ("Semi-independent" homelands politically and economically dependent on the apartheid state). Processes of decentralisation already evident in the 1980s to increase the political legitimacy of the regime.</p>	<p><i>Apartheid state intervention:</i> National-scale interventions through racist labour regulation, as well as infrastructural investment, subsidies and political control over core industries.</p>
	<p><i>Post-apartheid scalar articulation:</i> Centralisation of state power remains strong, but local government established as a distinct sphere of the state. 'Decentralisation by stealth' through emphasis on local participatory democracy, and the transfer of administrative responsibilities (Beall, Crankshaw et al. 2002). 'Embedded autonomy' in relation to the central state administration and specific local socio-political conditions (Oldfield 2002).</p>	<p><i>Post-apartheid state intervention:</i> Less active state intervention in core industries at a national level, privatisation of parastatals (Bond 2000). Growth-strategies increasingly becoming the responsibility of local government, albeit in a climate of limited fiscal decentralisation.</p>

TERRITORIAL DIMENSION	Uniformity ↔ customisation	Equalisation ↔ concentration
	<p><i>Apartheid territorial articulation:</i> Racialised area classification and the development of highly uneven local government structures and political bureaucratic capacities.</p> <p><i>Post-apartheid territorial articulation:</i> Demarcation of non-racial local governmental structures, but with the establishment of customised urban administrative structures in metropolitan areas.</p>	<p><i>Apartheid state intervention:</i> Actively enforced uneven development motivated by apartheid ideology. Cross-subsidisation of service delivery based on unequal citizen rights. Racial segregation of cities and uneven access to areas of economic activity.</p> <p><i>Post-apartheid state intervention:</i> Local growth strategies and post-Fordist regime of accumulation stimulate concentrated economic growth, which solidifies social polarisation and spatial exclusion (Beall, Crankshaw et al. 2002).</p>

Source: Adapted from Brenner (2004:197, see also Table 3.1 above). Thanks to Dr. Marianne Millstein at the University of Oslo for the idea.

As becomes clear from Figure 4.4, the transition to liberal democracy and neoliberalism in South Africa does not represent a clear-cut move towards the relativisation of scale or the customisation of state territoriality. Along the scalar dimension, there is a significant continuity in the way in which considerable economic, political and cultural authority has remained strong at the national scale before, during, and after the political transition. Hence, the assumption that the national scale is hollowed out by processes of globalisation is problematic when faced with the South African experience. In line with the nature of the elite transition in South Africa and postcolonial transitions more generally, state power has continued to be heavily concentrated at the national scale (Beall, Crankshaw et al. 2002). The new leadership saw the necessity in keeping a strong political authority in order to tackle the apartheid legacy and the threats of federalism and ethnic secessionism. However, it was acknowledged that a political transition at the national scale was insufficient to enable the state to transform the South African society. The 'homeland' system and the existing provincial structure were abolished in favour of nine fully integrated provinces, which were further subdivided into districts and municipalities. Furthermore, a

Demarcation Board was appointed in 1999 to reassess municipal borders and structures.

Along the territorial dimension, racial Fordism and the apartheid state did in many ways create customised and concentrated territorialities, and thus had the opposite effect of the so-called KWNS (see Section 3.4.2). The unevenness of the South African socio-economic landscape has not been easy to change, and economic liberalisation and the move towards a post-Fordist accumulation regime has in some places even solidified or aggravated this unevenness (Beall, Crankshaw et al. 2002). Confronted with the geographical legacy of apartheid, the South African state is faced with a twofold challenge of *reterritorialisation* and *rescaling*. These processes go hand in hand, redrawing administrative boundaries and establishing political scales that can facilitate effective redress of existing inequalities. The South African state still faces a highly uneven landscape in which its regulatory efforts both represent temporary solutions and new contradictions. And it is firmly placed in this uneven landscape, and it is precisely because of this unevenness that new forms of political struggles have emerged.

4.7 The development of a new local government system

The politics of the post-apartheid state cannot fully be understood without critically examining the sphere of local government, in terms of its geography, its role in the economy and its political dynamics. Local government was only established as a distinct, autonomous sphere of government through the 1993 Interim Constitution (Craythorne 2006). The municipality, as a political scale, has a history of conflicts around consumption and reproduction issues that dates back to the apartheid era, shaping the form that local government has taken in the post-apartheid period (van Ryneveld 2006:164):

“Most important in the development of the new system was the extent to which anti-apartheid struggles from 1976 and onwards were focused on or related to municipal issues.”

Political parties, trade unions and civil society actors were invited to take part in drafting the framework for a local government system through the Local Government Negotiating Forum (LGNF). The LGNF negotiations led up to the Local Government Transition Act of 1993, and South Africa held its first democratic municipal elections in 1995-6.

After this initial phase of negotiations and community mobilisation, van Donk and Pieterse (2006) argue that the period from 1996-2000 was when the terms for the design of the new local government system was laid down. Great expectations were attached to this process for three reasons. Firstly, local government was seen as playing a key role in overcoming the apartheid legacy, by being the political scale through which substantial redistribution of resources was expected to happen. Secondly, and in line with the ideology of international development discourse, the local scale was attributed with a significant potential for driving economic development. Finally, based on the country's history of community mobilisation, local political actors demanded a new local government system which had its mandate founded on local democratic processes and community participation. The most important document to guide this process was the 1998 White Paper on Local Government. The White Paper policy framework gave birth to a series of important legislative pieces shaping the form and role of local government, as shown in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3 *Key legislation on local government issues in South Africa*

GOVERNMENT ACT	YEAR	LEGISLATIVE SCOPE
<i>Municipal Demarcation Act</i>	1998	Allowing for a new system of new municipal boundaries based on redistributive potential and integrated development.
<i>Municipal Structures Act</i>	1998	Differentiating between rural and urban municipalities; defining the executive systems of governance; and allowing for ward committees to open up council matters to local democratic channels.
<i>Municipal Electoral Act</i>	1998	Regulating the municipal elections system.
<i>Municipal Systems Act</i>	2000 2003 (Amended)	Establishing operational guidelines for development planning, service provision, staffing matters and performance management.
<i>Municipal Finance Management Act</i>	2003	Setting up the conditions for municipalities to borrow money.
<i>Municipal Property Rates Act</i>	2004	Establishing a unified property rating system across South Africa.

Source: Adapted from van Donk and Pieterse (2006:114)

With respect to the objectives of this thesis, the extent to which this local government policy framework represents *destatisation* and *denationalisation* (as outlined in Section 3.4.3) of state power are crucial issues. With respect to the former, the White Paper and the following Municipal Systems Act did open up for transfers from the public to the private sector through public-private partnerships, outsourcing and privatisation of municipal functions. While these policies by no means were uncontested by social actors, the threat of fiscal crisis resulting from increased spending

in the late 1990s allowed city authorities (particularly the Greater Johannesburg Metropolitan Council) to introduce many of these policies under the pretext of crisis management (Beall, Crankshaw et al. 2002; van Donk and Pieterse 2006). Local destatisation was justified by the assumption that if all South Africans were to receive the levels of service provision hitherto enjoyed by whites, local government would not have the capacity to do so on its own. Relating to the question of denationalisation, the strong national coordination of this political process supports the argument that, in contrast to decentralisation programmes elsewhere on the African continent, political decentralisation (or devolution) was never an explicit agenda on part of the ANC government (Millstein 2007). However, while the government championed a restructuring of local government as a means to redress apartheid injustices, “the transformation of local government in the 1990s was mainly a local rather than national issue” (Ramutsindela 2001:67). This strong influence of local actors led Beall *et al.* (2002) to characterise it as a process of *decentralisation by stealth*.

Beall *et al.* (2002) further argue that the development of a new South African local government system must be understood as a negotiation between the centralisation of power at a national scale, the hegemony of global developmental discourses and the complex politics on the ground (Beall, Crankshaw et al. 2002:86):

“Because of the nature of the centralist transition in South Africa, local government was not allocated any of the traditional developmental or welfare functions of housing, health or education. Instead, in line with international planning practice and the global trend towards neo-liberalism, local government was mandated simply to coordinate social, economic, environmental and spatial planning, albeit in the context of a new participatory and integrated planning framework.”

Central to the establishment of subnational state structures is the notion of *Developmental Local Government (DLG)*. DLG was conceived as a holistic approach which included the economic, political social and environmental aspects of local government, and could be seen as an attempt to marry the basic needs focus of the RDP and the economic principles of the GEAR plan (Beall,

Crankshaw et al. 2002). Along with a focus on poverty reduction and local growth strategies, there is a strong emphasis on participation and local democracy. Oldfield (2002) argues that while local government has come to represent a constitutionally separate sphere of government, and hence has been given a certain independence as a political scale, this is best understood through a reworking of Evan's (1995) concept of 'embedded autonomy' (see Section 3.4.2). In contrast to Evans, Oldfield uses this term to describe intra-state conditions at the local scale; and, in contrast to other postcolonial states which are described by Evans as lacking in embedded autonomy, local state structures in South Africa are characterised by a high degree of embeddedness (Oldfield 2002). The embedded autonomy of local government, she argues, is a result of provincial and national forms of state intervention, as well as the constraints placed on local government by political actors and place-specific conditions in the form of physical and social infrastructure. Apartheid left a fragmented and unequal regulatory landscape wherein some municipalities had highly developed bureaucratic capacities, whereas other had to start from scratch (Atkinson 2003). In South Africa's major metropolitan regions, impoverished black areas had been cross-subsidising the wealth of the white residential areas for years. Demands for 'one city, one tax base' by civic organisations and trade unions led to the establishment of 'unicity' regions in Johannesburg and Cape Town, opening up the possibility of redistribution and reverse cross-subsidisation to townships and underdeveloped areas (Beall, Crankshaw et al. 2002).

The main vision of DLG might be to address the pressing needs of South African communities, but its implementation revealed certain challenging dilemmas. On the financial side, the macroeconomic framework of limited state expenditure and fiscal discipline created a mismatch between the new developmental responsibilities of local government and the insufficient funding that comes with them. South African municipalities are forced to raise 90 per cent of their revenue locally. Against this backdrop, DLG's emphasis on public-private partnerships, privatisation and cost recovery policies in service delivery appears as much an inescapable response to budget constraint as a policy recommendation (Beall, Crankshaw et al. 2002:200):

“[T]he birth of developmental local government (DLG) in South Africa has also unleashed a swathe of unfunded mandates, giving rise to privatization initiatives and the casting around for multi-sectoral partnerships.”

Politically, DLG envisions active participation by citizens and civil society organisations in local government decision-making. People can be political actors in at least four distinct roles: as *voters* through the elections, as *citizens* expressing their views via associations, as *consumers* of public services and as *organised partners* (through the organisations of organised labour and organised capital) (Cashdan 2002). But as Cashdan (2002:169) argues, “[i]n practice, one of these identities may squeeze out the others”. According to Baker (2004), the policy transfer of New Public Management-like reforms tailored for highly developed state apparatuses to a development context is problematic. In circumstances of widespread poverty and unemployment, the capacity of citizens to exert political influence over service delivery issues through their ‘consumer power’ is massively reduced. Moreover, as Samson (2004) has documented through her research on women and privatisation in Johannesburg, this also has an explicit gender dimension in the way it puts further pressure on the domestic realm in poor communities. Also, in poor areas where citizens are alienated by inadequate service delivery and harsh credit control, the incentive to participate in local government issues might be eroded by the diffusion of responsibility for municipal services to the private sector. Participatory democracy around service delivery issues, then, is circumscribed by municipalities’ lack of financial ability and *de facto* responsibility. The study of Beall *et al.* (2002) shows that the potential for fundamental redistribution in Johannesburg was severely restrained by the political strength of affluent communities. Interestingly, behind the demands for ‘one city, one tax base’ one can discern a scalar dilemma: minority constituencies might be alienated from taking part in democratic processes at a metropolitan level.

The combination of financial constraints and the lack of direct popular participation at a metropolitan level is a threat to the legitimacy of local government democracy. Moreover, the lack of political mandate at a ward level risks rendering sublocal democratic institutions little more than outlets for political

frustration with very limited capacity to change the conditions causing these grievances. The discussion in Section 3.4.4 around local governance systems functioning as ‘national crisis management’ holds some relevance in the South African context. With the limited success of the ANC government’s growth and employment strategy in mind, the decentralisation of political participation mechanisms without the backing of financial resources circumscribes the capacity of local governments to redress poverty and inequality. This could be characterised as a type of crisis management where the failure to manage the crisis in the structural economic sphere – at the national scale – prompts the state to transfer the crisis from the economic to the political sphere, and from the national scale down to the local.

4.8 Service delivery reforms and the emergence of urban social movements

The increasing responsibilities of local government, and the insufficient transfers of funds from national government, led to a commitment by municipalities to enforce cost recovery policies and a stricter regime of payment in service delivery (Jaglin 2004; van Ryneveld 2006). To be able to introduce cost recovery in municipal service delivery, service departments in many cities were *corporatised*, i.e. established as separate business units with their own budgeting mechanisms. While corporatisation was met with opposition by trade unions – who saw this as a first step towards full-scale privatisation – cost recovery mechanisms affected people as service users. Consequently, both trade unions and community organisations resisted these changes. As shown above, the rise of post-apartheid social movements in South Africa represents a new grassroots mobilisation challenging the government party and the tripartite alliance from the Left – where they hitherto had not been faced with a clear opposition alternative. Academics have tried to make sense of this community resistance from the perspective of social movement theory (Habib 2003; Oldfield and Stokke 2004; Ballard, Habib et al. 2006). But as these contributions have explicitly pointed out, one must also pay attention to the structures which underlie their grievances.

Social movements in South Africa mobilise around different issues, ranging from the Treatment Action Campaign's (TAC) struggle for an appropriate response to the HIV/AIDS pandemic to the Landless People's Movement's (LPM) fight for land redistribution. In this thesis, however, focus will be placed on mobilisation around service delivery and consumption in urban areas which – along with housing, health and crime issues – represent the most intensely contested political issues in post-apartheid South Africa. In line with the previous sections of this chapter, these urban movements can be seen as a response to three different, yet related, processes. Firstly, they reflect a growing frustration amongst South Africans that the ANC has not lived up to the expectations set when they came to power. Neither the SACP nor the labour movement escapes this criticism, as they clearly have been unable to use their political channels to make government policies sufficiently address the needs of the poor. Secondly, the establishment of the new local government system solidified the urban area – both at metropolitan and ward level – as the political scale at which these politics are played out. The comprehensive set of developmental responsibilities assigned to local government, and the promise of democratic participation which accompanied the restructuring of South African cities have led many of these political battles to be framed as urban issues. Thirdly, the effects of these two processes have been exacerbated by the crisis of unemployment and working poverty experienced by many South Africans. Importantly, it is hard to explain the politics of these social movements without taking into account the closely related and mutually constituted effects of these three factors.

In the wake of GEAR, popular resistance outside the tripartite alliance was articulated more clearly. Many of the well profiled social movement organisations, such as the Anti-Privatisation Forum⁴ in Johannesburg and the Western Cape Anti-Eviction Campaign (AEC) in Cape Town, were established between 1998 and 2001. Some of the issues on the top of these movements' agendas – such as housing and evictions – are not formally a local government responsibility. With regards to basic service delivery issues, however, community members have organised as citizens

⁴ The Anti-Privatisation Forum in Johannesburg is a different organisation from the Cape Town Anti-Privatisation Forum (APF) referred to later in the text.

and rate payers to confront local authorities. Community grievances relate to both the *access* and the *affordability* of municipal services (McDonald 2002). Despite efforts by the government to extend services to new households, more than six million people were still without access to piped water and more than four million people were not connected to the electricity grid in 2001-2002 (McDonald 2002). The backlogs were even more severe in the areas of sanitation and waste removal. McDonald refers to research showing that the poorest families spend from a quarter to a half of their income on service rates, compared to upper-income households for whom rates are “simply not a major budgetary concern” (McDonald 2002:6). In addition to this, 22 and 13 per cent of respondents’ said they were in arrears for water and electricity, respectively. In addition to the effect the introduction of cost recovery policies has had on service rates, it also prompted local authorities to make people pay their rates and arrears by force (McDonald 2002:11):

“Seldom used prior to 1994, service cutoffs have become a major mechanism of payment enforcement and have been implemented throughout the country.”

It was as a response to this (lack of) development that urban social movements started employing their diverse set of tactics around the turn of the millennium: obstruction of attempted evictions; reinstatement of households into houses from which they have been evicted; marches to local councillors and provincial authorities; reconnecting the fittings of those that have been cut off from their water; barricading areas that are going to be invaded by local government officials; and direct confrontations with the police and the army when they accompany the sheriffs (Xali 2005).

In 2004 and 2005, a new surge of more or less spontaneous protests spread around the country (Atkinson 2007). This time, political mobilisation extended far beyond these initial organisations, but the level of coordination was arguably much lower. Most of these protests were, directly or indirectly, related to municipal services. Atkinson (2007:58) identifies three main categories of grievances: poor municipal service delivery; unresponsive and undemocratic decision-making; and perceived corruption amongst municipal councillors and staff. Interestingly, this new wave of unrest took place one year before the 2006

municipal elections where the ANC strengthened its majority and retained its position in all but one of the municipalities where protests had taken place (Atkinson 2007). Hence, Atkinson argues that elections do not represent a form of quality control at local level. Instead, inadequate service delivery gives rise to coordinated and uncoordinated forms of protest, targeted at ward councillors, city officials and frontline staff. The timing of this mushrooming of local mobilisation is interesting. Local discontent emerged after the initial wave of movement politics had made its message well known, and after efforts by leftwing forces arguably had been successful in steering the social policies of the ANC government into a more social democratic stance. Also, the protests around municipal services emerged after a ten-year period when transfers from national to local government increased at an annual growth rate of 15 per cent. This begs the question: why are people protesting when it seems as if their demands are being met? Atkinson (2007) explains this by referring to the unevenly distributed impact of this increase in resources within municipalities. Also, the technical challenges should also be taken into account, such as increased maintenance costs and a tendency of municipalities to prioritise highly visible capital investments rather than operational costs. Finally, the human side of service delivery should not be forgotten – the growing frustration of trying to meet (possibly increased) service bills, being placed in endless waiting lists and so forth (Atkinson 2007).

While the visibility of these protests made sure they attracted attention from media and local government officials in 2004 and 2005, it can be argued that without a sustained level of political mobilisation and organisational capacities this kind of social movement is insufficient to engage constructively with the political agenda of the local state. Hence, some of these different organisations made various attempts to forge alliances with other organisations, both at a local and national scale, as well as with progressive trade unions and NGOs (Oldfield and Stokke 2004; Lier 2007). Both in Johannesburg and Cape Town, the rise of post-apartheid mobilisation around service delivery issues can be traced back to initiatives of the South African Municipal Workers' Union (SAMWU). Being the biggest trade union in local government, and the one with the strongest activist credentials, their political agenda was seen to be compatible with the demands for better service

delivery. The union's attempts to build these alliances could be interpreted as an attempt to rebuild the social movement unionism tradition in a post-apartheid context (Lier and Stokke 2006). But despite the promise of this movement-oriented union strategy, the market-orientation of service delivery has continued. It is also debatable whether SAMWU's involvement with these community groups translates into an alliance where the poor and unemployed are given a political voice. In other words, one important question remains unresolved: do union-community alliances around service delivery issues in local government represent a way of overcoming the above-mentioned crisis of representation? This issue will be discussed in light of the case study in Chapter 8.

4.9 The political agency of municipal workers in South Africa

Before reaching a conclusion, it is appropriate to ask how the theoretical discussions of Chapters 2 and 3, and the outline of the South African national context presented in this chapter, together provides a framework for the forthcoming analysis. *How can we conceptualise the political agency of municipal workers in South Africa?* Chapter 2 introduced labour as embedded in the geography of capital, as well as in the social networks which secure its reproduction. The sphere of social reproduction, in which the delivery of basic services plays an important role, not only provides workers with the necessities of life but it reproduces the conditions for capital accumulation. By mapping the geographies of workers, the work-*place* is seen in relation to the social *spaces* where workers' live their lives, as well as the political *scales* at which the politics of labour are contested. This perspective offers a framework to understand how economic restructuring – such as outsourcing and subcontracting – presents workers with some very challenging geographies of work. Not only can the *conditions* of labour be mapped; workers' political *responses* to these conditions can also be approached geographically. When workers mobilise their strategies are spatial: by engaging with employers and the state at different political scales; by defending certain territories (at the expense of others); and by resisting the fragmentation posed by neoliberalism. Although workers sometimes manage to use capitalist space for their own advantage, labour geographers should

lift their gaze beyond the success stories; this entails looking at sectors, regions and socio-economic contexts where the political potential of workers is less understood.

South Africa fits the bill on all the above points. Just as the country is often labelled a semi-peripheral economy, so can South African labour be located in the semi-periphery of the world economy. On the one hand, their job security is reliant on a national economy which struggles to establish itself in a globalising world, and which has restructured its labour market in order to do so. On the other hand, South African wage workers find themselves in a relatively privileged position surrounded by widespread unemployment. This chapter has showed how the post-apartheid political regime has managed to engage with, and harness, a powerful labour movement through *hegemonic* processes and *corporatist* arrangements. For organised labour, this has been a mixed blessing. True, the country's largest trade union federation has influenced government policies, but not enough to stem the neoliberal tide. Resisting the fragmentation posed by unemployment, informalisation and casualisation of work remains imperative for organised labour. Failure to do so will lead South African unions further into a *crisis of representation*. To represent the broader working class, they must expand their domain of mobilisation and build alliances with communities.

The South African state takes on several roles in this narrative: as a political arena, as a regulatory body in the labour market and as a public sector which conditions the sphere of reproduction through services and employment. Likewise, South African workers are brought into engagement with the state in many ways: as citizens, as service users, as voters and (in the case of public sector workers) as employees and union members. The ways in which states intervene in economic and social life, and how this has changed through neoliberal reform, represented the key theme of Chapter 3. While many advanced countries have experienced a historical shift from state strategies favouring uniformity to the customised and unequal spaces of neoliberalism, South Africa's uneasy embrace of neoliberalism came at a time when the country was trying to shed the socio-economic inequalities of apartheid. Through popular demands for equitable services, the local state and municipal services have taken centre stage in the conflicts over redistribution of resources in the uneven landscape of post-

apartheid South Africa. When local government fails to secure the sphere of reproduction in accordance with its democratic mandate and popular expectations, it will meet resistance from people depending on state-provided services and employment for their well-being. This picture brings us closer to an understanding of the political challenges and opportunities for labour located in the municipal sector.

However, this conceptual work can also build on specific research on the case in question. Contributions by both South African and international researchers have shed light on some important political dynamics behind the various forms of social movement politics in general (Habib and Kotzé 2002; Desai 2003; Oldfield and Stokke 2004; Miraftab and Wills 2005; Ballard, Habib et al. 2006), and the cooperation between trade unions and social movements in particular (Xali 2005; Lier and Stokke 2006). A growing body of research on processes of commercialisation of public services serves as a backdrop to these narratives of resistance (McDonald 2002; McDonald and Pape 2002; McDonald and Smith 2002; Smith and Hanson 2003; Miraftab 2004; Smith 2004). Still, it can be argued that there is a lack of detailed synthesis between the analyses of political dynamics of the former strand of research, on the one hand, and the latter's sensitivity to the complex, structural factors constituting the grievances that trigger political mobilisation, on the other hand. This lacuna is particularly apparent when trying to explain the conflicts of interest that have threatened the unity of alliances bringing together groups which are seemingly all opposed to the general processes of commercialisation and neoliberal restructuring.

The political dynamic between municipal workers, their union representatives and various community formations is a good case in point. Municipal workers certainly share a common interest with the newly emerging social movements in South Africa. Firstly, they are concerned with these issues as producers; their job security, work conditions and wage level are suffering from the neoliberal shift. Secondly, as most public sector workers reside in areas dealing with these issues on a day-to-day basis, they are also concerned with service delivery as users of these services (Xali 2005). Therefore, it comes as little surprise that the need to join forces with social movements around these issues has been voiced in public sector unions since the late 1990s, and has also been

picked up on by activists and academics. But while this potential has been recognised by the actors involved, as well as by outside observers, the actual attempts to work together have revealed some important differences. Some of these can be explained by political dynamics, but to understand the full picture it is necessary to further examine the different groups and their location in the underlying structures that constitute the local state and the urban economy. Atkinson (2007), for instance, argues that there is a fundamental conflict of interest between municipal employees and rate payers over the share of municipal operational budgets allocated to staff salaries versus the money available for maintenance of service delivery systems. Behind this somewhat crude distinction lie further axes of possible conflict. On the rate payer side, the geography of the coverage of service systems represents only one of many issues which can create conflicts of interest between different groups. On the employee side, proposed caps on salary expenditure have served to create differences between formal, unionised jobs and the growing level of casualised and outsourced workers performing functions for the city. Uncovering these differences is not an attempt to portray working class unity around local government issues as impossible, but rather to clarify which challenges must be overcome for political mobilisation to be effective in the post-apartheid city.

4.10 Concluding remarks and research questions

This recent history of South African labour politics helps concretise and complexify the theoretical considerations of this thesis. The final task of this chapter is to outline how a concrete research project can help elaborate and examine these political dynamics more closely. The empirical data of this research are drawn from a case study of local politics and labour relations in Cape Town. To guide the research and make sure that the empirical findings are relevant to the aims of the research and the theoretical discussions above, the following research questions have been articulated:

Research question 1 (see *Chapter 6*):

In what ways has local government restructuring in Cape Town transformed service delivery and employment relations in the municipality?

Research question 2 (see *Chapter 7*):

What have been the social impacts of neoliberal restructuring on municipal workers, other community members, and the relationship between these groups?

Research question 3 (see *Chapter 8*):

Through what kinds of political strategies has organised labour engaged with, and resisted, neoliberal restructuring?

As indicated in the text box, each research question corresponds to an empirical chapter in the following analysis. Hence the analysis will be structured as a narrative which starts with examining the nuts and bolts of the restructuring process, which prepares the ground for an examination of the contested nature of neoliberalism as it affects the lives of workers and community members. But before the Cape Town case is elaborated in detail, the research methods used to collect the relevant data are discussed in the following chapter.

5 Researching labour in a politicised field

5.1 Introduction

“As we attempt to analyze dialogue as a human phenomenon, we discover something which is the essence of dialogue itself: *the word*. But the word is more than just an instrument which makes dialogue possible; accordingly, we must seek its constitutive elements. Within the word we find two dimensions, reflection and action, in such radical interaction that if one is sacrificed – even in part – the other immediately suffers. There is no true word that is not at the same time a praxis.” (Freire 1986:75, emphasis in original)

Qualitative research on political phenomena is invariably preoccupied with *words*. But the hundreds of thousands of words collected through interviews and other means in this research project were not amassed in order to count them, or to conduct a literary analysis. Rather, it is the social reality and power geometries behind these words – described in the quote above as their “reflection and action” – which take centre stage. All researchers have in common an aspiration to uncover the patterns and structures that lie behind these objects of study. Social scientists’ preoccupation with words is sometimes perceived as less scientific than other forms of academic investigation. In contrast to advanced laboratory equipment and computer modelling, the ‘qualitative research kit’ is not very sophisticated; you do not have to be a social scientist to possess a tape recorder, a cell phone and a laptop, or to have a car at your disposal. Still, there is a great deal of sophistication and methodological rigour behind a good

qualitative research project. Looking for social reality in words requires appropriate methods – and appropriate methods need justification.

This chapter will reflect upon my methodological choices, and consider the challenges that I faced during my fieldwork. Starting out with the *philosophical underpinnings* of the research project, Section 5.2 identifies critical realism and dialectical thinking as sources of inspiration. In Section 5.3 I consider the choice of Cape Town as a case and justify the use of a *case study* research method. Section 5.4 focuses on *qualitative research methods*, and on the way I have employed interviews, documentary analysis and other supporting methods in this project. The methodological implications and practical challenges of doing research in a politicised field is the subject of discussion in Section 5.5, while Section 5.6 ends the chapter with some concluding remarks.

5.2 Philosophical reflections on the case study

Certain traditions within the philosophy of science can be recognised in the methodological underpinnings of this thesis. On the one hand, my approach to political research is inspired by a critical realist framework (Archer, Bhaskar et al. 1998; Sayer 2000). Critical realist ontology asserts that there is a *real* world, independent of the researcher, in which objects have certain intrinsic causal powers. For example, people have the causal power of doing work (labour power) (Sayer 2000). Whether or not these causal powers are *actually* activated, relies on the existence of generative mechanisms and on the specific factors of each *empirical* case. Disentangling the *necessary* causal factors from their *contingencies* therefore becomes a primary task for social research. This is done through abstraction and careful conceptualization from the empirical to the real. These abstractions can in turn be applied to our explanations back onto the concrete (Yeung 1997; Sayer 2000). In this research project, the well-documented ability (or causal power) of capitalist states to re-regulate and fragment local state structures to allow market forces an increased role in the sphere of reproduction will be examined against the specific social and political factors in Cape Town. In a similar vein, the suggested potential of public sector workers to mobilise an organised response to these changes, will also be seen in light of the concrete

findings of this case study. It is worth noting here that critical realism has been criticised for creating a dualism between the strategic agency of individuals and the objective structures of capitalism, and hence obscuring the *dialectical* nature of the social world (Roberts 2001). Dialectics represent a second methodological inspiration, which can be particularly illuminating when researching complex political phenomena. Rather than contrasting objects with their external contingencies, a dialectical way of thinking “emphasizes the understanding of processes, flows, fluxes and relations” (Harvey 2004:125). Even ‘things’ that are seemingly solid and inert can, after closer scrutiny, be understood as matter in motion and the only way we can understand them is by scrutinising the processes they *internalise* (Harvey 1996). When looking at the case in question, this implies that the researcher should avoid approaching the process of restructuring as distinct from the labour and community mobilisation contesting it. Rather they are mutually constitutive of each other (Ollman 2004).

These two positions are not necessarily incompatible, but what can these rather abstract perspectives on the social world imply for the conduct of this research project? Yeung (1997), for example, argues that critical realism as a philosophy leaves open the practical and methodological question of how to do this abstraction. While it is true that neither of them represents a set of clear, practical guidelines for research, they both inform the way in which the researcher approaches the field. To put it differently, rather than trying to *operationalise* critical realism and dialectics into a methodological framework, these approaches contain some *sensitising concepts* – which are used as heuristic devices for making sense of the field in relation to the research questions. This is reflected in my search for underlying explanations and causal structures which were not necessarily visible or made explicit in the data collected. I also made active use of abstractions in understanding these underlying explanations, as evident in my theoretical framework in Chapters 2 through 4. Furthermore, my research project represents a dialectical take on the case through looking at the various political institutions, organisations and mobilisations in relation to each other. Similarly, I approached political restructuring as an *internally contradictory* process, by virtue of the multiple processes constituting it (Harvey 1996). At times,

this challenged the understanding of representatives in the field, who were not necessarily convinced that these processes were related or contradictory. This is not to say, however, that I had made up my mind as to *how* these processes were related. Rather, addressing this question became the main objective of the fieldwork.

In an enquiry which explicitly looks for complexity, contradiction, causality and co-relation, *depth* becomes more important than *breadth* as a guideline for research. Consequently, I chose a case study approach as the most appropriate methodology for this project. Global capitalism and processes of state regulation are far-reaching phenomena. Sayer (2000:137) argues that durable, widely distributed structures such as these to a certain extent can be “theorized independently of further empirical research”. In other words, abstraction does not have to start out with the theoretically ‘clean sheets’ proposed by grounded theory or empiricism (Strauss and Corbin 1998; Glaser 2001). On the contrary, in analysing workers in the public sector, a rich theoretical literature can assist in the process of conceptualisation – not only in relation to an understanding of the state in general (e.g. Jessop 2002; Brenner 2004), but also in unpacking the structural and contingent factors that have shaped developments in Cape Town (e.g. McDonald and Smith 2002; Mirafteb 2004; Smith 2004). By drawing on previous research and the theoretical framework of the previous chapters, the methodology of this project could be characterised as a *theoretically informed case study* of contested neoliberal change in a South African city. But as Castree (2005) points out, the articulation of neoliberal processes is always impure, and is played out through a variety of material and discursive contestations. This research can therefore shed light on how the political legacy of apartheid and the contested nature of post-apartheid civil society are articulated with a set of processes which can be abstracted as ‘neoliberal’. Echoing Sayer (2000:137), case studies should therefore not only be *theoretically informed*, but also aspire to be *theoretically informative*.

5.3 Defining a case: Some methodological considerations

According to Yin (2003:2), the case study is an appropriate method for analysing complex social phenomena, particularly when the boundaries between the phenomenon and its context are hard to define. One of the main appeals of the case study method is its explanatory strength in dealing with ‘why’ and ‘how’ questions in real-life scenarios. Rather than a comparative case study – where different cases (e.g. metropolitan areas) are compared in relation to each other – this research project is based on a *single* case study of restructuring in Cape Town. Single case studies, argues Yin (2003:41), are often applied to critical cases which “can then be used to determine whether a theory’s propositions are correct or whether some alternative set of explanations might be more relevant.” At the same time, case studies can also embody unique, typical or even disconfirming characteristics when compared with my theoretical assumptions (Yin 2003; Bradshaw 2005). My choice of case study can be explained and justified from different angles. Firstly, as noted in Section 4.9, South Africa represents a conceptual bridge between the advanced economies of the Anglo-American world – from which most of the contributions in labour geography base their generalisations – and the developing world. Consequently, well-known themes from the labour geography literature – such as working poverty, inequality and unemployment – are found on a more extreme scale in South Africa. Secondly, the political transition since apartheid has triggered political restructuring processes in all South African metropolitan areas. These processes have had huge implications for labour, and therefore been subject to political struggle.

The choice of Cape Town rather than, say, Johannesburg or Durban is perhaps not as evident. One important reason can be found in the timing of the research; at the time of my research, Cape Town was in the midst of a political restructuring process which in other major metropolitan areas had taken place already in the late 1990s (Pillay, Tomlinson et al. 2006). Also, from a labour perspective, the municipal workforce of Cape Town represents a trade union stronghold. SAMWU, the biggest municipal trade union in the country, was established through a merger of five trade unions of which the Cape Town Municipal Workers’

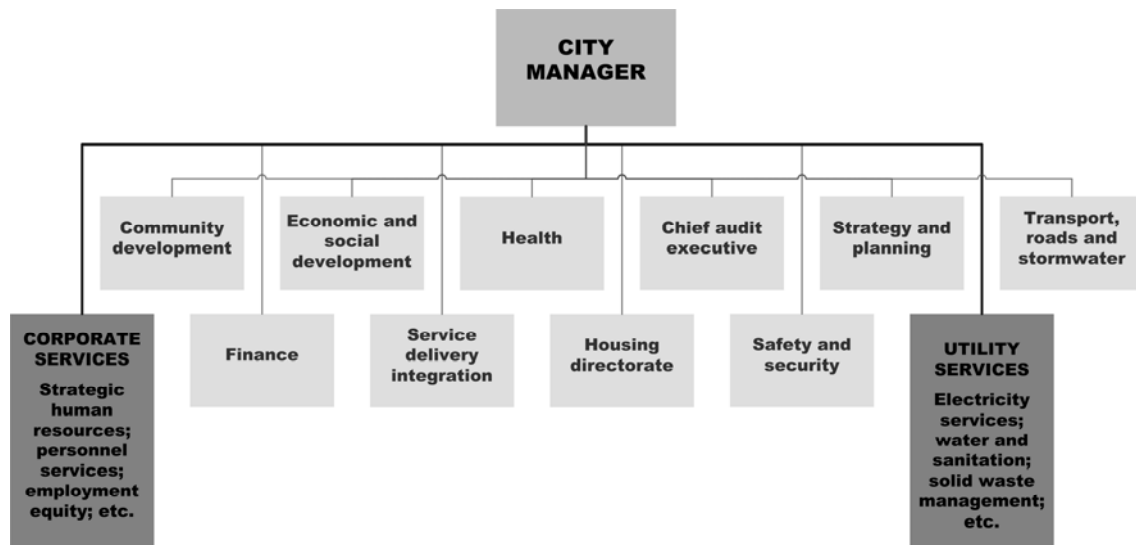
Associations was the biggest. SAMWU still has its national headquarters in Cape Town, unlike most other unions. Also, Cape Town is one of the metropolitan areas where SAMWU has been most actively engaged in community politics. Here, the relationship between community organisations, the trade union and the city authorities has been conflict-fuelled since the mid-1990s. This academic justification of the choice of Cape Town and SAMWU notwithstanding, a range of practical and pragmatic issues have also influenced the choice of case and methods. Given the time constraints and financial limits I have as a PhD student, as well as family considerations, I chose to focus on one geographical destination and a single fieldwork period (although I decided to add a follow-up trip in 2008). My choice of case was also made easier by the fact that I have – through previous research experience in 2003, and subsequent visits in 2004 and 2005 – established a network of academic and political contacts in Cape Town.

While the geographical context of this study can be understood as confined to the Cape Town metropolitan area, such geographical limitations are deeply problematic, particularly when applied to political phenomena (Massey 1994; Hart 2007). As Allen and Cochrane (2007) argue, local government structures cannot be reduced to fixed political territorial units ordered in a scalar hierarchy, rather they should be understood as regional assemblages where political actors from different scales are ‘lodged’. The social and political relations of the local state in Cape Town are subject to pressures and constraints operating at different scales. Hence, the dynamics of a specific case should be viewed as “a local articulation within a wider whole” (Massey quoted in Hart 2002:35).

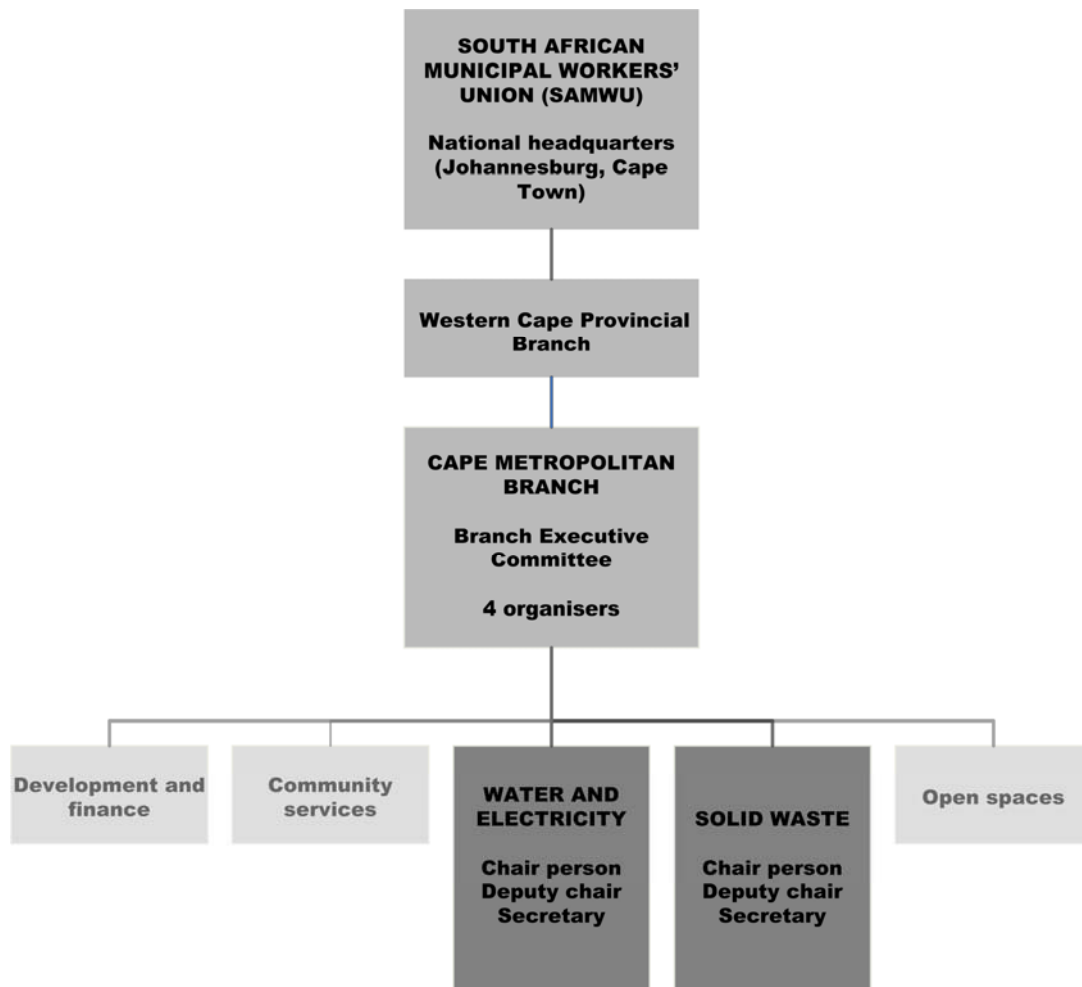
Some further limitations are worth mentioning, in order to clarify the scope of this project. Yin makes a distinction between *holistic* and *embedded* case studies. While the first category looks at the defined case in its entirety, the embedded case study incorporates subunits of analysis. Due to the enormity of the Cape Metropolitan Area and organisational complexity of the CoCT, I have limited my research to *certain sectors of service delivery*. I will focus on the municipal sectors of water, sanitation, electricity and solid waste. In the CoCT, these form three distinct directorates under the Utility Services directorate: Water and Sanitation, Electricity

Services and Solid Waste Management (see Figure 5.1). In the bureaucratic structure of SAMWU, these are organised under the local offices of 'Water and Electricity' and 'Solid Waste' (see Figure 5.2). These sectors are often referred to as 'basic services'. They are critical cases in the sense that they represent the political sphere where both community organisations and union activists have been most vocal in their opposition to restructuring (Oldfield and Stokke 2004; Xali 2005; Lier 2007).

Figure 5.1 *Management model in the City of Cape Town*



Source: City of Cape Town (www.capetown.gov.za)

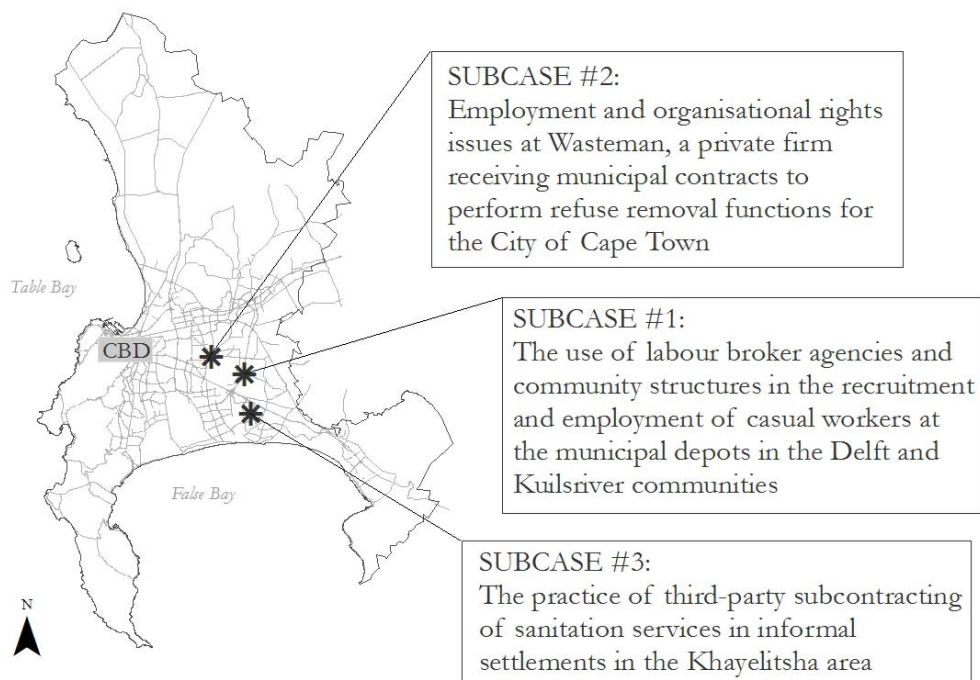
Figure 5.2 *SAMWU's organisational structure*

Source: Communication with the chairperson of SAMWU's Cape Metropolitan Branch.

The scope of this research project was also narrowed down through *establishing three local subcases*, where the processes referred to in the research questions have been examined in depth. The selection of these subcases was a particularly useful strategy in addressing the social impacts of restructuring (see Chapter 7). While a general, city-wide level account of restructuring was indeed necessary to capture the nature and extent of these politics (see Chapter 6), the social reality behind commercialisation can only be fully understood if attention is also given to workers' experiences

and the complex relationships between local government institutions, workers and community structures. In other words, instead of being equally devoted to all cases of outsourcing and subcontracting, I chose to study a selected few in depth. Preliminary discussions with key informants early on in the fieldwork period helped me establish the three subcases (see Figure 5.3). A further elaboration of the social and geographical context of these subcases will be offered in Chapter 7.

Figure 5.3 *Location and description of research subcases in Cape Town*



Note: All these cases involved interview and data collection sites across the metropolitan area.

The asterisks indicate the Delft municipal depot, the Wasteman building at the Airport Industria estate and the centre of the Khayelitsha township.

Finally, Yin (2003) also stresses that a case study must be *delineated in time*. The broader historical backdrop of this project encompasses the political, economic and institutional changes that have occurred since the end of apartheid in 1990. However, this

research project is specifically concerned with the municipal restructuring process that has taken place in the 8-year period since the Unicity Commission in released their policy recommendations to the CoCT in 1999-2000 (see Unicity Commission 2000).

5.4 Qualitative research methods

Many aspects of the social world are inaccessible to a researcher without making use of qualitative methods. Sayer (2000) argues that intensive research and qualitative methods are the most appropriate for giving causal explanations. Stake (1995) emphasises the ability to generate an ‘emphatic understanding’ of complex interrelationships as a particular strength of this methodology. As both causality and complexity were central to my research questions, this case study was based on semi-structured interviews, with document analysis and observation as supporting methods. Yin (2003:85) states that a main principle for data collection should be the use of multiple sources of evidence. This principle relates to concept of *triangulation*, which is the idea that the interplay between different approaches can generate an account which is more robust than the sum of its parts. This approach is also reflected in the theoretical framework of this thesis, as the politics of municipal restructuring are looked at from different theoretical perspectives (*theory triangulation*). Similarly, I attempted to create a triangulated symbiosis between various sources of data and different methodologies – *data* and *methodological triangulation*, respectively – to allow the various stages of data collection and analysis to inform each other in flexible and unexpected ways (Yin 2003; Flick 2004).

Some scholars have questioned the appropriateness of concepts such as *validity*, *reliability* and *generalisability* in qualitative research (Kvale 1996; Steinke 2004). For example, reliability in its classic sense represents a significant challenge for qualitative data collection. But unlike scientific experiments, reliability in social research is not about being able to replicate the *same* results. By attempting to conform to quantitative benchmarks, there is a risk of marginalising some of the core strengths of qualitative research. Therefore, interview-based fieldwork and other qualitative projects should find ways of “auditing quality without losing the key characteristic of creativity in this type of research” (Bailey, White et al. 1999:176). Baxter and Eyles (1997) suggest that these

conventional criteria should be replaced with principles that are more useful for guiding qualitative research. Although not to be adopted dogmatically, they argue that a certain level of rigour “allows qualitative research to demonstrate the relevance of the single case (*credibility*) and to move beyond it (*transferability*) with a degree of certainty (*dependability* and *confirmability*)” (Baxter and Eyles 1997:521, emphases added). An important step in this direction is to establish a research practice which documents the procedures of the case study and attempts to demonstrate transparency – in this way, “an external public is given the opportunity to follow the investigation process and the results which derive from it” (Steinke 2004:187; Mansvelt and Berg 2005). Hence, each step of this research, from the selection of informants to the analysis of interview transcripts will be explained in this chapter, based on my documentation of the fieldwork through memos and qualitative analysis software.

The other typical challenge for qualitative case studies is “the problem of knowing whether a study’s findings are generalizable beyond the immediate case study” (Yin 2003:37). Explanatory case studies do not look for representative samples, but rather seek in-depth understanding of cases and phenomena. This understanding can, in turn, be subject to *analytical generalisation* – “in which a previously developed theory is used to compare the empirical results of the case study” (Yin 2003:32-33). The design of my research questions (see Section 4.10) reflects a close relationship between the theoretical framework and my empirical scope. Thus, I attempt to *analytically generalise* rather than claim ‘representativeness’ or *statistical generalisability*. In sum, I agree with Kvale (1996) that the best way of securing the *quality* of qualitative data is through an open and reflexive practice of checking, questioning and theorising research findings in dialogue with actors in the field and a sound, yet flexible, theoretical framework. In this way, the choice and treatment of the theory is given methodological significance: Is the theoretical framework coherent and relevant? Does it encourage the researcher to formulate appropriate research questions? Does the theory aid the analysis of the empirical findings? Through close supervision by experts in the field and a formal ‘continuation report’ process led by a third academic peer, strong links have been forged between my reading

of relevant academic literature and my fieldwork practice. The exact methods of this practice will now be discussed in detail.

5.4.1 Interviews

The main methodology utilised in this research project was *semi-structured interviews*. Two main motivations support this choice of method. Firstly, interviews allow the researcher to gain access to rich and comprehensive information about a diversity of meanings through individuals' experiences and interpretations of the political landscape they are located in (Thagaard 2002). As my research questions refer to social impacts, relationships and political strategies, it is almost impossible to create a sound account of these without talking directly to the actors involved in these processes. But interviews do not automatically reveal these complex relationships. Interviews are, to use Kvale's (1996:5) words, *conversations*. Through interviews the researcher gets "to know other people, get[s] to learn about their experiences, feelings, and hopes and the world they live in." The semi-structured interview has been described as "a conversation with a purpose" (Cloeke, Cook et al. 2004:149). As I am seeking different experiences and points of view, this form of interview allows me to tailor questions for each individual informant and to do *ad hoc* probing during the interview situation. Here, a balance must be struck between a sufficiently flexible and attentive approach to the informants – in order to understand their world and their perspectives – and the need for rigour, i.e. to make sure the interviews actually address the research questions. The second reason why interviews represent an indispensable source of data is because they can give information about *current* events, otherwise inaccessible to researchers. During my fieldwork, interviews also functioned as a supplement to, and an update and a commentary on, the documentation I managed to access through official sources. Some documentation was too technical, whereas other data was incomplete, dated or subject to political contestation. Therefore, this information made less sense to an outsider without additional feedback from actors in the field. In other words, interviewing was both a direct source of data and a way of triangulating other research methods.

A lot of time was spent preparing for the interviews. Firstly, I identified and selected a list of individuals in the field whom I wanted to interview. This selection process was carried out according to a set of criteria. One of these was particularly important in the early phase of my research, namely singling out potential *gatekeepers* (Merkens 2004). These are individuals in the field who are located in critical positions, and who can give me access to other informants and sources of documentation. As I had an existing network of academic and field contacts in Cape Town, I already had a head start on this point. Another important group of people were the *elite representatives*, meaning individuals with control over, and access to, the resources and social networks relevant to the case study (Wood 1998). In some cases, establishing a relationship to a gatekeeper gave access to the elite, whereas in other cases the gatekeepers were in fact occupying elite positions. Contacting these individuals can be a challenge, but sometimes establishing contact with elite representatives happens in unexpected ways. This was the case when I sat in the library at the University of Cape Town and, by coincidence, came across a Masters thesis from 1985 stacked away in the basement shelves. This was written by an individual who I found out was now the executive director of Corporate Services in the CoCT. I read the thesis and sent an email directly to the executive director discussing my research and his thesis, and within the space of the next month I had established a very constructive relationship with an individual who had extensive knowledge about my case, and who opened doors to other elite informants and sources of documentation. In addition to gatekeepers and elites, the informant selection process was also driven by an ambition to include a diverse *set of roles*. This was particularly relevant to my case. The politics of this study are tangled up in organisational hierarchies, both in the municipality and the trade union. Many people claim to speak “on behalf” of others, but important frictions can be found playing out within these hierarchies. Therefore, I tried to trace these issues from the upper echelons of power to the rank and file of these organisations. Related to this point, some informants were selected according to their *unique experiences*. Elite representatives might act as spokespeople for large numbers of workers and community members, but they most likely do not share their experiences. I thus judged it to be essential to the trustworthiness of my research to be confronted with on-

the-ground worker stories, and to get an understanding of what the political agreements and disagreements meant for workers' lives. With these four criteria in mind, I contacted the potential informants by e-mail or by phone. Although a few informants were unavailable for an interview, the overwhelming majority of my requests were met with a positive response. I started out with interviewing some of the gatekeepers, and during these interviews I was often recommended other potential informants. SAMWU's Metro branch office and the executive director of the Corporate Services directorate in the CoCT were particularly helpful in this process. Because I followed several narratives in the restructuring process at once, I often felt that the fieldwork took on the character of an *investigation*: by pursuing some early leads I was led to yet other leads. Kvale distinguishes between two interviewer stereotypes: the *miner*, who unearths objective facts, and the *traveller*, who "wanders through the landscape and enters into conversations with the people encountered" (Kvale 1996:4). His only map, adds Kvale, is his methods and his plan. Certainly feeling more like a traveller than a miner (in more than one sense), a challenge midway through the fieldwork was to keep track of the subcases and to limit my focus. Thus I tried to make sure that when I left Cape Town, I did so with a manageable set of data corresponding to my initial research questions. Between 22nd March and 28th June 2007 I conducted 50 interviews with 55 informants. In some cases informants were interviewed in pairs, and in one case I conducted a focus group-based interview with 4 people. Three of the informants were interviewed twice. While the overall number of informants was close to what I had envisaged during the planning of the research, I was also conscious of arriving at the so-called 'point of saturation' – where the researcher feels that the informants start covering the same ground. The institutional affiliation and organisational role of the informants is summarised in Table 5.1.

Table 5.1 *Summary of interviews conducted*

SAMWU representatives	
<i>National office representatives</i>	1
<i>Branch executive committee members</i>	1
<i>Other branch office bearers</i>	2
<i>Organisers</i>	4
<i>Shopstewards</i>	8
CoCT representatives	
<i>Corporate Services senior management</i>	3
<i>Utility Services senior management</i>	6
<i>Depot management</i>	4
<i>Other CoCT managers</i>	2
Workers	
<i>CoCT staff, SAMWU members</i>	7
<i>CoCT staff, non-SAMWU members</i>	1
<i>External staff, SAMWU members</i>	3
<i>External staff, non-SAMWU members</i>	1
<i>Unemployed</i>	1
Other representatives	
<i>Community activist groups</i>	3
<i>Private firm management</i>	7
<i>Other trade unions</i>	6
<i>Other industrial relations institutions</i>	3
<i>Research institutions</i>	3
<i>Consultants</i>	1

Note: Some of the informants had multiple roles (e.g. shopsteward/worker, researcher/activist), hence the total number of roles add up to more than the total number of informants.

Most interviews were conducted at the offices/workplaces of the informants, as I had access to a car. As there was no other costs or inconvenience involved on part of the informants, they only had to set aside time for the interview. Still, many of the informants also offered me 'add-ons', such as guided tours in workplaces or

invitations to attend meetings and strike action. I also conducted interviews in less conventional settings, such as in people's homes or sitting in my car. The choice of venue was a balancing act between establishing a neutral ground where the informant felt comfortable, and finding a place that was practically feasible. Ahead of every interview, I prepared an interview guide tailored to suit the specific interview. Beforehand, I had drafted some generic interview guides with the questions and topics appropriate for the different key groups of informants as summarised in Table 5.2.

Table 5.2 *Main topics discussed with key groups of informants*

Organisational role	Key topics discussed
<i>SAMWU leadership</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Their relationship to CoCT management • The relationship between union leadership and members • Their strategies to engage with the restructuring process • Their relationship to community organisations • The cooperation between different unions • The successes and challenges of particular campaigns • Their strategies of unionisation in private firms
<i>Shopstewards and workers</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The experiences of the restructuring process • The attitudes between permanent and casual labour • The relationship between union leadership and members • Their experiences of SAMWU's unionisation efforts in private firms • Their views on union strategies and industrial action
<i>Community activists</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The successes and challenges of particular campaigns • The relationship between SAMWU and community organisations • Their strategies to engage/resist restructuring of service delivery

Organisational role	Key topics discussed
<i>CoCT management</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Their relationship to the trade union leadership • The institutionalisation of local government industrial relations • The evolution of the restructuring process in Cape Town • The actors, ideologies and policies behind local state restructuring • Their relationship to national and provincial authorities • Fiscal constraint policies and other budget issues • Service delivery models and systems • Service charges and cost recovery mechanisms • Recruitment policies and labour broker issues • Legislation around employment conditions and unionisation • The regulation of contractors and third-party subcontractors
<i>Private firm management</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Their business practices related to employment conditions • Their attitudes towards unionisation • Their role in labour brokerage in local government • Their experiences with municipal service delivery contracts • Their use of subcontractors
<i>Industrial relations representatives</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The regulation of third-party subcontractors • The legislative framework for employment conditions • The legislative framework related to unionisation rights • The institutionalisation of local government industrial relations

The majority of the interviews lasted about one hour, but their duration ranged from 15 minutes to over 2 hours. Adding up to

almost 50 hours of information, this represents a substantial challenge in terms of storing, systematising and analysing data. 46 of the interviews were recorded digitally, which allowed me to store the audio clips on my computer and easily retrieve them at a later stage. Even if the semi-structured interview represents a much more transparent situation than participant observation, there are a lot of things – narratives, digressions – going on at once. In these situations, using a tape recorder “eliminates at one stroke many of the problems [...] with the unspecified accuracy of field notes”, as Peräkylä (2004:285) puts it. Listening through the interviews again during the transcription phase also refreshed my memory and allowed me to listen to the first interviews with the privilege of having the knowledge I had build up throughout the fieldwork period – another form of triangulation. Tape recording was always done with the permission of the informant. Three informants chose not to have their interview recorded, giving either fear of employer intimidation or the concern for business competitors as their main reasons for doing so. In these cases, I was a more active note-taker and wrote a detailed memo of the conversation immediately after the interview. With all my informants, I made sure to properly introduce my research project – explaining my aims, my institutional affiliation and the way I intended to use the interview data – to everyone involved so that they could give me *informed consent* for their participation (Nagar 2002). I have chosen to anonymise all interviews, even though this was seldom uttered as an explicit desire by the informants. Still, it could be possible for people with an in-depth knowledge of these organisations to guess the identity of certain individuals on the basis of their organisational roles. While this was a concern of mine throughout the research, I made it clear to the key informants that they were interviewed because of their particular role in their respective organisations. Following from this, it was deemed necessary to state their organisational role – if not exact position – when referring to my informants in the thesis. I have tried to solve the challenge of referencing interview data in the text through referring to particular informants in brackets which correspond with the interview list in Appendix 7 – e.g. (*SAMWU representative 8*).

Finally, even though Cape Town is a city where Afrikaans, English and Xhosa language are widely used, 49 of 50 interviews were

done in English without a translator. As many South African workers have received little (and sub-standard) English education, it was definitely a concern for me that some informants had trouble communicating their views in a precise and eloquent way. Still, I tried to make the best out of this situation, and often rephrased questions to make them clearer. In fact, I felt that not having English as my mother tongue was an advantage, as I could more easily put myself in their situation and possibly appear less intimidating in an English conversation. In the one case where I did make use of a translator, another informant who I had interviewed the previous day offered to translate between Afrikaans and English. This was not without its problems, though, as the translator represented a different standpoint than the informant, and often engaged in conversation with the informant in Afrikaans or chose to answer some of the questions directly herself.

5.4.2 Documentary analysis

The other main source of data was documentation. Few, if any, research projects can be undertaken without relying on written documentation. However, rather than regarding it merely as facts which can back up other qualitative methods, documentary analysis should be treated as a sophisticated method on its own terms. One can distinguish between *different types* of written information: for example, official versus non-official information (Clope, Cook et al. 2004); published versus non-published sources (Hoggart, Lees et al. 2002); while Yin (2003) also makes a distinction between documentation (letters, meeting minutes, proposals, study reports, newspaper clippings) and archival records (charts, maps, budgets, survey data, lists). In my case, the South African state and the City of Cape Town have— thanks to their bureaucratic capacities — both generated an extensive and detailed set of written documentation relevant to my research. Official information has the advantage of being produced with the help of a state's institutional resources, and is therefore often stereotypically seen to provide reliable and accurate information. However, Clope *et al.* (2004) argue that the researcher must be aware that states always have multiple purposes for generating written material, in addition to that of producing reliable information on society. For example, they seek to monitor society

through statistics and use official information as a means of communicating with their citizens and civil society. Revisiting the discussion of Sections 3.4 and 4.4, the textual production of the state apparatus certainly plays an important role in manufacturing hegemonic consent. Hence, this information has *performative* power in society and can cause changes in the reality it (supposedly) seeks to represent. Non-official information requires a similar degree of critical reflection. It can potentially tell us about the political strategies of civil society actors and trade unions which cannot be read from official sources, hence it can “open up social worlds which are inaccessible and relatively closed” (Cloke, Cook et al. 2004:63).

Written documentation can also be differentiated along a *primary source* and *secondary source* continuum, where the former is unique in that it is written by “the people directly involved [...] at a time contemporary or near contemporary with the period being investigated” (Finnegan 2006:142). Information from primary sources can in many ways be treated similarly to interview transcripts, although the context of the text production differs and is often not known to the researcher. In my case, meeting minutes and photos represented useful primary resources, complementing the interview material. Secondary sources can also be very useful when looking for qualified interpretations and expert knowledge. Early on in the fieldwork period I was made aware that a progressive research group at the University of Cape Town – the Industrial Health Research Group (IHRG) – had completed an action research-based project together with shopstewards in SAMWU and the Municipal Services Project (MSP) at Queen’s University in Canada. This project focussed on the organisational health and safety conditions in subcontracted municipal services in Cape Town. I contacted the researchers involved in this project and was allowed to peruse their relatively unprocessed raw data, including an impressive photo series. Although this grassroots-driven project might lack formal credibility in comparison to Stats SA or the reports of the CoCT, they have provided me with a unique and contrasting source of data generated at workplace level, by workers themselves. In addition to research reports, media coverage provided a useful commentary to the events I traced in my case study. Interestingly, both these sources of information hold potential performative power in society, and are often even

used tactically by actors in the field to influence public opinion and legitimise policies. The main types of information I based my analysis on are listed in Table 5.3.

Table 5.3 *Sources of documentation*

Type of documentation	Content
<i>Legal documentation</i>	Government Acts on local government, service delivery, labour relations and employment since 1994
<i>National policy statements</i>	Policy documents on local government and service delivery since 1994, e.g. the Green and White papers of the government
<i>Municipal plans and budgets</i>	Annual Integrated Development Plans (IDPs) of the CoCT since 2000, municipal budgets, contracts and tender documents
<i>GIS data</i>	Maps and layer files access through the planning departments of the different sectors in Utility Services directorate, CoCT
<i>Employment statistics</i>	Extensive database on employment trends through Statistics South Africa (Stats SA)
<i>Organisational resolutions and agreements</i>	Agreements between the two municipal trade unions and the employer, congress resolutions of SAMWU and COSATU, election manifestos, party political programmes
<i>Media coverage</i>	News coverage of campaigns and strikes, notably through Cape Argus, Cape Times, Mail and Guardian and IOL
<i>Photographs</i>	An extensive database of my own and others' photos. Photos of working life and various political events
<i>Online resources</i>	SAMWU's own website for an update on political events; the CoCT's website for access to relevant documentation

Similarly to the process of interviewing, the collection of printed and digitally stored documentation relied on meeting certain gatekeepers in the field. These gatekeepers – both in the trade union organisations and in the municipality – were not only able to identify relevant informants; they also put me in touch with individuals with expertise and access to quantitative data, policy documents and other relevant sources of documentation. While some of the data collection continued by email after the fieldwork period, much of it was accessed through driving to various libraries and offices across the city (for a list of contacts and correspondence, see Appendix 8).

Documentation can be used for different purposes in research. Finnegan (2006) distinguishes between direct and indirect uses. Direct use refers to when documentary text or statistics are seen to directly answer certain questions relevant to the research project: How many? When? Who? Documentation can be the source of both *textual* and *statistical* evidence. This information was very helpful to me when trying to establish a systematic account of my case and its actors, and tracing events and processes eight years back in time. That being said, information found in written documentation should not be taken at face value. Facts are not valid because they appear in written form. Cloke *et al.* (2004) direct attention to ‘validity checks’ with particular reference to non-official textual data: the *authenticity* of the sources, meaning the soundness (material quality and intactness) of the data and the veracity of its authorship; the *credibility* of the sources, meaning the sincerity and accuracy of the information; the *representativeness* of the sources; and the multiple layers of *meaning* embedded in all written material. The *indirect* use of documentary resources explicitly disregards documents as authentic, credible and representative. Rather it focuses on the meanings of written information: What does this piece of documentation tell us about the actors involved? What does it say about the message these actors want to put out? For the purpose of my research, as I entered a contested field with open (and hidden) conflicts, the textual information produced by different actors contained much more information than its direct textual content. It also helped me create a clearer picture of the political dynamics of the field, and identify the strategies and discourses used.

This approach echoes the introductory quote by Freire, who calls for the reflection and action behind the words to be uncovered. This is also supported by Jupp (2006), who calls for a *critical analysis of documents*. He also contributes some rigour and focus to this method of analysis. A critical analysis of a text, Jupp (2006) argues, approaches written texts as social constructions, often products of social conflict and the exercise of power. Inspired by a Foucauldian discourse analysis he regards written documents as being closely interlinked with their institutional setting, and so should be interpreted accordingly. Recalling the discussion of neoliberal governmentality in Section 3.5.1, written text – be it government acts or information brochures – can take on the role of ‘seemingly neutral instruments’ that legitimise particular political projects. This critical understanding can be applied to the dialectical approach outlined above. Harvey’s (1996) dialectical conception asserts that while change is a characteristic of all systems – social systems included – these processes also produce *permanences*. He goes on to say that “the issue of how such permanences are maintained yet also integrated into a world of processes becomes a critical subject of analysis” (Harvey 1996:55). Just as words can generate change, written text can also manifest and support these permanences. In sum, the power of the written word and the role of documentation in producing and contesting hegemonic discourses should be central to critical social research. Throughout my fieldwork experience, the contrast between the dynamic (but often contradictory) nature of the interview, on the one hand, and the negotiated settlements evident in written agreements, resolutions and legislation, on the other hand, represents a good example of the dialectical nature of politics. This point also functions as a reminder of the importance of triangulation methods of data collection in a qualitative research project.

5.4.3 Other sources of data

One very useful methodological supplement to my interviews and documentary analysis was *direct observation*. Kearns (2005) argues there is a ‘range of purposes’ for observation in social research. Two rationales have been particularly relevant for this project. Firstly, observation provides *complimentary evidence* – and permits the researcher to “gather additional descriptive information before,

during, or after other more structured forms of data collection” (Kearns 2005:193). Secondly, observation provides *contextual understanding* – as the researcher can “construct in-depth interpretation of a particular time and place through direct experience” (Kearns 2005:193). Both these understandings can be achieved through what Foster (2006:62) describes as *less-structured observation*, that can be triangulated with interviews and documentary analysis to produce an “in-depth and rounded picture” of the field. Throughout my fieldwork, I was able to have informal talks with many people who never made the interview list. Also, I was allowed to attend meetings, strike action and demonstrations, as well as to visit workplaces and people’s homes. All these experiences played a vital role in shaping my understanding of the data collected. In fact, these observations are data in their own right (Foster 2006). Issues such as employment security and organisational rights appear very different when discussed over a cup of tea in the top floor of a government building rather than when shouted through a megaphone at a political rally. But even if these observations are ‘less-structured’, they still require the researcher to develop a certain level of methodological rigour. An important step in this direction is record-keeping. Throughout my fieldwork, and in particular after meetings and political events, I wrote memos and reflections, based on jotted notes and my memory – as tape recording was more problematic in these situations. Perhaps even more so than in the case of interview selection, the observation process relies upon being granted access to the field through key individuals and gate-keepers. As an observing researcher, I also had to negotiate between the role of an *observer* and the role of a *participant*: although first and foremost the former, in real life situations, the researcher is unlikely to fall squarely into either of these categories.

While not pursued as a systematic method of data collection, I also found *photographs* to be a valuable source of data. I concur with Harper (2004:231) that “it would seem natural to record the world visually as part of how we study society”. Throughout my fieldwork, I took many photos in the field, and I was granted access to several files of photos from the trade union and a research institution. These have given me a more vivid understanding of the issues that arose in the interviews. Whenever I took photos in the field, I asked for permission and in most cases

this was granted. I have pasted photos together in thematic collages, which are attached as Appendices 1-6 in this thesis.

5.4.4 Processing and analysing qualitative data

At the end of my fieldwork period, I had a massive set of relatively unprocessed qualitative data. The first task was to transcribe the interviews. The tape recorder I bought in Cape Town included an appropriate software package for interview transcription, and I started transcribing the interviews during my fieldwork stay. This transcription process was finalised a couple of months after my fieldwork. In the main, the interviews were transcribed *in vivo*, meaning that every word uttered in the interview was written down. However, as my list of informants includes highly educated managers and researchers, as well as illiterate workers who are more comfortable speaking Xhosa or Afrikaans, and because different people have different oral skills in general, the grammatical and semantic nature of the transcription text varies considerably. Therefore, the researcher should take great care when using direct quotes from interviews. Firstly, vague and unclear utterances risk being misunderstood both by the researcher and the readers. Secondly, if researchers choose to edit direct quotes – e.g. remove repeated words or correct grammatical mistakes – there is an overhanging danger of misrepresenting their informants. Thirdly, in contrast to the second point, leaving direct quotes completely unedited can also be problematic. Statements often sound very different in a conversation than when written on a page. Therefore, Kjæret (2000) identifies an important dilemma when she argues that researchers are responsible for not stupefying their informants. Taking into account the oral language, the informal setting of the interviews and the varying English skills of the informants, I have taken the liberty of doing some minor editing in cases of grammatical errors, word repetitions and local slang that would appear incomprehensible to non-South African readers.

After the transcription of the interviews, the next challenge was to systematise my qualitative data and to bring the transcripts together with the documentary data in a constructive way. Based on previous experience with digital software for this purpose, I chose to use the *NVivo 7* computer programme for qualitative

analysis. Although using software for analysing qualitative data gives some people the impression that your laptop will interpret the interviews for you, the reality of this process is more mundane (Bazeley 2007:2):

“The use of a computer is not intended to supplant time-honoured ways of learning from data, but to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of such learning.”

The main advantage of using the NVivo programme is its capacity of storing, matching and linking huge, complex sets of qualitative data. The transcript files, along with digitally stored documentation, newspaper clips, memos, photos, links and other fieldwork notes, were uploaded to my laptop and imported into the software. Written material that was not digitally stored was systematised and referenced, to enable me to link these to the digitised data.

The next step was the analysis, meaning the interpretation of the data in relation to my research questions and my theoretical framework. Again, NVivo proved useful, as I used its coding tools to go through every piece of qualitative data and label it according to its content by linking fragments of the material to one or more *nodes*. The coding of data is subject to a lot of methodological debate, and how this process is executed has some important epistemological implications. Firstly, if the data is fragmented into nodes early on, and treated as isolated nodes from there on, the researcher risks losing sight of the narrative structures and context which each piece of information is embedded in (Millstein 2007). Secondly, there are different ways of designating nodes to qualitative data. Bazeley (2007) identifies two extremes here. The first one is inspired by the ‘grounded theory’ approach (Strauss and Corbin 1998; Glaser 2001), which maintains that the researcher should be true to the ‘reality’ of the field without bringing with him/her preconceived notions of how things are organised. Hence, coding should start out with words and nodes taken *in vivo* from the material itself. The other extreme is theoretically derived *a priori* nodes, where the researcher brings a list of theoretical concepts to be explored in the context of the field. Most researchers with fieldwork experience would probably agree that despite having a principled epistemological stance in one or the

other camp, it is pragmatically convenient and methodologically appropriate to categorise reality both in terms of field experiences *and* your theoretical baggage. In my case, I started out with a fairly sophisticated theoretical framework even before going into the field. Therefore, much of the coding was influenced by this reading. Still, the complexity and detail of this particular case study meant that much of what I heard, read and experienced did not neatly fit into a preconceived conceptual slot. Therefore, my NVivo base was an eclectic mix of nodes. When the material was coded, the software allowed me to build hierarchies, identify relationships and trace causal chains. With such a huge set of data in front of me, and with complexity and contested meanings as my building blocks, this process was neither quick nor linear – I continued to revisit and revise this framework throughout the writing process. In short, such an analytical tool could not do the job *for* me, but it eased the process of making sense of my findings.

5.5 Ethics and research practice in a politicised field

I will conclude this chapter with a discussion of some of the dilemmas and implications for research in politicised contexts. While no social research is completely amoral or apolitical, post-apartheid politics in South Africa certainly represent a *highly politicised* field where personal interests, ideology, organisational allegiance and party politics influenced relations between people. As I have previous research experience from South Africa, I knew that research can take you to places and situations where your role as a researcher is misunderstood, or where the political climate between different actors is hostile. On a couple of occasions I have even found myself in the midst of demonstrations which have been dispersed by police vehicles and rubber bullets. In the particular case of municipal politics in Cape Town, I was aware that the relationship between the state and the trade union, and between certain community groups and the state, was fragile and conflict-ridden. As I developed close, trust-based relationships with individuals on both sides of these political divisions, it forced me to be very cautious in negotiating my loyalties and expressing my sympathies. But with this in mind, I still think it is worth asking

the following question: is there room for an *unpoliticised* researcher in a politicised field?

According to Donna Haraway (1991), attempting to claim 'unlocatable' and general knowledge claims is irresponsible and not objective. As all knowledge is inseparably linked to a body, to a vision and to a certain position, the only way to secure objectivity in research is through allowing for *situated knowledges*. A researcher's 'situated-ness' should not only be made clear to the readers of his/her academic output. It should also be made clear, in an appropriate manner, to people in the field. My identity as male, middle-class, white and Norwegian, as well as my institutional affiliation to well-known universities in Manchester and Cape Town, certainly influenced the perception my informants developed of me. Most political activists in Cape Town are quite familiar with local and overseas researchers attending their meetings or asking for interviews. Still, some of my informants were clearly not sure what to make of me, even though I tried to explain my purpose. When I contacted some of my informants, some of them initially treated me with a lot of scepticism. However, the fact that my research was supported by the union leadership meant that most shopsteward and worker informants met me with a positive attitude. Private firm managers, on the other hand, did not appreciate my links with the union, but the fact that senior management in the CoCT supported my research was helpful in these situations.

My informants reacted very differently to the interview situation and these reactions reshaped my positionality, e.g. that of an insider/outsider. Some seemed to engage in what Raymond Lee (1995) has labelled a 'competition of communication', wherein informants attempt to convince the researcher and advocate their cause through their answers. Others gave vague answers, perhaps intentionally to make it difficult to cite them in reference of a particular view. In yet other interviews I was left with the impression that the informant was eager to present me a 'politically correct' view. Truman (2000) argues that when academics do research on marginalised groups, they must negotiate the *structural privileges* that follow from their position, their identity and social role – as this will always influence the research experience. One misunderstanding that almost unavoidably arises when doing research in poor communities is the following: people hope that by

telling me about their hardship, their message will reach decision-makers and influence their decisions. Unfortunately most social research is still falling short of this performative potential. Consequently, I made sure not to give any false expectations of the impact of my research.

Still, the practice of research in areas mired in poverty and unemployment can give a sense of hopelessness to an academic from a rich country. In some very few cases, I gave informants a small sum of money as an appreciation of taking time to talk to me, but then only after the interview was completed to avoid this act influencing the nature of the interview. Hence this act never interfered directly with the data collection process, and should rather be seen as my way of tackling the personal and human side of the social injustice I was exposed to. I entered this field with my own political sympathies, being supportive of working class movements in South Africa. While being open about this to workers as well as executive directors, I tried to avoid engaging in political arguments with informants. In sum, I would therefore answer my own question by saying that a politicised field requires a researcher that acknowledges his or her position and the politicised nature of the research itself. Better than striving to be an *unpoliticised* researcher is to be a *politicised* researcher committed to an open practice – or what Back (2007:262) labels *reflexive engagement*, defined as “a political intervention that realizes the limits of writing and the complexities of dialogue and listening”.

Related to the discussion above, it is worth considering the ways in which the politicised nature of the field affects the *quality* of the research. A legitimate concern relates to the *internal validity* of the data, i.e. the causal assumptions of the data analysis (Yin 2003). In short, in politicised fields there will be intense discursive contestations around questions of causality: what causes what? Or, in a more crude political jargon: who is to blame for what? In relation to my research questions, trying to establish causal links as an outsider and a researcher was challenging amidst strong accusations on both sides of who was to blame. Moreover, I could not take for granted that actors on both sides attribute identical meanings to key terms in this research project – such as ‘restructuring’, ‘negotiation’ and ‘privatisation’. The danger of erroneous causal conclusion is a threat to the validity of the analysis, as well as to the whole principle of critical realism in

social science, and it is finally left to the researcher's good judgment to negotiate these discourses and make sense of the empirical findings. Similarly, politicised fields challenge what Yin (2003:37) labels *external validity*, which refers to "the problem of knowing whether a study's findings are generalizable beyond the immediate case study". In cases where intense political contestation permeates every aspect of the research, it is difficult for the researcher to establish how insights drawn from this particular political context can be relevant to other cases, or to a theoretical framework. There are no clear answers to this question. Again, these dilemmas are ultimately left to the researcher's discretion. I had to consciously refrain from getting caught up in the political intrigue, a balancing act that concerned the data collection as well as the process of analysing the data. These issues also affect the reliability of the data. As noted above, approaching transparency is a key challenge when securing the reliability of qualitative data. In contexts where political actors are in conflict, and meanings are contested, this can prove a challenge. A good way of securing transparency is to bring the analysis back to the field for comment and dialogue (Yin 2003). In March 2008, I presented a report summarising the main preliminary conclusions of my analysis to the trade union. I also presented, orally, my general interpretation to a gatekeeper in the municipality. This allowed key informants to comment upon my interpretations, and thereby strengthened the reliability of my data and my analysis. It did not mean that all informants necessarily agreed with my interpretations of the situation, but that there was at the very least an informed understanding of my role and my analysis among some of the central people in these organisations. In general, representatives on both sides of the employer-employee divide with my main observations and interpretations, but as these were on a fairly general and abstract level – it did not entail that they were willing to (nor did I ask them to) reconsider their stance on particular policy issues.

5.6 Concluding remarks

This chapter has sought to document and justify my methodological assumptions and the practical and ethical intricacies associated with conducting fieldwork in the political

landscape of Cape Town. Starting with an outline of the project's philosophical underpinnings, I have discussed the political contingencies between cause and consequence in the social world. In light of these reflections, there was a need to justify undertaking a theoretically informed case study of the politics of labour, the local state and community issues in Cape Town. Based on the framework outlined in Chapters 2 through 4, the main objective of this study is to analyse the political agency of organised municipal workers in a context of local state restructuring process involving the casualisation and commercialisation of municipal work and services. Considering the nature of my research questions, I have justified the applicability of qualitative methods, such as interviewing and documentary analysis, and showed how I utilised these methods during my fieldwork. A huge set of qualitative data – consisting of interview transcripts, different sources of documentation and various field memos – was analysed using a software package for qualitative research. As I have tried to show, the practical execution of qualitative research in intensely politicised fields is not without its difficulties, for example complicating the process of securing the quality of qualitative data. An open and reflexive practice in dialogue with the field and a rigorous documentation of the research process are key factors in making sure that the research is credible. The rest is left to the good judgment of the researcher, whose interpretation will hopefully reveal what the introductory quote of this chapter formulated as the “reflection and action” behind the words (Freire 1986). Having given this thesis a theoretical and methodological foundation, it is now time for an exploration of the case.

6 Restructuring Cape Town

6.1 Introduction

Any attempt to critically examine politics in Cape Town since 2000 will quickly encounter the word *restructuring*. When it was mentioned by municipal workers and their union leaders, the term seemed to be capturing much of what has gone wrong over the last decade:

“[T]he City of Cape Town has made the employment relationship intolerable through its unilateral *restructuring process*.” (SAMWU 2008, italics added)

“The union had also realised that *restructuring in municipalities* had far-reaching effects on service delivery in many communities.” (Cape Argus 2008, italics added)

Municipal senior management used this term cautiously, and when they did utter the word – for example in conversation with local journalists – it was often to distance themselves from this process, or to pass blame onto previous administrations:

"[T]he ‘ineffective and inefficient’ staff structure produced by the merging of the seven administrations into the unicity [was] compounded by the [previous] ANC administration's *restructuring*" (Cape Times 2007, italics added)

“[T]he Corporate Services directorate had been ‘sensitive to the *restructuring fatigue*’ that had blighted staff and had opted for realignment rather than restructuring.” (Cape Times 2007, italics added)

Ultimately, any form of institutional change that has occurred in local government since apartheid could be labelled restructuring. As a result, the restructuring referred to above can not be understood as one unified process, but rather a complex web of interrelated processes. Making sense of this opaqueness was a challenge; not only to the researcher as an outsider *looking in*, but also to those actors who found themselves in the midst of it, trying to *engage with* these processes politically. The main objective of this chapter is to critically examine processes of restructuring with particular reference to the transformation of administrative boundaries, employment relations and service delivery systems in the City of Cape Town (CoCT). As such, it addresses *Research Question 1* in Section 4.10, and at the same time provides a background to the analysis of the political dynamics in the following two chapters.

Section 6.2 maps the reorganisation of administrative boundaries and political scales in the Cape Metropolitan Area (CMA) as has undergone a transformation from the geography of its apartheid past to a new local government sphere as envisaged by South Africa's new, democratic Constitution. The impact of this reorganisation on service delivery mechanisms is examined in Section 6.3. Attention shifts from municipal service users to municipal employees in Section 6.4, which looks at changes in the labour regime of CoCT. Section 6.5 narrows the scope by specifically considering how reforms in service delivery mechanisms and employment relations unfolded differently in the service sectors constituting the scope of this case study. A conclusion wraps up the chapter by separating analytically *neoliberal restructuring* from other processes and phenomena which have transfigured the city. This differentiated understanding is necessary for the analysis in the next two chapters, which try to explain why the restructuring process has posed contradictory pressures on different social groups and on the practice of unionism.

6.2 Coming together: Redrawn maps and merging administrations

The importance of urban spatial planning in creating the apartheid society, and the challenges facing post-apartheid urban authorities

in overcoming this legacy, has attracted significant academic interest (Bond 2000; Beall, Crankshaw et al. 2002; Pillay, Tomlinson et al. 2006; Robinson 2008). The segregation and unevenness resulting from apartheid spatial planning was articulated to the extreme in cities. Urban areas therefore became battlegrounds for the politics of production, reproduction and social justice. The contrast between life in the white, wealthy suburbs and the black townships did not just represent a wealth divide, it was also a matter of uneven access to services and political representation (Robinson 2008). Therefore, the political transition at a local government level in Cape Town – which took place parallel to the national negotiations – not only highlighted questions of redistribution, but was also an exercise in bringing all political actors together for the first time. The transitional local government forum in Cape Town brought together statutory and non-statutory representatives, meaning that ‘newcomers’ from the resistance movement had to engage constructively with the formal political system and the old regime. In this climate, consensus-building was critical, as elections were yet to be held. The focus on consensus also meant that several unresolved issues were left to be dealt with at a later stage. Still, participants in this process conceded that those who coordinated these early talks have had a lot of influence on the contemporary state of affairs (*External consultant 1*)⁵. These assumptions are also supported by Robinson (2008:27), who argues that “the past laid a foundation for today’s efforts at urban governance, and also in how certain routine elements of council activities exhibit strong and significant continuities with the past”.

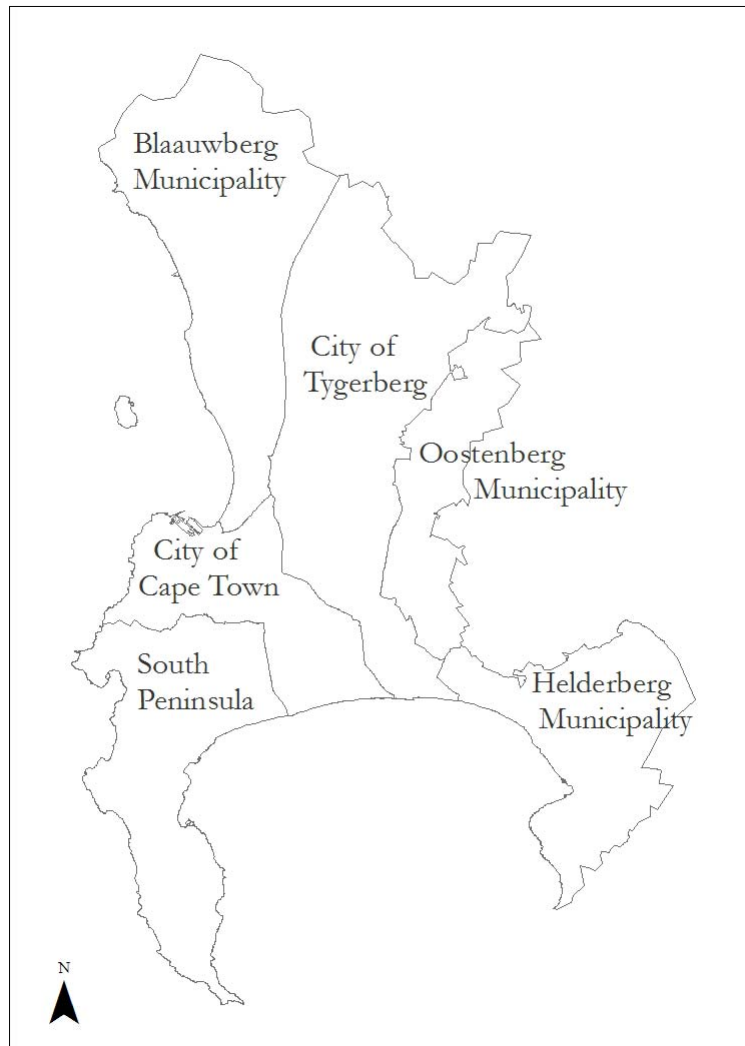
It also became clear that before any substantial policy change could take place, administrative, political and spatial units had to be brought together. This could not be done without national guidelines, and such a framework was indeed set up in the 1993 Local Government Transition Act (RSA 1993). After the first municipal elections in 1995-6 and the 1998 White Paper on Local Government, new legislation was put in place to coordinate the establishment of administrative boundaries, electoral systems and municipal structures (see Section 4.7) (Cameron 2006). Particularly influential in shaping the present political map was the 1998

⁵ See Appendix 7 for a full list of interviews and informants.

Municipal Demarcation Act (RSA 1998) and the input of the Municipal Demarcation Board. This board started its work on 1 February 1999 with only 15 months to complete new municipal and ward boundaries for the 2000 municipal elections (MDB 2004). It was supposed to demarcate functional and efficient administrative territories, taking socio-economic factors into account to facilitate redistribution and integration (Cameron 2006). In addition to a two-tier local government system of *local municipalities* (Category B municipalities) under the authority of larger, *district municipalities* (Category C municipalities), the Demarcation Board also granted some urban areas status as *metropolitan governments* (Category A municipalities). Legally, Category A municipalities collapsed the authorities of Category B and C municipalities into one body. This was an acknowledgment of the need for specific urban policies and effective metropolitan governance in South Africa's growing cities. Six Category A municipalities were established, of which Cape Town was one.

In terms of spatial amalgamation, the CMA had to consolidate a conglomeration of different municipal authorities and Black Local Authorities (also known as townships) into a unified structure. Starting out with 61 local, racially segregated entities with different functions and levels of political authority – “devoid of democratic legitimacy” – the transitional local government forum in Cape Town agreed to reduce this number to 39 (Jaglin 2004:233). After the first municipal elections, which were held on 29 May 1996 in the CMA, a second phase of restructuring took place. This further reduced this number to six municipalities under the authority of the Cape Metropolitan Council, the so-called ‘6+1 structure’ (*CoCT senior management 2*). The boundaries of these substructures are shown in Figure 6.1.

Figure 6.1 *Substructures under the Cape Metropolitan Council 1997-2000*



Source: Adapted from GIS data acquired from CoCT.

On 5 December 2000, a second round of local elections took place across the country. On the same day, the 'Unicity model' came into effect in Cape Town, meaning that the entire CMA *formally* amalgamated into one municipal structure known as the City of Cape Town (CoCT). The term 'formally' is emphasised here, as the *de facto* integration of systems and structures into one organisation was not done overnight. The different municipal structures had

their own procedures and organisational culture, different standards of service and employment contracts, and incompatible computer systems (Jaglin 2004). Moreover, the communities they were in charge of were still far from unified, and the need for a roll-out of services and local democratic structures was pressing. The merger of these authorities also revealed a need for the elimination of ‘double positions’ and an unfulfilled potential of economies of scale. A key informant who had been involved in the restructuring process from the beginning, and who was in charge of the organisational restructuring process at the time of research, described the sheer size of the task in no modest terms:

“This is probably one of the most widespread, intensive local government restructurings of a municipality anywhere in the world. Go look for a more awesome one!” (*CoCT senior management 2*)

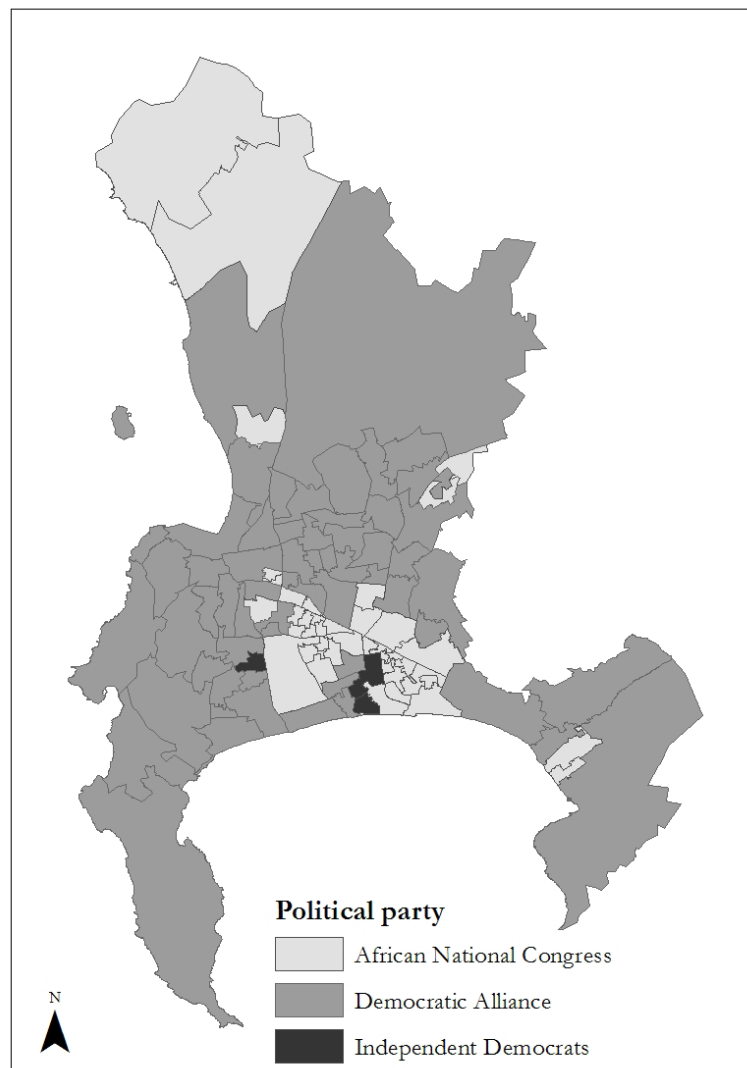
Although it was acknowledged when the Unicity was established that time would be needed for its constituent parts to gel into a unified structure – somewhere between six months to a year was envisaged (*CoCT senior management 6*) – no one predicted that in 2008, at the time of writing, the restructuring process would still not be finalised. As will be shown in the next few chapters, this state of suspense has legitimised neoliberal restructuring in the city.

Restructuring inertia in Cape Town has been attributed to different factors. The complexity and unprecedented nature of the process notwithstanding, the turbulent relationship between the unions and the CoCT – which will be dealt with in detail in the following chapters – has been blamed for the lack of progress. Another important feature, which sets Cape Town apart from most other South Africa cities, is the power geometry of party politics in the city. Whereas the ANC’s dominance at a national level has translated into a firm grip on most other metropolitan areas, the political opposition is much stronger in Cape Town. After a period of multi-party interim local government between 1996 and 2000, the ANC and the Democratic Alliance (DA) have taken turns controlling the CoCT through various coalition governments (McDonald and Smith 2004; Jolobe 2007). With a different political culture and ethnic composition than the rest of the

country⁶, it is not surprising that this city has hosted a close-fought battle between different political constituencies. Emerging as the main institution for *sublocal* democracy in Cape Town was the *ward system*. In 2008, there were 99 wards in the metropolitan area. The inhabitants of each ward elect a councillor, and these ward councillors make up 50 per cent of the members of council. The remaining half is elected based on proportional representation from party lists. A map showing the party affiliation of ward councillors reveals a strong ANC presence in the densely populated, black townships on the Cape Flats amidst a largely DA-dominated suburban landscape.

⁶ According to the 2001 census, 48.13 per cent of Cape Town's population was classified as Coloured, 31.69 per cent as Black African, 18.75 per cent as White and 1.43 per cent as Indian/Asian. Traditionally, the ANC's support has been strongest amongst black Xhosa-speakers. The same census estimated that 28.7 per cent of the population speaks Xhosa at home.

Figure 6.2 *Party affiliation of ward councillors in the 2006 municipal elections*



Source: Adapted from GIS data acquired from CoCT.

The frequent shifts of leadership have certainly come at a price, and have been “characterised by a crisis of governance and institutional instability” (Jolobe 2007:78). Finding a clear political direction has been made even more problematic by a system of floor-crossing windows which allows councillors to switch party every other year (IDASA 2007). This has caused the

implementation of many of the restructuring processes to be tangled up in the political agenda of consecutive, short-lived coalition governments.

The establishment of the Unicity also signalled a new stage in the evolution of metropolitan planning regimes in Cape Town. In the late 1980s, planners started to realise the absurdity and unsustainability of apartheid segregation policies and the separate planning of townships and *Bantustans* (homelands). This encouraged a series of locally initiated metropolitan planning processes. Slowed down by the ongoing local government restructuring, a fully integrated planning regime was not realised until after the 1996 Second Amendment of the Local Government Transition Act – in which all metropolitan local councils were required to “formulate and implement a local integrated development plan” (RSA 1996:25). The Integrated Development Plans (IDPs) were seen as a tool for municipal authorities to practically integrate the notion of Developmental Local Government (DLG) (as discussed in Section 4.7), and to force these priorities to be considered alongside the existing municipal agenda (van Ryneveld 2006). The IDPs did not become common practice in the CoCT until 2001-2002, but have since been developed on an annual basis. But while the IDPs might represent a tool for policy integration, they are also manifestations of the contradictions of post-apartheid policies. In other words, a reading of these annual reports reveals how urban restructuring and planning is not a straight-forward, technical project, but rather a slow, politicised process.

6.3 Restructuring municipal services: Imposed ideology or ‘necessary evil’?

While the six metropolitan municipalities in South Africa have developed in quite distinctive ways, some general features of service delivery reform can be identified (see also Section 4.8). In the most basic sense, what came to characterise metropolitan governance in all South African cities was a significant, and increasing, involvement by the private sector in municipal service delivery. While the trend was indisputable, establishing the driving force behind these policies remained a bone of contention.

Representatives from COSATU and SAMWU (*SAMWU representative 8; COSATU representative*), supported by some academic observers (McDonald and Smith 2004), perceived these reforms to be the implementation of an ideological agenda of the ruling elite. This account seems to outline an explicitly *neoliberal state project*, to use Jessop's terminology. Some senior managers and consultants interviewed by this author (*CoCT senior management 1; CoCT senior management 2*), on the other hand, explained the decision to bring the private sector into municipal services as nothing more than a pragmatic solution – a way of facing up to increasing service delivery requirements within existing budgetary constraints. This question remains a critical one as it determines whether there is any room for manoeuvre at a municipal level – and hence any potential for local political advocacy. Alternatively, structural factors could be seen to leave municipal authorities with no other option than to adopt neoliberal policies, rendering local political opposition futile.

In any case, the ideological component of these policies should not be overlooked. Individuals involved in formulating national policy documents – such as the 1996 GEAR plan and the 1998 White Paper on Local Government – as well as those involved in the Unicity Commission in Cape Town conceded that the NPM paradigm and Tony Blair's Third Way policies in the UK *did* in fact influence their thinking (*External consultant 1; CoCT senior management 1; CoCT senior management 2*) (see also Harrison 2006; van Ryneveld 2006). Therefore it was not surprising that the Unicity Commission, in line with the NPM paradigm, promoted 'partnership and joint effort' in service delivery:

“The Unicity will seek to leverage private sector, NGO, community and public sector knowledge, resources and effort for service delivery and development.” (Unicity Commission 2000:8)

In other words, what was already established practice in some municipalities was to be *extended* to the entire city and *increased* over time. This was made explicit in the Commission's recommendations:

“That all stakeholders acknowledge the reality that a significant proportion of local government service delivery responsibilities are already outsourced, and

that this proportion is likely to increase in future, particularly in the case of new services.” (Unicity Commission 2000:25)

Two other developments were significant in steering metropolitan governance in a NPM direction. Firstly, the Unicity Commission advocated the discontinuation of so-called ‘non-core activities’. The old municipal authorities had performed functions, particularly in wealthy areas, that were seen as peripheral to the rationale of DLG. Consequently, the municipality’s involvement in garden refuse collection services, the fresh produce market and the abattoir were discontinued, and other functions were to follow suit. But these developments were contested – both from labour and within the municipal administration – and other municipal functions, such as libraries, were kept in-house. In line with five other metropolitan areas in South Africa, Cape Town also established a metropolitan police force even though it was identified as a core function for provincial, not local, government. The definition of ‘core’ and ‘non-core’ functions continues to influence decisions around service delivery mechanisms today.

A second significant reform can also be traced back to the recommendations of the Unicity Commission, namely the *ring-fencing* of service directorates and the establishment of separate *business units*. This mirrors the general discussion of public sector restructuring in Section 3.6 and overlaps closely with Smith’s (2004) definition of corporatisation. She argued that corporatisation was a three-pronged approach: ring-fencing public sector entities, introducing performance-based management and establishing separate business units. In short, this involved accounting for the total income and expenditure of a service, separating the service from the rest of the municipal organisation, encouraging management autonomy and remunerating senior management on the basis of business targets. This model was actively championed by consultants and senior management in Cape Town. As different service sectors had different levels of profitability, it was established practice in the past to let certain service directorates (such as electricity) cross-subsidise and offer support services to other functions of the municipality. This system was deemed counterproductive by new, business-minded managers who were guided by corporate benchmarks and adherence to cost efficiency targets (*CoCT senior management 1*).

From this perspective, ring-fencing was unavoidable in order to monitor the expenses of different parts of the municipal organisation – and by so doing keeping the looming financial crisis at bay. With a corporatised model, other municipal functions would have to pay the full cost of any service purchased from the business unit, which would effectively stop cross-subsidisation of local government services. Senior managers advocating this model argued that corporatisation should be seen as a form of technocratic crisis management, and not the product of a neoliberal ideological agenda.

But the ring-fencing of municipal services was met by strong resistance from organised labour and the Left, as it was seen as the first step in a process which would lead to the full corporatisation of utility services (which in fact had already taken place in Johannesburg around 2000) or even wholesale privatisation. Several senior managers in these services came out quite strongly denying that ring-fencing would lead to privatisation. Interestingly, Smith (2004) also made the point that corporatisation was not necessarily a precursor to privatisation, as the trade unions had argued. This was because, argued Smith, corporatisation transformed the public sector to such an extent that, from a capital accumulation perspective, sufficient business efficiencies were achieved. If a private sector dynamic – and therefore also the negative social outcomes that were associated with commercialisation – could be achieved within a corporatised public sector, this put the eager assurances of senior managers in a different light (*CoCT senior management 1 and 4*). But even within senior management there was no consensus around these corporatisation policies (*CoCT senior management 2 and 9*), and the notion that managers of corporatised utilities received higher salaries than other municipal managers provided ammunition for their opponents (SAMWU 2008).

And if facing ardent critics was not enough, corporatisation drives in local government also had to deal with an increasingly sophisticated regulatory framework. Notable in this regard is Section 78 of the 2000 Municipal Systems Act, which put in place strict procedures – “criteria and process for deciding on mechanisms to provide municipal services” (RSA 2000:37). Section 78 stated that if a municipality was to provide a service through an external mechanism, it had to (amongst other criteria)

obtain “the views of organised labour”, assess the likely impact on “development, job creation and employment patterns”, give notice of its intentions to the local community and obtain their views, and take into account the expected effect on “human health, well-being and safety” (RSA 2000:38). This detailed framework reflected the intensely contested political process behind it. As the tripartite alliance had been unable to resolve the different views on privatisation and commercialisation at a national scale, this piece of legislation made sure that even if the government regulation opened up space for private sector involvement in the public sector, it would have to go through a consultative and democratic process in each case of outsourcing. In other words, while legislation legitimised neoliberal macroeconomic policies at the level of the nation-state, it decentralised the politics of privatisation to a local government level (see discussion of local crisis displacement in Section 3.4.4).

Ideological and discursive contestation around different municipal governance models was also driven by party politics. The political programmes of the parties fighting for control over the CoCT Council revealed different emphases on this issue. Pro-privatisation policies were especially explicit in the election manifestos of the DA, which controlled local government at the time of research:

“The DA is committed to getting local governments to improve their performance. This means finding ways to avoid waste, duplication and inefficiency. *Privatisation, outsourcing, decentralisation and greater use of technology will be keys to this.*” (DA 2008:5.1, emphasis added)

The election rhetoric of the ANC, on the other hand, was shaped by the party’s close ties to COSATU and SACP. In their Local Elections 2006 Manifesto, their only hint at private sector involvement in service delivery could be found in the following passage:

“By listening to the people, and *working with business, labour and other organisations in our communities*, we can make local government work better for all citizens.” (ANC 2006, emphasis added)

But even though the DA's rhetoric appeared right-wing and business-friendly in contrast to that of the ANC – which ranged from revolutionary phrases, via social democratic terminology, to neoliberal talk – their actual political differences at the metropolitan scale in Cape Town were less clear-cut. For example, even though the ANC emphasised redistributive policies of service delivery, the DA arguably adopted a more cautious approach to the use of casual labour. This point is significant as it shows that neoliberal reforms not only reconfigure the relationship between the local state and citizens-as-service-users, but also in relation to citizens-as-employees.

6.4 The remaking of municipal employment relations

The other important area of governance reforms which was relevant to this research was the realm of employment. Restructuring had profound effects on pay structures, benefits and forms of employment in the CoCT. In 1996-97, at the start of the restructuring exercise, there were approximately 33,000 municipal employees in the city. However, this staff complement was spread across 39 different employers, later reduced to seven employers (in the 6+1 municipal interim structure). Furthermore, these employees were subject to 26 different conditions of service. This represented a dilemma for the trade unions. Since the late 1980s, a strong trade union presence in the municipal sector and a politicised labour movement achieved substantial victories on behalf of their members. Relatively speaking, some of these groups of workers (especially in the lower levels of the organisational hierarchy) received much higher wages than in the private sector, where widespread unemployment and apartheid culture allowed employers to pay their workers very little. Also, municipal salary levels were accompanied by a number of benefits, many of which were specific to certain parts of the organisation.

Faced with the imperative of levelling out this uneven playing field, but also influenced by NPM principles such as performance management, the Ucity Commission called for an urgent reform of the municipal wage bill: “excessive benefits” were to be either discontinued or compensated by “lower than standard salary

increases”; “more flexibility” was to be introduced, based on “sound reward principles”; the commission called for the rationalisation of working hours and reduction of sick leave entitlements; and it encouraged the employer to find ways to “make it attractive for many people to gladly accept the new conditions of service” (Unicity Commission 2000:28). The principle of giving employees with similar job descriptions and rank similar conditions of service was not opposed by the unions. However, there was widespread disagreement on how to accomplish this. No group of workers wanted to give up their entitlements, and the two unions in the municipality had different priorities as to which groups of workers they wanted to protect. SAMWU had traditionally drawn support from the labourers and the lower ranks of the municipality. They feared that the introduction of performance management principles would imply incentives for the upper end of the municipal hierarchy at the expense of the lowest paid workers. Also, the unions felt that the city administration was buying off workers with a one-off bonus, in exchange for inferior conditions of service. Even though each member of staff was supposed to accept the new conditions of service on a voluntary basis, the CoCT administration engaged in a campaign throughout the organisation to encourage workers to accept this package, helped by sympathetic coverage in the local media (e.g. Cape Argus 2008; Cape Times 2008). The administrative amalgamation of the metropolitan municipality also prompted a large-scale redeployment of workers, and many workers were asked to move workplace as municipal depots closed or were given different functions. This was also an area in which the unions got involved, especially SAMWU, as many workers resisted relocation to new depots which often entailed longer commuting times and higher travel-to-work costs.

Some corporate decisions made in the early phase of the restructuring process had a huge impact on the municipal labour regime. In line with the recommendations of external consultants, a *moratorium* on new appointments and promotions came into effect in 1999-2000 (in some parts of the organisation this moratorium can be traced back to 1995). It meant that no worker appointed after this point in time would be employed on a permanent basis; also, all promotions of staff after 2000 had the status of temporary positions. Two CoCT senior managers who

were responsible for implementing this policy explained the decision in the following way:

“It sounds tough to say we put a moratorium on, but we had to. Because if we didn’t put a moratorium on, we’d be appointing people on conditions of service that we wanted to bargain out, that we couldn’t afford anymore. [...] So we had to say: ‘*Stop, we are only using contract staff.*’ But we didn’t realise how long it would take to actually work through these issues.” (*CoCT senior management 2*)

“It was for good reasons at the time when it came out. It was the conflict of all the conditions of service and the fact that the City had this ambition to shrink itself.” (*CoCT senior management 5*)

Even though the paretisation (i.e. the ‘levelling-out’) of conditions of service might have been the prime objective, at least officially, the moratorium was hugely effective in fulfilling senior management’s other ambition of shrinking the organisation. The concept of inter-urban competitiveness was relevant here, as the 2006-07 IDP legitimised staff reductions by vaguely referring to a “perception of high staffing costs in relation to other cities” (*CoCT 2006:92*). As the finalisation of the restructuring exercise dragged out far beyond its projected one year period, the moratorium became a useful tool for reducing the number of permanent workers. In 2007, senior management in the Corporate Services directorate estimated that the number of employees directly employed by the municipality stood at 21,000 (*CoCT senior management 9*). Starting out with a staff size of 33,000 in 1997, this represented a 36 per cent reduction in formal municipal employment over the course of a decade. Based on anecdotal evidence from respondents at eight different municipal depots and institutions, they reported a decrease in the amount of formal, permanent staff that ranged from 33 per cent to 74 per cent (*CoCT depot manager 1, 2 and 3; CoCT junior management 1; SAMWU shopsteward 4, 5, 6 and 7*). In other words, the effects of the moratorium had a huge impact on the municipal workplace.

What was significant about this development was that this reduction in staff size had not been accomplished through retrenchments, a move that would have been strongly opposed by

organised labour. Rather, management allowed natural attrition and voluntary resignations to take their toll. Administrative amalgamation, and the 'double positions' resulting from this, could justify a certain level of rationalisation. Still, this 36 per cent reduction took place at a time when developmental tasks and service delivery requirements were increasing, and when the city's population grew by more than 20 per cent – from 2.57 million in the 1996 census to a projected 3.27 million in 2007. On the surface of it, this development was in stark contrast with the CoCT's stated main goal of improving service delivery. But it was perhaps not surprising that behind these numbers, a new employment trend could be spotted: service delivery functions were increasingly becoming dependent on externalised and casual labour power.

The reduction of the overall staff complement was also related to the dynamics between the *different scales of governance* in South Africa, and the constraints placed on local government by National Treasury. In 2002-2003, the CoCT applied for a 'restructuring grant' from National Treasury. This grant was available to larger municipalities, but was accompanied by a set of conditionalities. The municipalities had to conform to a set of benchmarks, and failing to reach these would mean that the grant was converted into a loan. One such criterion was to keep the ratio of staff costs below 28 per cent of total operating expenditure. In 2003, the CoCT spent 36.5 per cent of their operating budget on staff salaries. In other words, if the municipality was to comply with National Treasury guidelines, this ratio had to be cut significantly. As salaries to staff employed by private contractors and labour brokers did not appear as staff costs on the budget, this benchmark played an important role in shaping the municipal labour regime. This argument was upheld by a senior human resources manager in the CoCT organisation:

“That 28 per cent actively encouraged outsourcing. It drove outsourcing. It didn't drive a more efficient local government, it drove outsourcing. It didn't say, *'we will do the same with less people'*, it just said, *'if we can outsource this whole chunk of work to a contractor, we will come within that 28 per cent'*.” (CoCT senior management 9)

In 2008, salaries and benefits to permanent staff accounted for 27.9 per cent of operating expenditure. This link between the

restructuring grant conditionalities, staff costs and public-private partnerships in service delivery was also reflected in the 2004-2005 IDP – where it was identified as a financial imperative:

“[T]o effectively and efficiently manage the City’s financial resources [...] through compliance with the restructuring grant parameters. Plans are underfoot to reduce the administrative overhead significantly. This will primarily be achieved through staff reductions. The target is to reduce the number of staff and the staff budget as the major cost driver of the operating budget by approximately R 800 million over the course of the next four years. This will realize the potential savings flowing from the amalgamation of seven former councils [...] It will also involve a review of the service menu to identify areas where services can be reduced or where there are potential savings from alternative service arrangements.” (CoCT 2004:40)

It should be noted that senior management in the Strategic Human Resources directorate stated that the CoCT’s widespread reliance on labour broker staff since the restructuring process began was unsustainable. Therefore the CoCT has started offering permanent positions to workers who have functioned temporarily in their positions for a long time (*CoCT senior management 2 and 9*). This process was also announced through local media (Cape Argus 2007), although the precise extent to which this causalisation process has been reversed throughout the organisation remained undocumented.

Another development which impacted on the municipal labour regime was national government’s launch of the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP), announced by President Thabo Mbeki in February 2003. EPWP aimed at reducing unemployment through creating short- to medium term employment opportunities for unskilled labour, with a focus on government-funded infrastructural projects. In Cape Town, EPWP was introduced in the 2004-05 IDP (CoCT 2004). It was later utilised in flagship development projects such as the N2 Gateway project (CoCT 2005) – a prestigious housing project amongst the informal settlements along the transport corridor between Cape Town

International Airport and the Central Business District. Through EPWP, the municipality could employ unskilled labour on a contract basis for particular projects under the pretext of job creation. While it allowed local government to engage in projects otherwise financially unviable within the given budgets, it also increased the public sector's reliance on casual labour.

6.5 Sector-specific developments in basic services

It was clear from the recommendations of the Unicity Commission that there had been a fundamental rethink around the role played by CoCT in service delivery. Discursively, a separation was made between *ensuring* basic services and coordinating their delivery, on the one hand, and *providing* them, on the other (McDonald and Pape 2002). Echoing the focus on inter-urban competition identified as a main driver in urban neoliberalism (see Section 3.5.2), the Unicity Commission emphasised that the objective of *becoming globally competitive* was put centre stage (Unicity Commission 2000). Consequently, it was expressed quite clearly that *municipal provision of services* was too mundane a task for the CoCT to waste its energy on (Unicity Commission cited in Pape 2001:6, emphases added):

“The Unicity Council in particular will need to move boldly beyond the current emphasis on service provision issues which dominate the municipal agenda. The social realities of Cape Town and the challenges of a competitive world require that other roles of facilitating development and providing civic leadership will enjoy much stronger attention ... it is suggested that the Unicity Council should understand its role as a service ensurer and as a guarantor of municipal services rather than as primarily a service provider. Its responsibility is to ensure high quality levels of municipal and other public services, irrespective of whether the service is best provided by itself or not. This will help release the Council from the routine issues of service delivery and enable it to

focus its energies on addressing the many complex challenges of the city.”

While many of these developments were dispersed throughout the organisation, and affected most departments and directorates, the three service sectors forming the basis of this case study – *water and sanitation, electricity services and solid waste management* – were affected in quite specific ways. These specificities deserve mentioning, as they also required the union to adapt to a differentiated restructuring process. For example, when CoCT planned to corporatise these services after the establishment of the Unicity, it became clear that the immediate profitability of each service was different. As shown in Table 6.1, the differences in turnover in relation to capital requirements and staff costs were huge.

Table 6.1 *Consolidated overview of budget and staff, CoCT 2001-02*

	Electricity Services	Water and Sanitation	Solid Waste Management
<i>Estimated turnover 2001-02*</i>	2200	925	49
<i>Capital charges 2001-02*</i>	313	328	21
<i>Estimated net contribution before capital charges*</i>	593	92	-24
<i>Staff contingent in 2001</i>	2580	3386	N/A

* in thousand ZAR

Source: Adapted from CoCT (2001:2)

Even though these estimates were produced before the proposed ring-fencing, making the exact magnitude of costs and revenue difficult to pinpoint, the picture is clear. Whereas electricity was a fully tariff-funded ‘money machine’ for CoCT, water and sanitation and waste disposal were only partially tariff-funded, the latter running at a loss even before capital charges were deducted. In 2002-2003, electricity accounted for 34.1 per cent of CoCT’s operating income, whereas water and refuse removal contributed a modest 9.6 and 4.5 per cent, respectively. Still, a CoCT report recommended that all these three so-called ‘trading services’ were to comply strictly with the principle of cost recovery:

“All Trading Services will have been converted entirely to tariff funded services, will be financially autonomous and will make a contribution to the income of Council. Council will not subsidise the Trading Services.” (CoCT 2001:12)

The report envisioned a corporatisation process to be initiated in 2001, and the establishment of corporatised entities (companies) to be finalised by July 2002. But, as with most other restructuring exercises in Cape Town, this process took much longer than expected, with several twists and turns in each service directorate.

6.5.1 Water and Sanitation

Water and sanitation are basic services. Quality and access to these services impacted greatly upon people’s livelihoods, especially for the many poor families living in the overcrowded areas of a water-scarce region. Reform in the water sector in Cape Town was driven by two main concerns: adapting to the challenges of water scarcity and increasing demand – through so-called water demand management – and corporatising the service in line with the business objectives outlined above. Dealing with the former required technical solutions, such as the reduction of unaccounted for water, as well as a public education programme intended to raise awareness around water consumption issues. But curbing water consumption was also achieved through pricing mechanisms, which not only were design to reduce consumption, but also to comply with the corporatisation imperative of *cost recovery*.

Smith (2004) argued that CoCT implemented three main cost recovery strategies in the first phase of restructuring (1997-2001). First, it revised the *pricing policy* and introduced a five-step, progressive tariff block system. The intention behind this system was to ensure that high consumption levels were penalised by increasing tariffs at the top-end in order to subsidise a free water policy for the first 6,000 litres – a pro-poor measure prescribed by the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry (Smith and Morris 2008). Although this water demand management policy was important in reducing overall increases in water consumption, it had unexpected social consequences as the policy failed to take into account the fact that the highest poverty rates in the city are in

high-density households. In short, as the homes of poor people are shared with many others, their consumption levels – measured by household – are quite high. The combination of high-density households and leaks caused by an eroding water infrastructure in poor areas – mainly due to historical underinvestment – mean that the poorest tend to be penalised through a tariff system that was intended as a pro-poor policy (Smith 2004). Jaglin argues that the pro-poor measures implemented by CoCT since 2002 have benefited middle and working class households, while failed to empower the poor households in the informal settlements (Jaglin 2008).

Second, the water sector saw many of its support functions being *outsourced*. As shown in Table 6.2, water services across South Africa was privatised and outsourced through different types of private-public partnerships (PPPs).

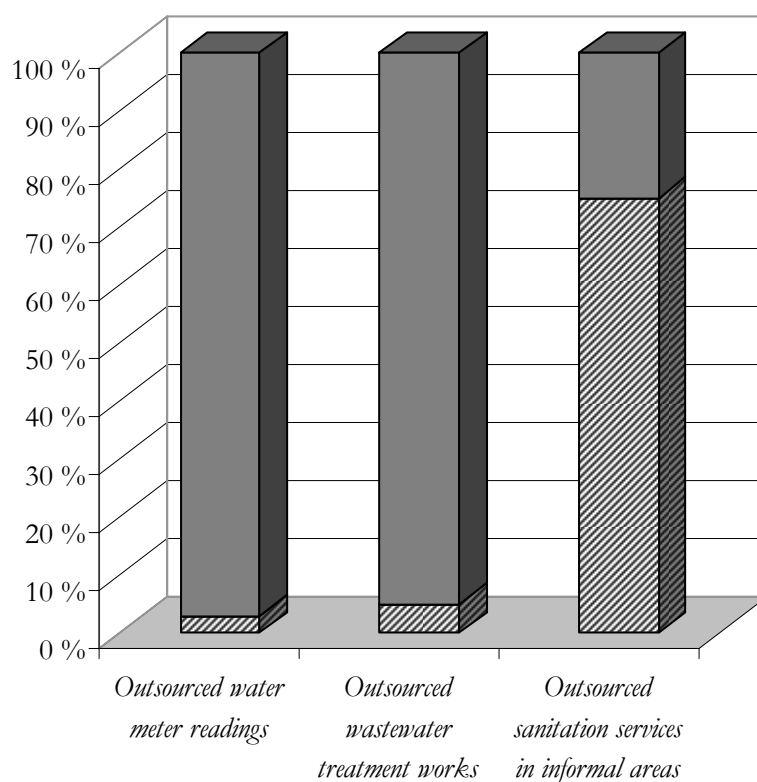
Table 6.2 *Partnerships in the municipal water sector in South Africa*

Partnership type	Business arrangement
<i>Concession</i>	Contractor undertakes all functions of municipal facility; contractor collects and retains consumer tariffs; council paid concession fee
<i>Delegated management</i>	Contractor is responsible for overall management of municipal service; assets leased to contractor; council paid rent for leased facilities
<i>Build, operate and transfer (BOT)</i>	Contractor designs, builds, manages, operates and maintains municipal facility at own expense
<i>Management contract</i>	Contractor is responsible for overall management of municipal service; but not for financing the operating, maintenance, repair or capital costs
<i>Municipal entity</i>	Private company operating as a service utility; municipality retains full control or ownership
<i>Service contract</i>	Service provider receives a fee from the municipality to manage a particular aspect of a municipal service
<i>Licensing</i>	Municipality does not provide the service, but is required to regulated it

Source: Adapted from Smith and Morris (2008:425-26)

Smith's (2004) study found that outsourcing of water services in Cape Town had taken place in construction work, meter installation, meter reading, water cutoffs and mainlaying. According to the Development and Planning department of the Water and Sanitation directorate, however, "outsourcing is not very big in our operations"⁷, with only 3 per cent of meter readings and 5 per cent of their wastewater treatment works outsourced as per April 2008. However, as shown in Figure 6.3, the level of outsourcing in the Informal Settlements Unit of the water service directorate is much higher.

Figure 6.3 *Outsourcing in Water and Sanitation, CoCT*



Source: Development and Planning department, Water and Sanitation, CoCT.

⁷ Email correspondence with Head of Development and Planning department, Water and Sanitation, CoCT 30 April and 6 May 2008.

While this might have led to short-term cost-savings, it also created the challenging task of having to regulate, coordinate and monitor these contractors. Smith (2004:387) argued that the social effects of this cost-cutting exercise by “sidestepping standard customer protocols fall on the poorest in the city”. As will be shown in the next chapters, this practice also had a negative effect on labour standards.

The third cost recovery strategy in the water sector related to CoCT’s *debt management practices* and the increased use of water cutoffs as a means of enforcing payment from poor households. Water cutoffs began in 1998, and were more widespread in certain municipalities than others. The inability of township households to pay due to high levels of poverty and unemployment led to an unprecedented level of cutoffs in the period 1999-2001: almost 160 000 cutoffs were registered in the two most populous municipalities, the former Cape Town and Tygerberg administrations (see Figure 6.1). Not only were these cutoffs costly and difficult to administrate, but they sparked widespread protests in these areas and the emergence of militant social movements (see Sections 4.4 and 4.8). The attempt to introduce prepaid water meters, another device to enforce payment and cost recovery, was also contested. CoCT has continued to try out new, and presumably less controversial, cost recovery techniques in the water sector - the latest being the introduction of so-called ‘Water Management Devices’ for poor households. Water Management Devices are designed to block a household’s water flow after an assigned 350 litres of free water per day (CoCT 2006). It has been heavily criticised by SAMWU leadership for limiting water consumption according to *affordability* – under the prevailing cost recovery pricing regime – rather than *need* (*SAMWU representative 8*).

Jaglin (2004) argued that reforms in the water sector have been characterised by two competing models of service delivery: an equality-based and centralised system in the former Cape Town administration and a competitive and decentralised system in the former Tygerberg administration. The establishment of the Unicity brought these two systems under the same administration, and today one can identify significant local variations in the water service regime across the metropolitan area. The danger was, of course, that this decentralisation would cement historical

inequalities and uneven levels of service through market mechanisms. According to Jaglin (2004), the initial stages of water corporatisation in Cape Town mark the failure of a technocratic and managerialist service delivery approach which emphasised technical solutions. She argued that this strategy was guided by the neoliberal agendas of career-driven officials – motivated by “the personal gain they hoped to glean from corporatisation of services” (Jaglin 2004:246). Immediately following the establishment of the Unicity, there was a period focused on economic and institutional development but, according to Jaglin (2008), this shifted in 2002 with a renewed emphasis on poverty alleviation and service delivery. This phase of social reinvention was prompted by national government directives and grassroots activism, which forced the water service regime to acknowledge the importance of principles of social equity, and not only economic efficiency, in the success of these reforms. At the time of research, the situation in the water service could in many ways be described as an unresolved, but ongoing, negotiation between these two approaches.

6.5.2 Electricity Services

Hassen’s (2006) account of electricity restructuring in post-apartheid South Africa echoed Jaglin’s description of water reforms in Cape Town by identifying an ongoing negotiation between an *efficiency*-driven and an *equity*-driven agenda. The goal of maintaining low cost electricity as a comparative advantage for South African business, on the one hand, was weighed against achieving universal access to all South African households. This being said, Hassen maintained that restructuring efforts generally prioritised the former objective at the expense of social equity concerns. This could perhaps be related to the tug-of-war between two main policy camps regarding electricity reform, identified by Pickering (2008) as a ‘professionalisation camp’ and a ‘local democracy camp’. This divide was essentially one between the Department of Energy and their external consultants, and other fractions of national government in alliance with local government institutions. Whereas the former professed a business-oriented and independent organisation of the industry, the latter viewed “electricity as an essential input to economic and social development and therefore feels that local government should

own, control and regulate all distribution activities” (Pickering 2008:449).

Electricity generation in South Africa was dominated by the state-owned utility Eskom, which supplied 95 per cent of the national electricity grid, whereas electricity distribution was undertaken by Eskom in addition to 415 different municipalities. In Cape Town, the municipality has traditionally distributed electricity to white areas, whereas Eskom has covered the townships on the Cape Flats as well as certain industries (Jaglin 2008). Electricity distribution has represented an important source of income for metropolitan municipalities such as Cape Town, and it still does. But at the same time, more than 120 municipalities had less than 1000 customers in 1998, and questions were raised as to whether these small municipalities were equipped to achieve the ambitious objectives of electrification of new areas and the extension of equitable services (DME 1998). National government has aimed to restructure the fragmented nature of the electricity business by reducing the number of electricity distributors. The 1998 White Paper on the Energy Policy of the Republic of South Africa unveiled the government’s objectives of consolidating the industry “into the maximum number of financially viable independent regional electricity distributors (REDs)” (DME 1998:44), which at the time was thought to be five or six regional units. A transitional structure, consisting of Eskom and the municipal distributors as a separate company, was to be set up before a final structure was agreed upon. Initially, the City of Cape Town Council – under the leadership of the DA – did not perceive the REDs to be in the interest of local government, and promised to “do everything possible to protect our interests and that of the electricity consumer in the metropolitan area” (CoCT 2002). But after a political shift to an ANC-controlled council, CoCT endorsed the policy and even agreed to established the national pilot RED1, serving the Western Cape and Northern Cape provinces (CoCT 2005). Formally, CoCT carried out the required Section 78 process (as outlined in Section 6.3), but union and community representatives complained that they were neither allowed to access the relevant information around RED1 nor to offer constructive input to this process (*SAMWU representative 8*). This was also reflected in CoCT’s Section 78 Report, which stated that the decision to establish a regional electricity distributor company

should be dependent on the outcome of the consultative process “in principle only” (CoCT 2004:8).

RED1 was established and ran for 18 months, but only as an “empty shell” (*CoCT senior manager 2*). In other words, the CoCT had yet to transfer its assets to RED1, and this process dragged out due to a breakdown in the negotiations between Eskom and CoCT around issues of compensation and the legal status of the company. But another turn of events gave those who opposed the REDs a lifeline. After the DA came back into power, CoCT’s stance changed and the city withdrew from the pilot project to the delight of critics who saw this as a ‘privatisation by stealth’ (Pape 2001), but much to the dismay of senior management in electricity whose priorities lay elsewhere. One of the senior managers in the electricity directorate expressed disappointment with the CoCT having let go of an opportunity to establish an independent electricity business:

“So the City decided to wind it up. They could have used it as a vehicle for corporatisation, they could have a much more independent HR [human resources] policy – and set its own conditions of service.” (*CoCT senior management 1*)

No matter what the final outcome of Cape Town’s role in the electricity distribution issue was to be, it was interesting from an analytical point of view that the RED1 pilot became subject to the ‘politics of scale’ between national government and the metropolitan area where the main opposition party has its stronghold. The need for a restructured distribution system notwithstanding, electricity remained an important source of income for municipalities in South Africa. SAMWU members’ economic interests were dependent on the financial viability of the municipality. This can explain why, on this particular issue, an ANC-aligned trade union chose to support the DA’s political stance.

Electricity restructuring led to job losses in Eskom, which reported a 28 per cent decrease in staff levels, from 39,952 jobs in 1995 to 28,396 jobs in 2004 (Hassen 2006). But growth elsewhere in the electricity sector created an overall increase in formal employment from 2000 to 2004. In Cape Town, however, the moratorium which was put in place ensured that CoCT did not contribute to

this growth. With the closing of the Athlone Power Station in 2003, and the documented outsourcing of meter reading, cable work and trench digging across the municipality, there was reason to believe that jobs are decreasing in the electricity service (Pape 2001). Employment challenges also included a shortage of skills, in part due to the unusually high attrition of electrical technicians, most of whom sought better conditions in the private sector. According to senior management, this resulted from the failure to sufficiently pursue a performance management policy in the sector. In their opinion, corporatisation and more diversified conditions of service and pay structure – mimicking that of the private sector – would have prevented this loss of skills (Cape Argus 2008).

Restructuring of municipal electricity distribution also affected the affordability and access of the services. While overall annual electricity tariff increases have been below the inflation rate, the impact on different groups of end users show that commercial and agricultural tariffs have been reduced at the expense of substantial price hikes for municipalities and residential customers (Hassen 2006). As with the 6,000 litre water lifeline, the Department of Minerals and Energy mandated that all households were to receive 50 kWh of free electricity per month (Smith and Morris 2008). But, also mirroring the development in water services, the electricity sector has seen the introduction of cost recovery policies and so-called ‘management devices’. In 1993, the first prepaid electricity meter was turned on and by 2006 the City had installed 420,000 of these meters, representing more than 60 per cent of domestic consumers (CoCT 2006). Adding to this, Cape Town has experienced its share of a country-wide energy crisis resulting from the industry’s inability to keep up with increased demand. Households and industry in Cape Town have suffered from a series of power outages, particularly in 2006. The energy crisis has also forced Eskom to propose a 53 per cent tariff rise in 2008, which would have a significant social impact (Cape Argus 2008).

6.5.3 Solid Waste Management

Two features shaped the restructuring of Solid Waste Management along a different trajectory than electricity and water. From a corporate perspective, Solid Waste Management was not profitable as an independent business unit (see Table 6.1). Moreover, the

nature of delivery mechanisms and infrastructural requirements made it easier to fragment the service into different smaller operations. While the first IDP pledged to “consolidate and rationalise the current fragmented service delivery structures to ensure equitable, affordable and sustainable services” (CoCT 2002:15), it soon became clear that consolidation would only apply to the administrative authority. Again, a strict operational distinction was made between the council as a *service authority*, on the one hand, and the various *service providers*, on the other, which consist of a range of actors along a public-private continuum (CoCT 2006:46):

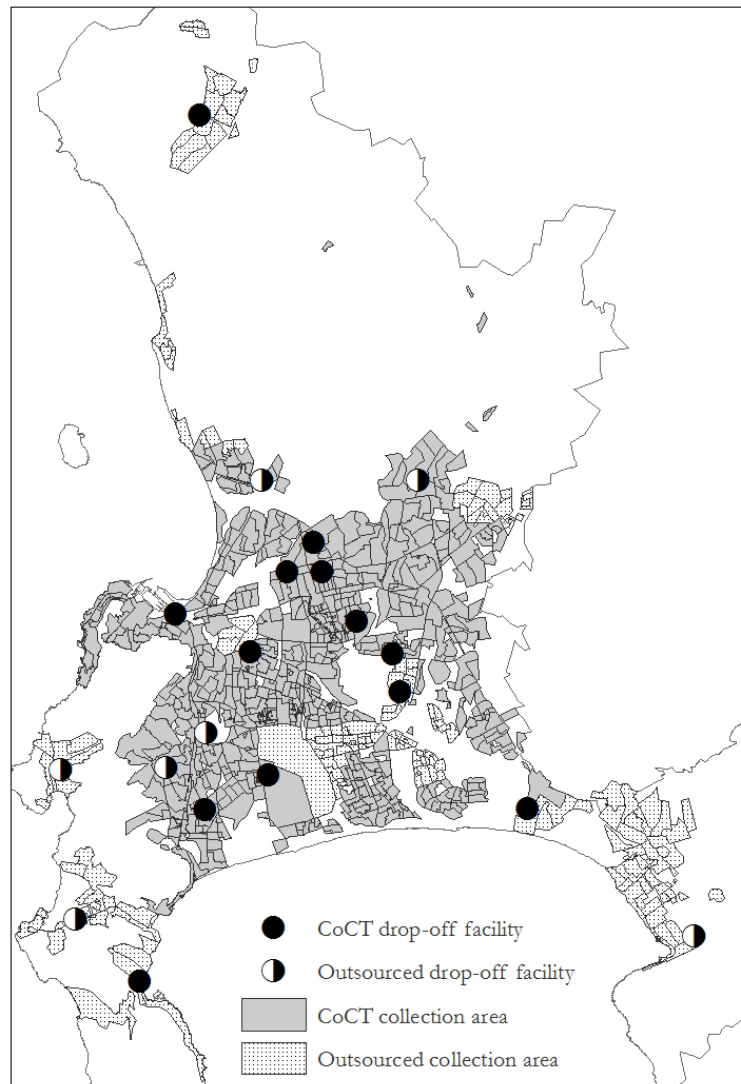
“Whilst the council employs a dedicated staff complement for the provision of various waste management services, the extent of population and City growth in geographic terms need to be offset against budgetary, infrastructure, equipment and staffing constraints and balanced by community needs. Service delivery may be ensured through a combination of mechanisms that include Council staff, equipment and infrastructure, EPWP-type projects, SMME and community contracting initiatives related to community-based service programmes, and private sector services, which may also include partnerships.”

In some areas of Cape Town refuse was collected as a weekly service at each residence; in other, typically lower-income, areas service delivery was provided through periodical removal from communal skips. In addition, some areas were serviced through community-based schemes where collection and removal was undertaken by local residents. All these forms of refuse removal have been subject to increased externalisation and private sector involvement, either through contracts with South African firms such as Wasteman and Waste-Tech, or through various arrangements drawing labour from the local communities – either as labourers or as so-called ‘entrepreneurs’ (Qotole, Xali et al. 2001; Miraftab 2004). In addition, there was an increase in the use of labour broker staff and ‘community labour’ in those functions still performed by the municipality. In 2004, Miraftab (2004:880) estimated that 36 per cent of the municipal waste services had been outsourced, and that 75 per cent of this outsourcing had been in lower-income areas.

The CoCT rejected the notion that they were focusing their outsourcing drive in lower-income areas. However, it was argued by management in the Solid Waste Management directorate that the areas singled out for external contracts were often in the geographical periphery of the city:

“Look, that’s part of the strategy. [...] Because of the Unicity being formed, the resources were scattered far and wide. And just looking at the operational logic of solid waste and the collection business, area cleaning, dispersal and all of that – there then was a need to shore up in certain areas. And the areas that we shored up are consolidated into where it’s almost *the centre of gravity of geographic areas*. If you look at what has been outsourced it is *everything on the outskirts of the City* – geographic areas that are already appendages of the city [...] we’re talking the Deep South, which if you know Cape Town it’s Simonstown, Hout Bay area – it’s a little appendage of the peninsula that goes out. The other area that we are outsourcing is the Strand-Gordonsbaai area, and if you look at that it’s also on the outskirts on the fringes on the periphery of the city. So it’s because of that, because of the operational logic and the fact that we don’t want to mobilise people from the centre of mass into those appendages. So that’s the reason, so it’s driven from an operational perspective.” (*CoCT Senior management 7*, emphases added)

If this was indeed the case, it certainly gave the concept of core and non-core services an added meaning. Although it was legitimised in the quote by referring to the ‘operational logic’, the social ramifications of such a policy should not be overlooked in a city where the relationship between the ‘centre of gravity’ and the ‘outskirts’ still bear the hallmark of apartheid. Other senior managers, however, were unwilling to concede that this indeed was official policy. As illustrated by Figure 6.4, the spatial distribution of outsourced drop-off facilities and collection areas did to a certain extent mirror this logic.

Figure 6.4 *Outsourced areas and facilities in waste management*

Source: Adapted from GIS data acquired from CoCT.

In any case, the scale of outsourcing in waste management was significant and its geographical and socio-economic distribution was uneven. According to the Solid Waste Management directorate, the estimated count of residential properties in 2006 was 720000 formal units and 115000 informal units. Of these, 23 per cent of the formal units and 100 per cent of the informal units

had been outsourced per August 2007. Also, of twenty refuse drop-off sites in the metropolitan area, eight sites had already been outsourced, “and the remainder will probably follow soon”⁸.

The relatively high level of private sector involvement in solid waste could be ascribed to a set of factors. Firstly, core functions – such as refuse removal – were easier to separate into manageable contracts in Solid Waste Management than in Water and Sanitation or Electricity Services, where most of the outsourcing was limited to support functions. Secondly, CoCT faced no lack of bidders in the sector, as several private waste companies had already lined up and were ready to take over. In fact, some of the previous municipal administrations, particularly in the Helderberg area, had already gone quite far down the outsourcing route (*SAMWU shopsteward 6*). Due to its particularly labour-intensive nature, Solid Waste Management, more than other municipal sectors, allowed smaller businesses and community labour schemes to get involved in service delivery. Thus, policy-makers could take advantage of community demands for job opportunities, as well as national initiatives such as Black Economic Empowerment policies and the Expanded Public Works Programme (Samson 2004). But the extent of externalisation in Solid Waste Management was also driven by the political agenda of senior management in CoCT, as it was arguably the directorate of Utility Services in which the business gospel was preached most directly – exemplified below by a quote from its director:

“Look, the City will never operate as efficiently as privately owned business – I know that because I’ve worked here. I’ve worked in parastatals, I’ve worked in government and I’ve worked in private industry – and *private industry does work, by necessity, more efficiently than government*. And for that reason, if you’re looking at affordability, in terms of what the rate payer is paying – the citizens pay – we could never reach the same efficiencies as private companies. [...] From a technological point of view, we are sitting at exactly the same place as private companies, so it’s mainly the management and the labour issues. There is a *different*

⁸ E-mail correspondence with the Planning manager of the Solid Waste directorate on 14 August 2007.

dynamic to someone who works for local government than it is for someone who works for private industry.” (CoCT senior management 7, emphases added)

In sum, these factors have contributed to a high level of private sector involvement and an extensive use of casual labour practices in the Solid Waste Management directorate in Cape Town.

6.6 Concluding remarks: coming to terms with neoliberal restructuring

The objective of this chapter has been to unpack the concept of ‘restructuring’ in the case of post-apartheid Cape Town, in particular with regards to how it relates to changes in service delivery systems and employment relations in the municipality. This was necessary because the processes of change that took place in this city since apartheid have been so overwhelming that approaching it as one coherent process is not meaningful from an analytical point of view. As we will see from the discussions in the following chapters, it is also problematic to do so from a practical-political point of view, as many of the political actors involved in, and affected by, restructuring in Cape Town had problems constructively engaging with these processes.

Because the starting point – apartheid – has often been described as a homogeneous phenomenon – i.e. racial oppression – the post-apartheid context, and the processes leading up to the present situation, are sometimes attributed the same coherence. True, some important changes could be understood as *deracialisation*: e.g. the extension of full voting rights to all citizens and the renaming of streets and buildings to reflect the ideals of a new (imagined) nation. But closely related to this were processes which could not be reduced to this anti-apartheid rationale, such as the need to amalgamate the various municipal administrations. Local government structures in the apartheid era were based on serving separate race groups, and in order to dismantle of the apartheid system there was a need to overcome the highly unequal and racialised geography of the city. But at the same time, the process of administrative amalgamation was more than a process of deracialisation. It must also be understood as a bureaucratic project of *organisational rationalisation* geared towards economies of

scale, a process which was not unique to post-apartheid South Africa. What gave South African local government transformation a unique flavour was the way it was legitimised. Here, becoming a more effective organisation was seen as moral imperative, as municipalities had been trusted with a new and ambitious *developmental agenda*. The challenge of Developmental Local Government (DLG) was called for by South Africa's first democratically elected government, who represented the majority of South Africans which has previously been excluded from economic opportunities and decent living standards. But while political rights and entitlements were extended, municipal budgets did not follow suit. Therefore, managers and politicians in local government were faced with a series of *unfunded mandates*, leading many of them to consider the ideas of New Public Management that were on everybody's lips at the time. As was suggested in Chapter 5, this could be seen as a national economic crisis being transferred to the politics of local government.

It is against this backdrop that the aspects of restructuring which are particularly relevant to this project emerge. The CoCT – as did other metropolitan municipalities in the country – increasingly introduced outsourcing, staff rationalisation and casual labour practices as a way of dealing with what management perceived to be excessive staffing budgets. CoCT also started corporatising its service sectors and introducing cost recovery principles in service delivery. As Cape Town's administration was striving to 'do more with less', in order to achieve the ambitious goals of deracialisation and development, the city's inhabitants were also facing severe water shortages and a looming energy crisis. The case of Cape Town was a good example of the "raft of other social and natural phenomena" with which neoliberalisation is interwoven (Castree 2006:4). By analytically separating the different elements of what was referred to as 'restructuring' in Cape Town, the main components of *neoliberal restructuring* could be discerned. But, as suggested by Castree's ideal-types (see Section 3.5.1), even neoliberal restructuring was a heterogeneous phenomenon. In the case of CoCT, the corporatisation of the service sectors, the outsourcing of service functions, the commercialisation of service delivery and the casualisation of the municipal employment regime represented distinct, yet interrelated, processes. As shown above, they had particular impacts on service delivery mechanisms and

employment relations, and their trajectories were sector-specific and politically contested. The politics of neoliberal restructuring were not only shaped by the politicised field of labour relations in the municipality, but also through party politics and the scalar dynamics of a metropolitan administration which, at the time of research, was led by an opposition party not afraid to challenge ANC's national hegemony. Having established the embeddedness and complexity of neoliberal restructuring in Cape Town, Chapters 7 and 8 will examine its social impacts and political responses, respectively.

7 The social reality of neoliberalism

7.1 Introduction

The post-apartheid transformation of Cape Town has impacted on those living and working in the city in various ways. In order to address *Research Question 2* in Section 4.10 in an analytical and theoretically informed way, some important arguments have been established in the previous chapters. The question refers to the social impacts of neoliberal restructuring – not only with regards to public sector employees, but also to other groups of workers and community members. While workers will remain the main subject of study, it is clear that the politics of public services are as much about consumption and reproduction as they are about production, and hence there is a strong incentive to adopt a holistic approach to the workers delivering these services. This implies acknowledging different worker subjectivities and the multiple roles they inhabit in society. As far as municipal workers are concerned, the relationship between them and the local state apparatus appears particularly complex: municipal workers are not only local government employees, they are also users of municipal services, voters in local elections, as well as organised partners in industrial relations. Against the backdrop of these multiple roles, the reflections, experiences and interpretations of labour and state representatives will be presented and analysed.

The chapter takes a new look at neoliberal restructuring (as defined in Section 6.6) by focusing on how municipal workers are affected along different dimensions of their *social reality*. Social reality, in this sense, refers to the everyday lives of men and women who struggle to secure their access to basic services and decent work, and who

try to make their political voices heard. These crucial aspects of the restructuring process are not necessarily visible when looking at these changes from the viewpoint of municipal management – according to their business objectives and their political agenda. It is not surprising that a reorganisation of the magnitude of that which has been occurring in Cape Town has shaken the foundations of municipal labour. NPM reforms have redrawn the internal relationships within the local state organisation, as well as those between the local state and other spheres of society – both private sector actors and the wider community. Expanding on this notion, this chapter will assess how these changes have transformed the potential for establishing unity and solidarity between different groups of workers, between organised workers and community members, and between the trade union and the local state.

Section 7.2 examines the *casualisation of municipal work* which accompanied City of Cape Town's (CoCT) outsourcing and externalisation of service delivery. Even though this process can sometimes be traced back to specific decisions made in local or national government, their impacts in the many workplaces and communities across the city has been varied and specific. Therefore, I have chosen to follow three local subcases, to allow for a more in-depth understanding of how the municipal labour regime in the CoCT has been externalised: through the use of *labour broker agencies*; through *contracting out* municipal functions to private firms; who, in turn, used *third-party subcontractors* to perform labour-intensive tasks. These practices created high levels of casualisation and had negative impacts on work safety and organisational rights. Constituting a re-regulation of the sphere of production, casualisation has been a particularly significant feature of neoliberal restructuring in Cape Town. Hence it makes up the lion's share of this chapter. But it was by no means the only social impact. Consequently, Section 7.3 focuses on the intimate and contradictory relationship between municipal workers and community members. Both the *commercialisation of service delivery* (as outlined in Sections 6.3 and 6.5) and the above-mentioned casualisation processes complicate the potential for solidarity and alliance-building between different social groups. In particular, this section grapples with the notion of municipal workers simultaneously being service users and, conversely, the

implications of community members taking up the roles of municipal workers. Finally, Section 7.4 tries to answer the following question: how have neoliberal reforms altered municipal workers' ability to organise politically and for organised labour to wield their collective strength? Here, a critical focus is directed at the *depoliticisation of labour relations* in the CoCT during, and partially as a result of, the restructuring process. The chapter is wrapped up by a conclusion which attempts to bring together these analytical threads to summarise the impacts of restructuring – not according to business principles or corporate benchmarks – but from the perspective of municipal workers and their social reality.

7.2 Casualisation through the externalisation of municipal work

The previous chapter documented how municipal functions in the CoCT were increasingly performed by private companies, poverty alleviations schemes and labour broker staff. The flip side of this trend was that more municipal work was being casualised. In other words, through *externalisation* – rather than downgrading of existing council jobs – municipal authorities reduced their staff costs and made casual labour an integral part of their labour practice without directly challenging the employment conditions of a highly unionised core of permanent workers. While it took place in all municipal services, Samson (2004) described this process as a particularly prominent feature of the municipal waste industry. Her case study of Johannesburg revealed the various forms of casualisation through externalisation in the municipal waste sector (as shown in Table 7.1). This was not unique to the Johannesburg metropolitan area, but rather illustrated a broader trend in South Africa.

Table 7.1 *Externalisation in the South African waste management sector*

	Type of contract	Employer	Bargaining council	Labour law coverage
<i>Labour brokers</i>	Commercial contract between municipality and private company to provide workers.	Private company	The National Bargaining Council for the Road Freight Industry (NBCRFI) for drivers and operators; none for other workers.	Covered by all labour law (if work more than 24 hours per month)
<i>Public-private partnerships</i>	Commercial contract between municipality and private company to provide services.	Private company	NBCRFI for those who work with trucks, none for other workers	All
<i>City Improvement Districts</i>	Commercial contract between private company and consortium of businesses to provide services.	Private company	None	All
<i>Municipal community partnership</i>	Commercial contract between municipality and non-governmental organisation (NGO) or community-based organisation (CBO) to provide services.	NGO or CBO	NBCRFI for those who work with trucks; none for other workers	All
<i>Provincial poverty alleviation projects</i>	Provision of services funded and administered by provincial government; no contractual obligations to the municipality	Poverty alleviation project	None	Ministerial Determination and Code of Good Practice for Special Works Programme
<i>Volunteer programme</i>	Provision of service by ward committee or councillor; not bound by any contractual agreement	None	None	None

Source: Adapted from Samson (2004:4)

Although Solid Waste Management experienced a “progressive pushing out” of municipal functions (*CoCT senior management 9*) – more than any other sector – casual labour was also becoming more widespread in water and electricity.

Accounting for the precise number of casual workers involved in municipal service delivery is difficult, due to the fragmented nature of the casualisation process. The CoCT was not able to present any quantitative data on externalised labour. Ironically, the ongoing restructuring process was blamed for the insufficient documentation procedures (*CoCT senior management 5 and 10*). The volatile nature of externalisation – with short-term contracts expiring, new contracts put out to tender and sharp seasonal changes in the need for casual workers – also made the scale and extent of CoCT’s labour practice difficult to measure. But in the absence of available official statistics, there were other attempts to assess the situation. Notably, SAMWU shopstewards and office bearers, in collaboration with the IHRG project (see Section 5.4.2), undertook a workplace study of the effects of outsourcing and subcontracting on occupational health and safety issues. Their research findings were based on observations and interviews at municipal depots across the metropolitan area. Data from this research project estimated that more than a quarter of the municipal workforce in these three service departments had an employer other than the CoCT (see Table 7.2).

Table 7.2 *Levels of casualisation in three municipal service sectors in CoCT*

	Wastewater	Electricity	Solid Waste	Total
<i>Permanent workers</i>	940	1433	1687	4060
<i>Labour broker staff & casual workers</i>	74	241	754	1069
<i>Sub-contractor workers</i>	131	134	199	464
<i>Total workforce</i>	1145	1808	2640	5593
<i>Permanent workers as % of total</i>	82.1	79.3	63.9	72.6
<i>Non-permanent workers as % of total</i>	17.9	20.7	36.1	27.4

Source: Adapted from IHRG (2007:12)

Although this information was not confirmed by employer representatives, anecdotal evidence from public servants directly involved in the procurement of labour estimated that the total staff compliment hired via labour brokers varied between 3,500 and 5,000 workers for CoCT as a whole at any given time (*CoCT junior management 1*). In other words, a municipal organisation that in early 1990s only had a limited use of contract workers had, in the space of less than a decade, come to rely heavily on casual labour.

The working conditions of different groups of casual workers varied considerably, and some of this diversity will be exemplified in the following case studies. What all these workers had in common, however, was a *less reliable employment situation*, as a result, a more precarious livelihood. Another general feature of casual work in Cape Town was the *absence of benefits* granted to CoCT employees. This represented, relatively speaking, a significant downgrading of municipal work. The unionised core of permanent workers in CoCT had won a range of employment benefits, such as medical aid and sick leave entitlements. In addition, several local benefits applied to particular workplaces and previous administrative units. The restructuring process, guided by the Unicity Commission's recommendations, was actively trying to 'trim down' benefits even for CoCT employees, but faced stark opposition from the unions. Finally, the *salary levels* of externalised labour were in general considerably lower than those of municipal employees. In fact, wage costs were identified as a key reason for externalisation by several CoCT representatives (*CoCT depot manager 2, CoCT senior manager 4*).

Samson's above-mentioned study also offered a nation-wide overview of salary levels in different types of municipal labour. As shown in Table 7.3, her findings revealed significant wage differentials.

Table 7.3 *Wage differentials in the South African waste management sector*

Employer	Location	Salary range in ZAR pcm
<i>Municipalities</i>	Cape Town, Sol Plaatje and Msunduzi	1,600-4,155
<i>Utilities</i>	Johannesburg	1,898-2,162
<i>Private companies</i>	Cape Town, Johannesbrug, etc.	800-1,540
<i>NGOs</i>	Msunduzi	1,417
<i>Special Public Works Programmes</i>	Johannesburg	880

Source: Adapted from Samson (2004:37)

Similarly, data from the workplace research project of SAMWU (IHRG 2007), which focused on selected outsourced service functions, showed huge differences in the minimum wage rates of municipal work in Cape Town.

Table 7.4 *Minimum wages in municipal work in the CoCT*

Employer	Minimum hourly rate for general worker in ZAR
<i>City of Cape Town</i>	20.19
<i>Bucket toilet sub-contractor</i>	9.37
<i>Waste disposal site re-cycling sub-contractor</i>	No minimum wage. Paid per kilogram of recyclable waste.
<i>Asbestos sub-contractor</i>	9.25
<i>Expanded Public Works</i>	16.00
<i>Labour broker</i>	11.00

Source: IHRG (2007:13-14)

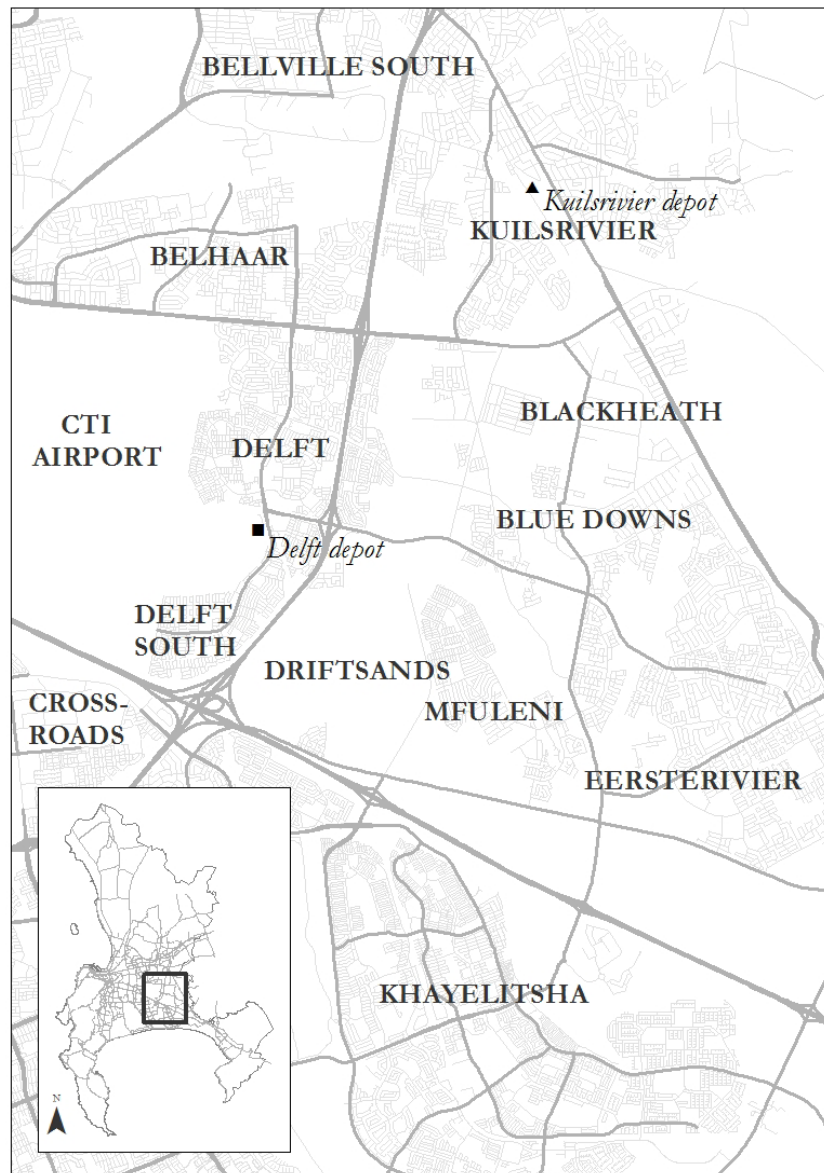
Suggesting that this shift was orchestrated through a coordinated effort from pro-privatisation politicians and public servants at the

top of the organisation is perhaps a simplification of the matter. Often several processes were at work, and budget constraints throughout the entire organisation left under-resourced municipal depots and departments further down the hierarchy having to make the decision to employ casual workers. Due to this decentralised casualisation, the following sections focus on three local subcases of this process. By selectively concentrating on localities where external labour has been employed, it is also possible to pay more attention to the particular social networks and personal experiences that facilitate the casualisation process on the ground. The subcases presented in Sections 7.2.1-3, which cut across different sectors, show the variety of ways in which municipal labour was externalised across Cape Town.

7.2.1 Labour broker staff and ‘community workers’ in Delft and Kuilsrivier

This section examines the changing employment patterns at the municipal depots in Delft and Kuilsrivier. Delft is a township on the Cape Flats – the vast plains that stretch from the Southern Suburbs at the foot of Table Mountain in the west to the suburban hubs of Bellville and Somerset West in the east. Consisting of sandy scrubland and wetlands, this inhospitable terrain became home to thousands of households in the late 1980 and early 1990s as people moved into the emerging townships surrounding Cape Town in search for employment. The Delft township is located to the east of Cape International Airport (see Figure 7.1), was initially designed as a Coloured township but gradually became a place of residence for different ethnic backgrounds. The Delft municipal depot is located in the heart of the town, and was until 2000 within the boundaries of the City of Tygerberg (see Figure 6.1). It coordinates municipal functions in the areas of *Solid Waste Management, City Parks, Roads and Stormwater* and *Water and Sanitation*. As a part of the Unicity amalgamation process, the spatial domains of these different sections of the depot shifted. In the Roads and Stormwater section, for example, their service area used to cover Delft and Delft South as well as the adjacent communities of Belhaar and Mfuleni (see Figure 7.1). But with administrative amalgamation, the Delft depot was required to extend its services to communities further away from the depot, such as Kuilsrivier and Blackheath.

Figure 7.1 Road map of Delft and surrounding areas



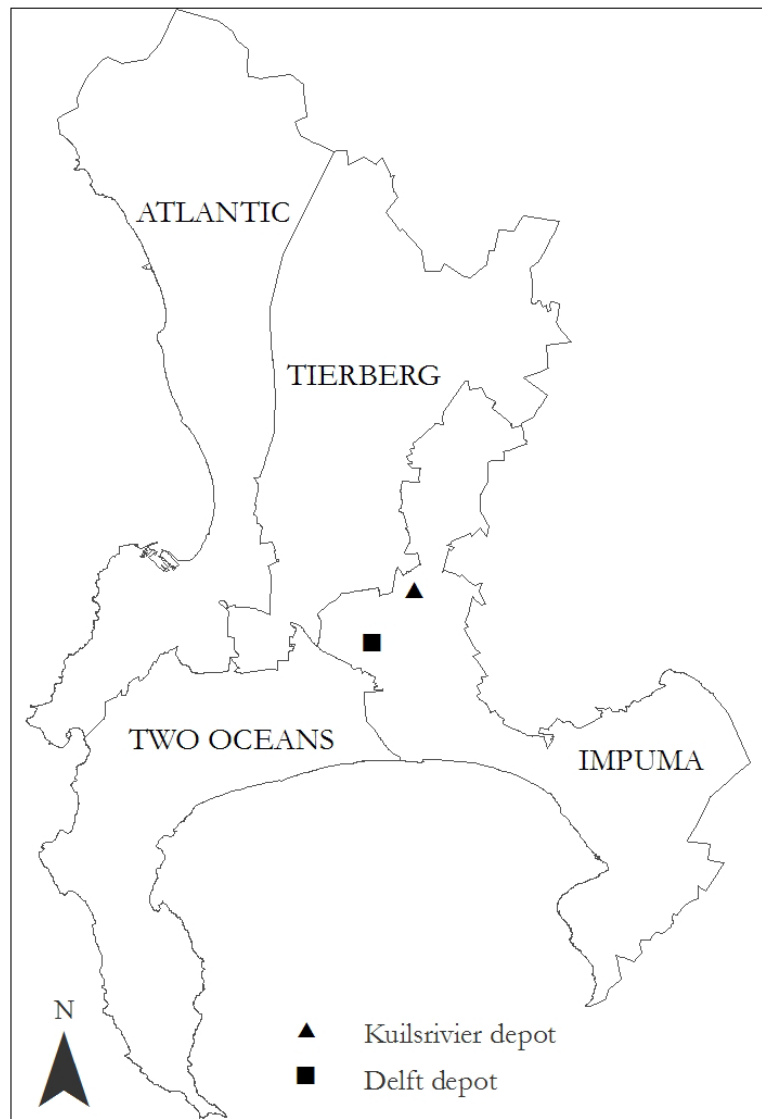
Source: Adapted from GIS data acquired from CoCT.

According to the head of the depot, this entailed a fivefold increase in road length with a reduced permanent staff compliment. At the Delft depot, the moratorium on recruitment and promotions had in fact been in effect since 1995, and had a

significant impact on the numbers of permanent staff (*CoCT depot manager 1*). As a result, levels of service could not be maintained as a satisfactory level, and the roads and surrounding areas “looked terrible”. Therefore, the Roads and Stormwater services at the depot started using short-term, casual labour to deal with the most pressing functions, such as the cleaning of the stormwater catchments.

Staff restructuring also impacted on Solid Waste Management services at the depot. Truck-based refuse removal had already been outsourced to a private company during the City of Tygerberg administration (see Figure 6.1), and this practice was maintained in the post-2000 Unicity structure, as waste management was reorganised into four sector-specific service areas (see Figure 7.2).

Figure 7.2 *Solid Waste Management service areas in the Unicity structure*



Source: Adapted from GIS data acquired from CoCT.

In this new structure, the workers at the Delft municipal depot were responsible for labour-intensive area cleaning tasks, such as street sweeping and litter picking. Out of the 50 waste management workers at the Delft depot, 17 were permanently employed and 33 were casual workers through a labour broker

company called Ikhwezi Recruitment (Pty) Ltd (*CoCT depot manager 2*). The head of the Solid Waste depot was also administering truck-based refuse collection in the adjacent Kuilsrivier depot, where this service had not yet been outsourced (see Figure 7.3).

Figure 7.3 Refuse collection areas in Delft and Kuilsrivier



Source: Adapted from GIS data acquired from CoCT.

The Kuilsrivier depot employed between 25 and 30 casual workers through another labour broker called Masibambane Recruitment (Pty) Ltd.. Ikhwezi and Masibambane had both experienced unprecedented growth during the last decade as a result of the increased level of outsourcing and externalisation of public sector functions combined with the opportunities presented by BEE policies. A senior manager at Masibambane estimated that CoCT accounted for 30 per cent of the company's contracts (*Private sector representative 1*). Incidentally, the two companies also shared office space in the same building in 84 Harrington Street in downtown Cape Town.

It seems clear that the emerging labour broker industry benefited from, and facilitated, casualisation in Delft and Kuilsrivier. But behind this general trend was a range of different employment arrangements. Labour broker staff at these two depots did not constitute a homogeneous group of workers. At the Delft depot, the Ikhwezi workers were employed on contracts of a very short-term nature. Interestingly, this was justified by the head of the Solid Waste depot as a poverty alleviation scheme, although he did not seem wholly convinced about the intended outcome of this system:

When I came in this morning [...] there where loads of people at the gate. Are they a part of that labour broker scheme?

Yes.

How does that work, do they just show up?

No no no. The [community] organisations contact them, they say: *'on Monday 14 we need 40 people.'*

So they are not waiting for a job, they already have a job?

Yes [...] they get picked up. Of course, at the start of the day the labour broker has to write out contract papers [...] And in Delft, because of the huge unemployment rate, we have got agreement with all the broker network here that we're gonna rotate the people every two weeks. So people only work here for a fortnight, then we get new people. Because the unemployment rate, I think it's 50 or 60 per cent. So what we I have decided here – other Solid Waste departments [...], in Mitchell's Plain or Bellville, they don't go that way, they're working for as long as the [CoCT] contract goes, 3 months, 6 months – whereas I rotate that. It's a bit of extra work for me, but I rotate them every 14 days. Look what I'm telling you, this is a feeding system. What we do here is, it's a kick off system [...], you get work for two weeks and you take home about 1000 rand or 1100 rand. What you can do now is, you can use some of the money for transport to look for work somewhere else. A permanent job, you know.

Do you get any feedback from those workers? Do people actually manage to get a job?

Man, as I know the success of that has been very few, you see, because some of them don't actually go that way. Because most of the people here employed is in the 40 to 60 age group. So once they've reach 40 they have already given up of taking a job elsewhere. So they would rather use that 1000 rand to pay whatever or buy whatever. They are not gonna look for something else. We have a success rate of, I would say, 10 per cent for the younger ones. That is the age group between 20 and about 35. We have other guys here now that got a permanent job.

(Conversation with CoCT depot manager 2)

The casual labour practice of rotating workers on extremely short-term contracts was specific to the Delft depot. It had its origins in the historically close ties between the present depot managers and a community-based group in the area, called the Concerned Residents' Forum or 'the Concerns'. In 2000-01, the Concerns were given a mandate by the municipal depot to provide 15 workers to do street sweeping on a short term contract directly with the municipality. The selection of these 'community workers' was done by the Concerns, according to a list of people based on informal surveying and attendance registers at their meetings (*Community activist 2*). In the previous City of Tygerberg administration depot managers were given the flexibility to hire contract workers directly, and this practice was maintained in the first years of the Unicity amalgamation, and even expanded and institutionalised over the course of the next few years.

However, as the restructuring of the Unicity proceeded, procurement procedures became stricter, more standardised and centralised at a metropolitan level. This signalled the end of the 'community worker' practice as a direct relationship between the depot and the community organisations. Instead, the depot was required to employ staff via a list of labour broker agencies that had won a city-wide contract with CoCT. The community structures remained involved in the recruitment and selection process, however, even though the formal employer responsibility was transferred to a third-party private company (*Community activist*

2). Representatives from the labour brokers described the practice of recruiting through informal political structures such as the Concerns as quite unusual. That being said, directives from CoCT on the use of local labour did mean that they often cooperated with local political authorities, such as the ward councillors (*Private sector representatives 2 and 3*). According to the depot manager, the involvement of third-party labour brokers was primarily done to conform to the new, centralised procedures – but was, in his opinion, neither beneficial to the municipality nor to the community:

I believe that if I want to help the community then the money I spend must go to the community. I don't want half of it to go to Masibambane's back pocket. Because you pay them x amount of money per day, and they pay half of that to the worker, the other half goes in their back pocket. I don't want to work that way.

Why was it shifted from a direct link between the depot and the community?

Because of the ideas of Procurement⁹. That is the way they want to run the show.

So it's not your decision?

No. This is beyond me. My decision would have been carrying on the way we were. They called me a manager, but I am not allowed to manage.

(Conversation with *CoCT depot manager 1*)

Despite claims from both depot management and community organisations that the 'community worker' practice forged a direct and constructive link between the community and local government (*CoCT depot manager 1 and 2; Community activist 2*), there were some serious problems with framing this kind of labour recruitment as a local developmental scheme. Not only did it function as a pretext to shortening the length of employment contracts, as mentioned above, but it was also used to legitimise

⁹ Procurement, Tenders and Contract Management; Supply Chain Management; Finance Directorate; City of Cape Town (see also Figure 5.1).

wage cuts. One community activist involved in the labour recruitment process described an episode where the Concerns received a project from CoCT involving the employment of 20 people for 17 days – on a daily rate of 120 rands for 17 workers and 150 rands for three supervisors. But to “reach more people” in a largely unemployed community, the organisation decided to extend employment to 40 people over the course of 21 days, paying everybody (including the supervisors) 80 rands per day (*Community activist 2*). In other words, the community scheme cut workers’ wages in half and doubled the workforce. While this practice did offer unemployed individuals a meagre and short-lived income, it also allowed the municipality to exploit extremely vulnerable workers to perform municipal functions for lesser pay.

The Masibambane workers at the Kuilsrivier depot who were working on the refuse trucks were subject to quite different conditions. As these workers were working on mechanised vehicles, the nature of this work required some specific skills and experience. Consequently, the practice of rotating ‘community workers’ every fortnight was deemed unsuitable (*CoCT depot manager 2*). However, with the moratorium preventing any permanent positions to be filled, their solution was to recruit workers via Masibambane on a quasi-permanent basis. One worker at the Kuilsrivier depot had been working in the same job for four years (*Casual worker 3*). However, his working week was restricted to four working days which kept him from the status of a full-time employee. He expressed frustration about working on refuse trucks alongside permanent workers for years on end, doing the same job without enjoying any benefits or the right to a full working week. Moreover, he was placed on different trucks every day, depending on labour requirements, whereas the permanent workers worked on the same vehicle. Lastly, the financial and practical arrangements around transport were much better for permanent workers. In effect, this reduced casual workers’ real wages and increased his travel time in the mornings and afternoons. Out of 25-30 workers, the worker respondent estimated that seven or eight of these were SAMWU members. He was one of them. However, he confessed that: “I do not feel they are representing me” (*Casual worker 3*), even though he paid five or six rands per week in union fees. Not only was there a lack of direct support centrally from the trade union, but he also explained

that, at a workplace level, the casualised depot workers had not been able to collectively and effectively present their demands and grievances directly to the depot manager. The depot manager himself expressed ambivalence towards the use of casual labour (*CoCT depot manager 2*). Although he held an opinion generally shared with most other CoCT senior management and private sector representatives interviewed in this research project – namely that *casual workers work harder* than permanent ones – he saw the social impact of this practice colliding with business principles.

For me as a manager, I would love to have labour broker staff, because they all perform. I would love to do away with the permanent staff. But if I come to me being a human being, what will happen if we just have contract staff? You know what I mean. What will happen when these people go on pension one day?

So they're working their way into poverty?

That's right. With the member of a labour broker, the deductions – there's no pension, there's no medical aid. Only UIF [Unemployment Insurance Fund], that's all. The worker is supposed to take up his own insurance and whatever he is going to get, understand?

(Conversation with *CoCT depot manager 2*)

The continued presence of quasi-permanent workers in municipal workplaces across Cape Town did not only create resentment amongst casual workers who received less benefits and job security than their colleagues. Evidence from other depots in the city suggests that it also, paradoxically, led to some disgruntlement amongst permanent workers who complained that casual workers were allowed to work unlimited overtime, and hence earn a higher salary than permanent workers. The moratorium on staff promotions did also allow some workers to accept a temporary status in return for a higher position, which was viewed as an illegitimate career shortcut by many permanent staff (*SAMWU shopsteward 5*). In short, the two-tier system of employment that has been allowed to operate during the restructuring period fragments the workplace and workforce solidarity, and hence a threat to organised labour.

While casualisation created tensions between different groups of workers, it also led to some friction in the relationship between the municipal workers and the communities in which they were working. Different sources cited Delft as an area where local community groups and municipal workers had been in conflict in the past. Millstein (2008) described tension between SAMWU and the ‘community worker’ scheme, as the latter saw the union’s fight for re-municipalisation as a threat to their jobs. A 2000 report written by the International Labour Research and Information Group (ILRIG) to the Unicity Commission highlighted the fact that permanent municipal employees felt that they had been pitted against the community, as they had been brought to the Delft depot from other communities without the local community structures having been consulted. To the local community, this had been particularly provocative as the municipal authorities previously had turned service delivery “into an emotive issue through promises of job-creation in ‘previously disadvantaged’ areas” (ILRIG 2000:19).

At the time of research, despite the fact that the depot manager conceded that the local union had “moaned a bit about it” (*CoCT depot manager 1*), the unionised workers at the depot were tangled up in so many issues as a result of the restructuring process that a concerted effort to tackle the issue of casualisation in Delft had not been made. There had been no attempts to recruit ‘community workers’ as SAMWU members, as their contracts lasted for only two weeks at a time. As a way of legitimising the casual labour practice of the Delft depot while maintaining support for the trade union’s anti-privatisation agenda, a community activist and key actor in the recruitment of ‘community workers’ made a distinction between privatisation and outsourcing, on the one hand, and casualisation on the other.

[*Community activist 2*]: SAMWU shopstewards and SAMWU workers, they are for the people – I definitely know that. [...] They won’t say that the people can’t do that work because the people are taking away their jobs. Yes, they are against privatisation, but they are not against people getting a permanent job [sic], to get work so that they are getting food on the table at the end of the day. *Is ek korrek?*

[SAMWU shopsteward 1]: Ja.

[DCL]: So the relationship between community members and SAMWU workers is essentially a good one. But are there disagreements?

[*Community activist 2*]: Yes and no. I would say yes and no, because for me as a community worker and as a volunteer doing whatever, these guys has been backing me [...] Even [*SAMWU shopsteward 1*], he would say: 'They must give you a job here'. [...] They are behind me, I would say. So experiencing I don't think they are against people having bread on the table. What they are against is privatisation. In particular the water going privatisation, you know, that sort of thing.

[DCL]: But Masibambane work is also a form of privatisation, isn't it? In another way?

[*Community activist 2*]: In another way, yes.

[DCL]: It's a private company getting a lot of money out of people doing work for the City.

[*Community activist 2*]: Yeah. But even so, their jobs is not actually on the line. You understand? Even if water works is going to be privatised, that means automatically water works workers will be out of work. So it's a private company that is doing the work, not municipality workers. There is a difference from Masibambane.

(Conversation with Community activist 2 and SAMWU shopsteward 1)

What is clear from this passage is that informants in Delft did not necessarily view the casualisation of *municipal jobs* as a political issue, as long as it did not entail the degrading of *municipal workers*. This represented a delicate challenge to SAMWU and other political actors attempting to fight casualisation by mobilising all those involved in the municipal labour regime. But while 'community workers' were unlikely to become SAMWU members, other externalised groups of workers proved more fertile recruitment grounds for the union.

7.2.2 Wasteman and the outsourcing of refuse collection services

“Wasteman has made considerable efforts to alleviate the problem of retrenchment caused by privatisation by offering to employ displaced local authority employees albeit on a small scale. [...] Attempting the same principle on employees of the Cape Town Municipality might become protracted when negotiating with the 12,000 member strong Cape Town Municipal Workers’ Association [CTMWA].”
(Beretti 1986:126)

The quote above embodies a snapshot of Cape Town’s past which brings together several of the main actors in this case study. It is an extract taken from a Masters thesis submitted at the University of Cape Town on “The choice between public and private sector agencies for the provision of local authority services”. Written in 1986, during the last years of apartheid, its author, David Beretti, would later become the Executive Director of Corporate Services in CoCT. In other words, since his days at university, Beretti has had considerable influence over the trajectory of restructuring in Cape Town. The passage contains a reflection on whether a private waste collection company such as Wasteman, who had been quite successful in creating employment as a compensation for the job losses following privatisation efforts in smaller municipalities in the 1980s, could replicate this in the Cape Town administration. Also mentioned in this quote was CTMWA, the municipal union whose militancy and strength was seen as a major obstacle to privatisation in Cape Town. In the year after the thesis was submitted, CTMWA would merge with other local government unions to form the national union SAMWU. Soon to be renowned for their militancy and political outspokenness, their members would not simply accept being ‘transferred’ to the private sector. This was acknowledged by Beretti, who argued that private companies benefiting from privatisation were more likely to tap into other labour pools than the unionised core of municipal workers:

“The contractors pay a lesser basic wage than the local authorities but they are not competing in the same labour market. The contractors are recruiting Black

labour from the Transkei who accept a lower wage.”
(Beretti 1986:127)

Twenty years down the road, Wasteman is now one of the biggest benefactors of outsourcing in Cape Town. Competing with other private companies for CoCT tenders, their main asset is cheap labour. Their workforce consists mainly of unskilled workers from the townships. Since Beretti's thesis was written, these people have been allowed to move from areas such as the Transkei in Eastern Cape to Cape Town in search for employment. Their poverty and – as will be shown below – their lack of effective union representation meant that they *do* in fact accept a lower wage, thereby representing a huge challenge for the politics of SAMWU.

An initial phase of outsourcing of refuse collection had already started in the 1980s, during the old administration, with municipal authorities such as Strand and Gordonsbaai (see Helderberg Municipality in Figure 6.1) being protagonists for this strategy. Large companies such as Wasteman were the beneficiaries of these contracts. But with the increasingly neoliberal macroeconomic direction of the new ANC government, outsourcing in local government accelerated. Unlike in Johannesburg, where the waste management sector was corporatised into a utility called Pikitup, the Cape Town process in the late 1990s went down a slightly different route (Qotole, Xali et al. 2001; Samson 2004). Here, waste management was identified as a sector where small businesses could get involved in service delivery through outsourcing. In part, this policy was a response to budget constraints. But it was, crucially, also legitimised by Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) policies and driven by the entrepreneurial ambitions of black individuals lobbying local authorities.

One of the most notable cases of this form of outsourcing was the so-called Entrepreneur Development Programme, initiated by the private company The Entrepreneurial Development Corporation (TEDCOR, previously Billy Hattingh and Associates). This programme, often referred to as the 'Billy Hattingh scheme', started its operation in Cape Town in 1997, when the City of Tygerberg (see Figure 6.1) decided to outsource refuse collection in Khayelitsha (Qotole, Xali et al. 2001). This scheme was based on a 'three-way contract' between TEDCOR, the municipality, a

local 'entrepreneur'. The local entrepreneur was responsible for refuse collection and the hiring and paying of staff, whereas TEDCOR was obliged to support the entrepreneur financially and take care of formalities with the municipality and other regulatory bodies. Samson's (2004:35) scrutiny of this contractual arrangement suggested that the "status of the 'entrepreneurs' is ambiguous, and could actually be a disguised employment relationship". Although TEDCOR and the municipality claimed the scheme had been a success by performing efficient service delivery and recruiting local labour (*CoCT senior manager 7*), Qotole *et al.* (2001) argued that it failed to bring long-term skills development or job opportunities to the community, and that this community-based delivery model contributed to cementing the highly unequal levels of service delivery in Cape Town. Miraftab (2004) concurred with this analysis, stating that outsourcing in the waste sector paved the way for both service inequalities and the casualisation of labour, particularly through exploiting female labour in low-paid and low-skilled tasks. This, she argued, was legitimised by appealing to gendered images of women as housekeepers and to a rhetoric of volunteerism, where labour-intensive work was either portrayed as job training, not employment, or as community-driven campaigns to clean up their neighbourhoods. TEDCOR's contractual involvement with the CoCT decreased over time. Their initial contract in Khayelitsha, starting in 1997 and covering as many as 50,000 formal and informal households, was terminated in 2006. TEDCOR serviced 14,000 households in other townships from 2000-2007. The company had, at the time of writing, only one contract with CoCT, servicing 13,000 household in an informal settlement in Monwabisi Park in Khayelitsha (see Figure 7.5), in a joint venture called Women in Waste (Pty) Ltd. A senior representative for the company claims that the new leadership of CoCT favoured "big' companies like Wasteman and Millennium Waste" even though she claimed that the community-based schemes were significantly cheaper than the present contractors¹⁰.

With the consolidation of the Unicity, the tender process was gradually standardised and the different practices of the previous municipal authorities were brought under one directorate. The

¹⁰ Email correspondence with TEDCOR's Western Cape project manager 25 and 29 April 2008.

larger private sector actors maintained and increased their share of the contracts. One of these was the above-mentioned Wasteman. The Hlumani Wasteman Group, as it was known in the Western Cape province, had been operating in waste collection since 1980 and on contracts with the CoCT (and previously the Cape Metropolitan Council) since the early 1990s. The company is now partially owned by the French water corporation Suez Lyonnaise, and performs similar functions in the Johannesburg and Durban municipalities, as well as other operations elsewhere in the country. According to one of their senior managers, Wasteman relied on the public sector contracts for about 40 per cent of their turnover in 2007. The profitability of these public-private partnerships, however, had decreased since the “highly rewarding” 1990s, as increased competition had driven profit margins down (*Private sector representative 4*). A Wasteman representative in charge of labour issues argued that their refuse collection service compared favourably to that of CoCT because they linked their labour costs to their performance:

Our productivity is by far better than the City gets. For the simple reason that our pay structures, our remuneration structure are performance-based incentives, et cetera – makes it for our guy more rewarding to perform better. In the City of Cape Town you will get five grand whether you work hard or whether you don’t work hard. You will still get your five grand. With us it is different. Therefore, in terms of productivity we believe that it’s better. (*Private sector representative 4*)

Moreover, the Wasteman representative claimed that they had an advantage over smaller businesses – such as the TEDCOR ‘entrepreneurs’ – because of the relatively capital-intensive nature of refuse collection:

In terms of national policy from our government, you would find that in some areas their aim is to empower small business. So they might find something for small, black companies that is easy to do. Something that gets a little bit more complicated – where you need more expensive equipment, more specialised equipment – they will possibly still do. But take a

simple example like street sweeping. Anybody that's got a broom can clean streets. So it would be easy to give that to a small company. Whereas if you have something that needs a mechanised machine that costs two and a half million rand, only the big companies would be able to do that. (*Private sector representative 4*)

Wasteman and the other companies experienced increased competition partly as a result of drivers and 'entrepreneurs' paying down the loans on their vehicles, becoming financially independent and subsequently entering the tender process on their own terms. However, the Wasteman representative claimed that these small companies had insufficient capital to withstand the maintenance requirements of these vehicles, and frequently went out of business. Therefore, small-scale private sector involvement in truck-based refuse removal was not sustainable, but rather contributed to a "stuffed market" (*Private sector representative 4*).

The workers working on Wasteman refuse trucks performed a similar job to workers directly employed by CoCT, but for a lower wage and with poorer conditions of service. One of the reasons employment conditions in Wasteman and other private waste management firms were poor compared to municipal workers was related to the *institutional coverage* of these workers. Private waste company employees did not fall under the scope of the South African Local Government Bargaining Council (SALGBC). The SALGBC provided higher minimum wages and better conditions of service for blue-collar workers than most other bargaining councils, a result of years of strong union presence in the sector. In private companies, drivers, loaders and operators fell under the National Bargaining Council for the Road Freight Industry (NBCRFI) in the present jurisdiction, which had significantly lower salary and benefit levels. Other workers in this sector often fell outside the scope of any bargaining council (see Table 7.1). Moreover, these lines of exclusion were gendered, as the semi-skilled layer of workers under the auspices of the NBCRFI almost exclusively consisted of men whereas women were assigned to the lower, unprotected tiers of this hierarchy (Samson 2004; Samson 2004).

Some Wasteman workers still managed to bring home an impressive salary, relatively speaking. These employees amassed

additional hours on top of their full working week through what could only be described as an *institutionalised system of overtime*.

In terms of our bargaining council they can work up to 90 hours a week. However, we all know that if you work 90 hours a week you'll die. They just won't keep up. It is all related to the following. You drive a truck, and at five o'clock you are ten kilometres from your depot. Now our workers ask: What do you do? Do you park the truck there and go home? So they allow for that. [...] Our guys work up to a maximum of 60, maybe 65 hours in some cases.

What would you say the average is?

Probably about 50 odd. [...] Our guys work overtime every day.

(Conversation with Private sector representative 4)

This was confirmed by workers at Wasteman, who claimed that most workers felt that working overtime was necessary to make ends meet. But their financial situation was not the only form of coercion:

“It is part of work at Wasteman. But now they force it on our people. You must work overtime. There is now guys who start 4 o'clock in the morning till 8 o'clock at night.” (*SAMWU shopsteward 3*)

They also pointed out that wages from overtime work neither represented a predictable income for the household nor allowed workers to access loan from banks (*SAMWU shopsteward 2*).

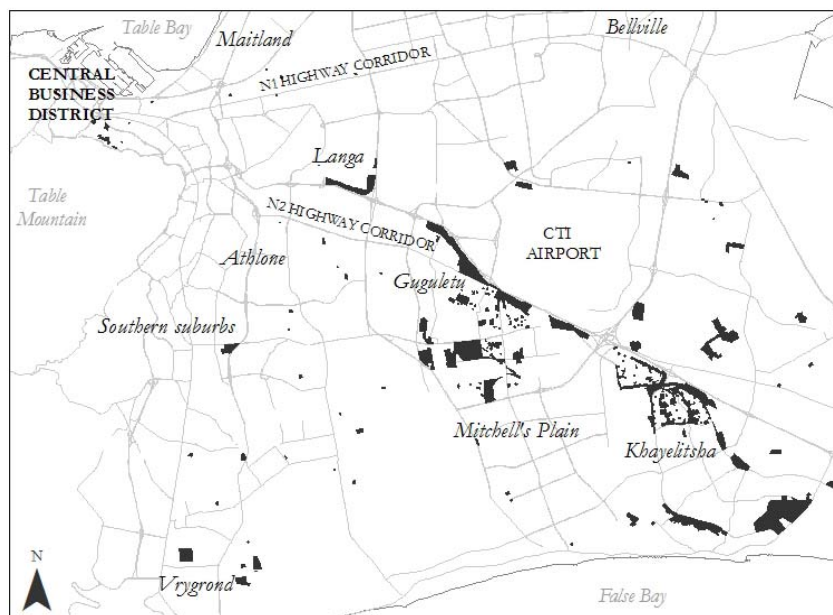
Adding to issues of remuneration were concerns about the occupational health and safety standards at the Wasteman workplace. Worker representatives had raised these issues in union meetings and consequently confronted management. However, they claimed that the employer did not take these issues seriously. Relatedly, there had been many incidents of “swearing” by bosses at Wasteman, which referred to verbal abuse and racism in the workplace (*SAMWU shopsteward 2 and 3*). Although these issues could not be reduced to a matter of outsourcing and private sector involvement, it was clear that the power geometry between

employer and employee at Wasteman was extremely asymmetrical to the detriment of workers' employment conditions.

Outsourcing of service delivery functions, as represented by Wasteman's refuse removal operations, contributed to the downgrading of municipal jobs through externalisation. This sector exploited a labour market whose wage levels were made possible by the vast pool of labour caused by rural-urban immigration. In addition, there was significant inequality within this sector. Performance-driven and highly hierarchical remuneration structures, combined with gendered recruitment practices and extreme levels of unemployment, lead to further exploitation of marginalised groups of workers. Interestingly, a 'hidden third tier' of casualisation was at work in Wasteman, as they used also labour broker agencies to complement their labour requirements. This was justified by a high level of worker absenteeism and the looming threat of sanctions from CoCT if a service was not delivered according to the contract. These workers worked on even lower wages, and were only covered by the Basic Conditions of Employment Act. Some of these were semi-permanent, and worked in the same job for months alongside Wasteman employees but on inferior conditions (see also discussion of Kuilsrivier casual workers in Section 7.2.1). This dynamic of subcontracting – i.e. the establishment of a third-tier employer – will be given an in-depth examination in the following subcase.

7.2.3 Sanitation and subcontracting in informal settlements in Khayelitsha

Capetonians have been living in informal settlements for decades. The unrelenting rural-urban migration of people in search for employment opportunities means that this type of livelihood is likely to remain prominent in the Cape Town urban landscape. At the time of research, close to 20 per cent of the population of Cape Town lived in the approximately 115,000 informal households (shacks) in the city (CoCT 2006). Although informal settlements are spread all over the metropolitan area, the majority of these are located on the Cape Flats along the N2 highway corridor south of the Cape International Airport (see Figure 7.4).

Figure 7.4 *Informal settlements on the Cape Flats*

Source: Adapted from GIS data acquired from CoCT.

The coordination of service delivery in these areas has been fragmented and poorly coordinated. This is in part due to the volatile and shifting character of these settlements, but it also reflects reluctance on the part of municipal authorities to regard this kind of livelihood as anything other than a transition phase (*CoCT senior manager 3*). The 2006-07 IDP claimed that by the end of 2004, 95 per cent of “accessible informal settlements had been provided with emergency free basic services” (*CoCT 2006:4*). Since May 2004, water and sanitation services in informal settlements were coordinated by an autonomous Informal Settlements Unit under the Water and Sanitation directorate. Driven by a small but “fairly motivated” staff (*CoCT senior manager 3*), it nonetheless faced severe budgetary constraints which influenced their choice of service delivery model and their labour regime.

The Informal Settlements Unit came to rely, to a large extent, on casual and externalised labour. At the time of research, the unit had three permanently employed administrative staff, six labour

broker staff in administrative functions, and 18 labour broker staff performing various manual maintenance tasks. These resources were clearly insufficient to deliver services to 115,000 households. As a result, the department also coordinated more than 40 so-called 'community workers' who were cleaning the toilets. These workers were recruited as casual labour. In addition, there were also 10 so-called 'community-based companies'. Each of these employed from 4 to 10 workers who performed janitorial and plumbing services. In these community companies, a chosen supervisor was paid a lump sum to remunerate the other workers (*CoCT senior manager 3*) (see also discussion of 'community workers' in Delft in Section 7.2.1 and of the TEDCOR 'entrepreneurs' in Section 7.2.2).

CoCT's choice of external service providers to collect and clean toilets in informal settlements, which is the main focus of this section, was closely linked to the development of a relatively small-scale manufacturing industry producing sanitation equipment and chemicals in the region. In 2007, Sannitree International in Westlake was one of three companies on a contract with CoCT. Sannitree had been involved with producing sanitary chemicals for informal settlements in Cape Town for 15 years. Gradually, the contracts between the company and local-/provincial government authorities were extended to cover the collection of human waste. Hence, Sannitree was not only producing the sanitary chemicals, but also servicing container toilets and waterless urinals. A Sannitree manager estimated that around 40 per cent of their profits stemmed from contracts with CoCT (*Private sector representative 5*). In 2007, their contract with CoCT had been in effect since 2001, although it was originally formulated as a two-year contract. Due to a lengthy process of auditing and appeals, the 2001 contract was extended several times without being legally legitimate (*Private sector representative 5; CoCT senior management 3 and 10*).

In most informal settlements Sannitree was involved in, the company's own staff complement of 22 workers performed this work. But in Khayelitsha, Cape Town's most populous township, a different arrangement was made, providing this analysis with an interesting example of how the externalisation of municipal functions also involved a range of local micro-sized firms acting as *subcontractors*. The people of Khayelitsha – which roughly number

between 500,000 and 1 million – reside in 36,000 informal and 43,000 formal households (*CoCT depot manager 4*) (see Figure 7.5). Until a restructuring process which started in 2005, the provision of sanitation services and the servicing of toilets in the informal areas was the direct responsibility of the CoCT Water and Sanitation depot in Khayelitsha. However, the depot had ageing trucks and equipment, and experienced a significant downsizing of staff numbers.

Figure 7.5 *Map of Khayelitsha*



Note: Numbers indicate wards (sublocal political-administrative units).

Source: Adapted from GIS data acquired from CoCT.

Consequently, depot management was actively encouraged by central CoCT management to seek other solutions for servicing the informal settlements. Rather than being perceived as a cost-cutting measure – in fact the depot manager estimated that “the contractors are normally more expensive than the in-house” (*CoCT depot manager 4*) – outsourcing was preferred due to staff shortages at the depot. It was also described as a more flexible solution to specific projects and unpredictable repair requirements. Subsequently, the depot manager contacted Sannitree – which at

that point already serviced informal areas on the Cape Flats – to request that their contract with CoCT concerning the servicing of informal settlements elsewhere was extended to cover Khayelitsha. The company was initially not prepared to go into this area, citing the lack of security as their main concern (*CoCT depot manager 4*). The depot then contacted some small local companies that were willing to perform these tasks, but due to CoCT tender requirements these functions could only be outsourced through an existing contract. Finally, Sannitree agreed to act as an intermediary between CoCT and the local subcontractors. This allowed the legal ties between the municipal depot and these small companies to be routed via Sannitree’s above-mentioned illegal 2001 contract.

The link between Sannitree and these local collection companies was loosely coordinated and based on trust (*Private sector manager 5*). In fact, it was not even regulated by a legally binding written contract as Sannitree’s role as an intermediary was intended to only last for a short while. But as red tape and restructuring delayed the tendering process, the company continued to be able to profit by doing little more than receiving money from the local municipal depot to pay the subcontractors. Sannitree oversaw the servicing of 4000 toilets in total, of which 1600 were done through subcontractors in Khayelitsha. The biggest of these was Nombulelu Cleaning Services, based in ward 94 but also covering other areas of Khayelitsha (see Figure 7.5). Nombulelu was a small firm with 10 workers servicing two different kinds of container toilets. Both of these were multi-household container toilets, often referred to as the ‘bucket system’ (see Appendix 3). A CoCT survey in three informal settlements in 2005 found that 71 per cent of households were using the ‘bucket system’, even though 86 per cent of informal settlement dwellers said they found it “unacceptable” to share a toilet with other households due to hygiene standards and exposure to disease (CoCT 2005:57). The head of the Informal Settlements Unit explained that the ‘bucket system’ was another example of a measure perceived to cover a short transitional period that became the standard.

“The problem is that we very naïvely believed that within two years everybody would have a house. Therefore, to spend to spend loads of money on toilets wasn’t an option. And so we came up with the idea of the container toilet as a temporary measure.

[...] But as we can say now in hindsight there is nothing temporary that ever happens, it seems to me.”
(*CoCT senior manager 3*)

This normalisation of temporary measures characterising sanitation services in informal settlements represented a microcosm of the general restructuring process.

Sannitree also used a smaller company, Masiphuthle Construction and Cleansing, commonly referred to as ‘Just-A-Wish’. Just-A-Wish had only 8 part-time employees servicing almost 550 so-called ‘port-a-potties’ in ward 93 (see Figure 7.5). The port-a-potty is a single-household, portable toilet with a detachable, sealed container (see Appendix 3). The manager of Just-A-Wish described them as much preferred by the communities, offering privacy and better control of hygiene issues (*Private sector representative 6*). Still, a Sannitree representative claimed that this subcontractor was “wasting his money” by not switching to the inferior ‘bucket system’, indicating how private sector business principles have a direct impact on hygiene levels in Cape Town.

“It is because he has too many staff. It is expensive for the City. In other words, at a rate per toilet it is four times more expensive than having a unit serving four families. It is obviously quite a good system, but it is not a financially viable for the City. It is very expensive.” (*Private sector representative 5*)

Hence, the subcontracting practice clearly impacted on people as service users, but it certainly also affected people as workers. The employment conditions in these companies were very poor. This reality was vividly portrayed by the IHRG research project which produced detailed documentation and photographic evidence of violations of occupational health and safety standards (see photo pages in Appendix 4) (IHRG 2006). The container toilets often leaked and spilled their contents, thus posing a significant health risk. Protective gear was therefore a very important issue to workers. In the case of Nombulelu, Sannitree provided the subcontractor workers with protective clothes, whereas those who work for Just-A-Wish were supposed to receive protective clothing directly from the Khayelitsha Municipal Depot (*CoCT depot manager 4*; *Private sector representative 5*). However, the workers complained that protective gear was often damaged or lacking (*Casual worker 1*;

IHRG 2006). Much of the work was done late in the evenings or in the middle of the night, and some of these workers were as young as 15 (*Casual worker 1*). These groups of workers were often referred to as the 'night-soil teams'. The work of the night-soil teams was – as it involved handling human waste – heavily stigmatised in township communities (*Private sector representative 5*). In conversation with SAMWU shopstewards and researchers from the IHRG project, CoCT officials conceded that there were no contracts covering the bucket toilet sub-contractors. Rather, they claimed it was governed by a 'gentleman's agreement' from month to month, but future contracts would include health and safety agreements. CoCT claimed that there were monitoring procedures and officials in place, but this was not observed by the researchers. Researchers in the IHRG project suggested that it was likely that the appalling conditions would have been allowed to go unnoticed, unless senior management had been confronted with photographic evidence of gross violations of health and safety standards (IHRG 2007). In conversation with the author, a CoCT official from the Water and Sanitation directorate maintained that they were now aware of these problems and were "attending to that particular issue" (*CoCT senior manager 8*). But blame was again put on the restructuring process, as the responsibilities for service delivery in informal settlements were unresolved and fragmented across different directorates.

Wages in the subcontracting firms were lower and less secure than those of permanent municipal employees. The IHRG project estimated the bucket toilet workers' average hourly wage to be 9.37 rands. The Just-A-Wish manager stated that his workers got 130 rands a day. Working two short shifts a week, this amounted to 1170 rands per month. The manager of Nombulelu Cleaning Services stated that she was paying her workers "good wages", amounting to 3000 rands a month for five shifts a week (*Casual worker 1; Private sector representatives 6 and 7*). Another way in which CoCT's outsourcing practice could be said to directly cause casual labour practices was through the unpredictable and short-term nature of the contracts. Even though their contract had been in effect since 2001, Sannitree expressed great uncertainty over CoCT's long-term commitment. Hence, Sannitree's own contract workers were on temporary contracts, which were justified by referring to the level of worker absenteeism and workforce

turnover (*Private sector representative 5*). The fact that their activities were dependent on the extension of short-term municipal contracts discouraged the company from offering these workers permanent employment. Moreover, a senior manager of Sannitree explained that they had been actively encouraging and instructing their subcontractors to set up temporary contracts with their employees, as they otherwise would risk losing money and face disciplinary hearings in the Council for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration (CCMA). He regarded this as a piece of good advice from a well-established business man to an inexperienced entrepreneur:

“I am trying to save her hassles at the end of the day. Because it is only fair, you know. We have a responsibility, you know, we have been in business for a long time. And we have a moral obligation to assist them when we can, and to uplift them for the country’s best – and to the people.” (*Private sector representative 5*)

When confronted with this practice, the manager of Nombulelu Cleaning Services claimed that these workers were in fact permanent, although she did concede that whether they had a job or not next year solely relied on whether the municipality would offer them a renewed contract (*Private sector representative 7*). Thus it is clear that CoCT’s practice of offering short-term contracts to a rotating list of bidders actually works as an incentive to increase the job insecurity of externalised municipal labour.

Subcontracting also complicated the relationship between workers and the community, much in the same way that was depicted in the discussion around ‘community workers’ in Delft. Community companies such as Nombulelu and Just-A-Wish are typically established by individual community members with status and leading positions in local civil society structures. As a result of this, these organisations continued to play a strategic role in the decision-making of the subcontractor companies, particularly in relation to labour recruitment and labour control. The owner of Just-A-Wish also stated that the Ward Development Forum was involved in decision-making in relation to job opportunities in the area (*Private sector representative 6*). The owner of Nombulelu Cleaning Services also explained that local branches of the South

African National Civics Organisation (SANCO) – an ANC-aligned umbrella organisation for community organisations – were involved in recruiting workers, and even in staging disciplinary proceedings. When asked whether these workers had a representative forum or a union, she replied that “Workers’ organisation – that is SANCO” (*Private sector representative 7*). But the mandate of these organisational structures was to service the community, and not necessarily to protect the interests of these vulnerable workers. After all, with the desperate need for jobs in Khayelitsha, these workers were seen as relatively privileged. The priorities of these community organisations were therefore very much focused on distributing these jobs to local residents and dealing with service delivery complaints. The extensive involvement of civil society structures in different aspects of workplace and employment issues highlight one of the critical insights emerging from the findings presented in this chapter, namely that the labour practices accompanying neoliberal restructuring complicate the relations between union members and the social networks they are embedded in.

7.3 The contradictory relationship between unions and the community

In line with one of the general themes of this thesis, the assessment of the social impacts of restructuring requires a fuller understanding of the *multiple roles* taken up by different actors in these cases. As argued earlier, municipal workers in Cape Town were not only affected by neoliberalisation directly through their employment conditions. They were also affected in relation to consumption and reproduction issues. Just how closely related their role as service users was to that of the worker was illustrated during a local union meeting of park officers in 2007¹¹. During this meeting, complaints were made by several shopstewards representing workers who had found that their service arrears had been deducted directly from their municipal pay slip. Not only does this observation show how (even) permanently employed

¹¹ A meeting for the Open Spaces Shopsteward Committee of SAMWU’s Cape Metropolitan branch in early June 2007. The author was invited to this meeting as an observer.

workers in Cape Town experienced difficulties paying their service bills; it also illustrated that their use of these services and their income were intimately bound up – both at the mercy of the municipal authorities. These multiple roles were recognised by all the SAMWU informants in this research, as illustrated by the following statement by a shopsteward in the union:

“Remember, when you leave your workplace you are a part of that community. And our people especially. You get the guys who are fairly well off. But when it comes the normal, average workers, he lives in your Mitchell’s Plain, Gugulethu, Khayelitsha. And especially in these areas there are things like black-outs happening, we’ve got prepaid electricity meters which is currently becoming a big issue.” (*SAMWU shopsteward 1*)

Even if municipal workers often experienced the adverse effects of cost recovery reforms themselves, they paradoxically also represent the local state and are therefore sometimes at the receiving end of complaints about insufficient service delivery levels (ILRIG 2000). This problematic relationship was an important factor in driving SAMWU to embrace a broader, community-oriented political agenda which included a focus on service delivery issues (see Chapter 8).

There were also other dynamics at work which brought the sphere of production together with the sphere of reproduction, thus representing a challenge to organised labour. Community members and local civil society which SAMWU has identified as a critical ally in their fight against neoliberalisation, were at the same time people looking for a source of income even if this indirectly lead to the casualising the municipal labour regime. As was shown in the case of ‘community workers’ in Delft and with the sanitation subcontractors in Khayelitsha (see Sections 7.2.1 and 7.2.3), local organisational structures and individual community members were actively promoting and facilitating casual labour practices to create employment opportunities for people in the neighbourhood. This is an important aspect which is often overlooked in the portrayal of casualisation as an externally imposed process. Theron (2007) labels this an ‘informalisation from below’, which plays a complementary role to the ‘informalisation from above’ driven by

the neoliberal agenda of political decision-makers and private sector interests. In a similar vein, Birchall (2001) sees informalisation as a dual process with a *demand side* – i.e. the formal sector’s attempts to bypass the costs of employing well-protected workers – that is matched by a *supply side* which “occurs because people who used to work for wages in the protected sector have been thrown out of work, or because they have not been able to enter the protected sector in the first place” (Birchall 2001:13).

In Cape Town, community members have indeed played an active role in changing existing labour practices. According to one of the SAMWU organisers, ‘informalisation from below’ sometimes preceded ‘informalisation from above’.

“[T]hose poverty alleviation schemes came about because communities became – and I will use the very nice word *‘gatvol’* – simply meaning they became fed up with the Council not cleaning their streets, not cleaning their townships. So they took it upon themselves to clean the streets, to clean those townships to make it certainly much more healthy to them coming from that particular community. Now what it in turn meant was that the City of Cape Town – as it is constituted now – need not to send in municipal workers to fulfil that function because the communities already fulfilled the function. I mean, why duplicate what the community is already doing, and what the community is doing for free? [...] That is the start of this thing you refer to as a vicious circle. Those community members then approached the City, because they realised that where municipal workers at least came into the township once a week or once a month, now they were not coming in at all. And they became conscious of the fact that they are rendering a service that the municipality is meant to be rendering. They approached the municipality, the municipality then entered into an informal arrangement [...] whereby those community workers doing the work of the municipality will be paid for what I call piecemeal work. [...] Not to say the workers weren’t exploited, because they would be paid something like fifty rand per day only if they would successfully complete the

cleaning of those streets and whether they would do it in the subscribed time period. And naturally that leads to a greater form of exploitation.” (*SAMWU representative 4*)

Not only did the community act as a direct response to unsatisfactory service delivery level, but their intervention allowed CoCT to continue under-investing in the sector. Informalisation from below *practically facilitated* the supply of cheap labour. But, as is evident from the subcases in this chapter, the rhetoric of grassroots initiative also helped *legitimise these practices* by being framed as job creation initiatives, poverty alleviation schemes and community-driven clean-up campaigns by the local state and the private sector (Miraftab 2004; Samson 2004) – rather than focusing on their role in the casualisation of municipal work.

Following from this, both casualisation processes and attempts to reverse these schemes can potentially pit the short-term employment interests of different groups of workers against each other. Therefore, it is perhaps not surprising that just as casual labour practices were opposed by SAMWU and other trade unions, attempts to terminate casual labour schemes were in some cases met with resistance by community members who have a direct interest in the income these jobs offer. Community labour initiatives were also legitimised by claims that municipal workers were lazy and rendered an insufficient service (see also Qotole, Xali et al. 2001), which threatened the potential for alliance-building between workers and community members. For the organisers in SAMWU, this was identified as a real challenge to their recruitment and mobilisation drives:

“There will not be solidarity. It’s one of the things that Council has been using to create conflict between workers and community members. Because immediately after the introduction of these community projects, the community would stand up and say: ‘*Go out, you are not doing proper jobs. We are here, we are staying here. We will do a proper job for here.*’ But what is behind that is not actually whether the work has been done properly. What is there is the fact a person is gonna get bread – something to eat out of twenty rand. As a result our workers have been driven out. But while

these people are working – we deem them as workers – they are not employed, we cannot recruit them, we cannot unionise them.” (*SAMWU representative 3*)

The SAMWU representative who expressed this view had also experienced that these differences between permanent workers and community members had been fuelled by ward councillors.

“You’ve got councillors who stay in the area who go to community meetings and say: ‘The municipal workers’ union, SAMWU, is very selfish because they are fighting for their workers to stay here, they don’t think about you guys, they don’t want you to get opportunities [...] So you should not allow them capitalise on this situation. You should fight them, so you can take control of this through this kind of projects.’ [...] Now that creates some kind of conflict, in the sense that if you attempt a community meeting from SAMWU in an area where the councillor has already addressed workers, if you are not careful you get heckled there. Because before you say what you want to say that proves to the community that: ‘We are not the enemy. This man is the actual enemy.’ But before you are saying that, a lot of people will stand up and say no. (*SAMWU representative 3*)

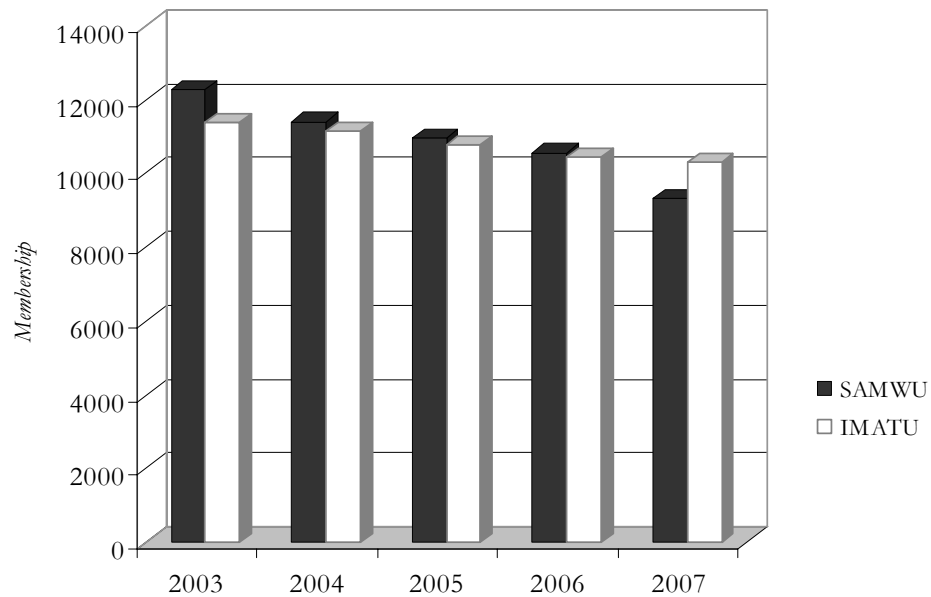
These lines of conflict notwithstanding, it should be stressed that union-community conflicts in Cape Town were relatively rare. Although these casual labour practices highlighted one of the areas where conflicts of interest could arise, in most cases SAMWU members and community groups expressed sympathy for each other’s struggles. While civil society networks in Cape Town often were uncoordinated and fragmented as organisations, the political constituency they represented was impossible for the union to ignore – particularly during a time when their own political foundation was under attack.

7.4 Deunionisation and unilateralism in the restructuring process

The social reality of neoliberal restructuring can be experienced both as a worker in the workplace and as a service user in the community. But in addition to these subject positions that individual workers inhabited, it is also important to assess how neoliberalism affect workers as *political subjects*. Not surprisingly, municipal workers in Cape Town were also taking on the role of the voter during municipal and national elections, with issues of service delivery often dominating the election agenda. As was evident from the political landscape in Figure 6.2, the areas with the highest service delivery backlogs were often also ANC strongholds. This, however, did not mean that the ANC represented an alternative to a neoliberal service delivery model. The impetus to accelerate service delivery in these areas, and the explicit ambition to create business opportunities for black entrepreneurs and new job opportunities, often meant that these policies included a strong element of casualisation, precariousness and cost-cutting as far as labour was concerned.

But the most important form of political mobilisation for municipal workers to express their grievances concerning service delivery and employment remained trade unionism. The changes that occurred in Cape Town certainly did challenge municipal workers' collective strength. There were several reasons for this. Firstly, there was an overall decline in the absolute number of union members. The two trade unions organising the majority of the municipal workforce in Cape Town, SAMWU and the Independent Municipal and Allied Trade Union (IMATU), have both experienced a significant reduction of their membership base since 2003 (see Figure 7.4).

Figure 7.6 *Union membership decline in Cape Town's local government unions*



Source: Email correspondence between SAMWU and CoCT's Collective Bargaining Manager 19 May 2007; and quantitative data acquired from SAMWU and IMATU (2003-2006).

Given the fact that the overall staff size of CoCT dropped from 27,000 to 23,000 in this period, it was not surprising that SAMWU and IMATU lost 2,944 members and 1,080 members, respectively. But IMATU's relatively small loss came on the back of a substantial membership boost from 2000 to 2003, which added almost 2,000 members at the height of the restructuring period (*IMATU representative 1*). The decline of the Cape Metropolitan branch (the 'Metro branch') of SAMWU, on the other hand, which was much sharper, was the continuation of a trend that cut their once powerful membership base of 18,000 workers in the mid-1990s almost in half. Even though SAMWU representatives disputed the 2007 figures it was, at the time of writing, unlikely that the union could maintain its traditional claim as the biggest employee organisation in CoCT. It has become clear that the period of restructuring and staff reductions after 2000 represented

a competitive climate of member recruitment amongst the CoCT workforce, and that SAMWU was on the losing end of this battle.

Secondly, and as a result of the trends depicted above, the power geometry between the two main employee associations in CoCT was reconfigured. This was not without significance, as it had implications for *how* workers and communities were politically represented in local government. SAMWU and IMATU opted for very different approaches to restructuring, both in terms of method and ideology. As is evident from the quotes in Table 7.5, they represented two political cultures which stood in stark contrast to each other.

Table 7.5 *IMATU and SAMWU's contrasting rhetoric*

IMATU representative	SAMWU representatives
<i>On ideology</i>	
<p>"You see, we don't play a social or political role at all."</p> <p>"I am not talking about unemployed people from the community who's looking for employment, it's our policy that we speak from only one perspective and that is in the interest of our members."</p>	<p>"One, IMATU is apolitical. Two, the ideology that we have on neoliberalism and anti-privatisation, they don't necessarily... ..we are far apart."</p> <p>"We believe that privatisation is profit-driven, and we believe that profit should not be made on basic services, considering that 60 per cent of the people of this country is poor [...] So, I don't know if you wanna call that ideological?"</p>
<i>On organisational democracy and mandate</i>	
<p>"I say: 'Look, you can take this decision – we haven't got time – but just think to yourself: will your members generally be happy with this?' And if you can say this to yourself – a small group of people – then you have got your mandate."</p> <p>"We are very much results-driven, we say look at the results and it doesn't matter how it came about."</p>	<p>"It might take slightly longer, but we have those mechanisms in place: the shopstewards on the ground, we got a communicating strategy with our members, we have all of that in place in our organisation."</p> <p>"I am strongly of the view that even though the democratic processes might take slightly longer, we would come out with an absolutely useful result."</p>
<i>On why they oppose privatisation</i>	
<p>"We are obviously against privatisation, and we have got a national policy against privatisation. The so-called privatisation mustn't be to the detriment of our members."</p>	<p>"Why are we against privatisation and outsourcing? Because the poor won't be subsidised. [...] You see, our heart as a union is more on the poor out there."</p>

On casualisation

<p>"You see, our members' interests in fact were not affected, [...] to a certain degree our members' interests were enhanced."</p> <p>"Now, the City's employment policy from outside is of no concern to us as a union."</p>	<p>"We believe, from the union's perspective, while we are fighting for the workers <i>per se</i>, we are fighting for communities as well."</p> <p>"We say: 'An end to casualisation is our campaign. Now let's sit down and deal with it!'"</p>
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On community involvement

<p>"We encourage our members to go to the rate-payers' association, to get involved in local elections – with a different hat. The union will not wear the rate-payer hat. We will only concentrate on the service the City gives our member in his capacity as an employee, not in his capacity as a rate-payer. We do separate those roles."</p>	<p>"[T]o me the critical issue is [...] to what extent we, as unions, see the necessity of forging alliances with community organisations which builds maximum unity"</p>
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Source: Quotes from IMATU representative 1, SAMWU shopsteward 1 and SAMWU representatives 3 and 8, as well as from previous interviews with SAMWU representatives in 2003 (see Lier 2004).

Whereas SAMWU traditionally represented the most outspoken and militant opposition to restructuring, IMATU focused on a so-called service unionism which were aimed at providing the maximum benefits to each individual member within the existing framework (see discussion of types of unionism in Section 2.8). It is unclear to what extent the unions' diverging policy stances affected trends in recruitment. SAMWU shopstewards claimed that IMATU's loan schemes represented a major incentive for workers to switch union affiliation. One of IMATU's regional managers indicated that as many as 6,000 workers had taken up individual loans in the union (*IMATU representative 1*), even though the loan scheme had been temporarily suspended due to legal problems at the time of research. SAMWU, which historically had built its organisational strength upon the ability to politically challenge the municipal authorities through collective action, had been unable to claim many victories during the period of restructuring. Claiming that neoliberal restructuring has been to blame for the overall union decline and SAMWU's reduced political strength is perhaps to simplify matters, but it seems clear that maintaining a militant union culture throughout this process had proven very difficult.

Thirdly, another related worry for the collective strength of organised labour was the fact that the casualisation taking place in municipal workplaces was in itself a threat to unionism. The decline in staff size has to a large extent been offset by hiring non-unionised labour broker staff, and by outsourcing and subcontracting out municipal functions to companies where unions are weak or non-existent. Whereas IMATU only organised CoCT employees, SAMWU had a national congress resolution which called for the recruitment of casual, temporary and externalised workers in the municipal sector (SAMWU 2006). But these externalised workers were much harder to organise due to their fragmentation across space and their precarious employment situation. To complicate matters even more, these workers were legally excluded from existing bargaining arrangements in the local government sector (see Table 7.1). Trade unions were therefore not able to represent them effectively (*SAMWU representative 3*). In short, CoCT's staff reduction did not mean that there were fewer workers dealing with municipal functions in the city. Rather, it meant that these workers cost less and were not under the same legal protection. When this dynamic of deunionisation was raised in a focus group discussion amongst senior managers in the Utility Services directorate, it was cheerfully commented that while the lack of union representation in private waste companies was not the main motivation behind the outsourcing drive – “it was a very good spin-off, though” (*CoCT senior manager 4*).

Fourthly, an increasingly hostile climate between the employer and the unions, and in particular between CoCT and SAMWU's Metro branch, challenged the political strength of organised labour. Again, restructuring was a bone of contention. As a part of CoCT's staff restructuring process, known as the Organisational Realignment process, the employer wanted to enter individual agreements with each municipal employee concerning the possibility of new conditions of service, new job descriptions and potential geographical location (CoCT 2006). CoCT began their engagement with the unions in September 2006, and signed an agreement with IMATU in November 2006. SAMWU, however, refused to accept CoCT's proposal due to fundamental differences on a range of issues, such as organisational structure and placement, conditions of service, pay structures and compensation (SAMWU 2007). According to the regional secretary of the South

African Local Government Bargaining Council (SALGBC), SAMWU's approach was based on the claim that the proposal was detrimental for lower-tier labourers, whereas IMATU were satisfied with the outcome for their members. However, one IMATU leader did in fact concede that if any one group was less fortunate in this process, it would have to be workers on the lowest pay scales. However, he stressed that as this was a voluntary agreement, it still did not make it a bad deal (*IMATU representative 1*). This was an apt example of the way the restructuring process individualised industrial relations. SAMWU's engagement with CoCT on this issue came to a complete standstill, even though they signed a Settlement Agreement in December 2006 outlining a number of steps which would eventually lead to an agreement. The way in which SAMWU engaged with the employer on the basis of these complex relationships will be further discussed in Section 8.5.

7.5 Conclusion

This chapter has tried to unpack the *social reality of neoliberal restructuring* in Cape Town. This provides an important counterpoint to the restructuring narrative presented in Chapter 6 and to the South African model of Developmental Local Government (DLG), which was discussed in Section 4.7. Behind the political imperatives of extending service delivery systems, and initiatives to create local job opportunities and poverty alleviation schemes, Cape Town witnessed a gradual dismantling of a municipal labour regime which in the mid-1990s provided employment and financial security for more than 30,000 workers and their families. What to municipal management represented an externalisation of service delivery functions was to the private sector a new and exciting business opportunity. Private firms were the main beneficiaries of this process. *Labour brokers*, in particular, saw their industry blossom through CoCT's extensive use of temporary staff during the ongoing restructuring phase. Also, an extensive programme of outsourcing, particularly in the waste sector, opened up space for a range of *contractors*, who in many cases chose to further contract-out their functions to a range of *third-party, small-scale subcontractors*.

The business concerns of municipal managers and private firms were often in direct conflict with the concerns of workers. This tension was brilliantly summarised by a manager at Wasteman:

“Maybe what they pay is fair, and what we pay is not. But maybe what they pay is not sustainable. One of the reasons why people are outsourcing is for the simple reason that they cannot afford to do it anymore. At the end of the day, if they buy a vehicle, they pay 1.5 million for it – the same as we do. However, their labour might be four times more expensive than ours, or three times more expensive. It is also a business decision for them, to outsource it.”
(*Private sector representative 4*)

For workers, however, externalisation was experienced as increased social risk. Municipal workers had historically provided security for their social networks, but now the social networks on the Cape Flats were forced to absorb the risk of the casualised, short-term and heavily exploited army of workers in externalised service delivery functions. While the presence of strong unions prevented this shift from being a direct externalisation of municipal workers, it was certainly an externalisation of municipal jobs. This *casualisation through externalisation* took place in a range of ways, with different social outcomes on the ground. Essentially, in line with the discussion of the new geographies of work in Section 2.7, the municipal workforce was *fragmented*. This fragmentation spread workers across different tiers of contractors and subcontractors and, consequently, between a complex network of employers. This shift also entailed that workers were excluded from labour law coverage and bargaining agreements. There was also an internal differentiation of wages which created greater income inequality. Importantly, this led to an intensified exploitation of marginalised groups, such as women and unemployed township dwellers, whose wages were driven down through gendered labour recruitment practices and the intense competition for jobs caused by the extreme unemployment levels on the Cape Flats. Contractual fragmentation and discrimination put further strain on the unity of workers. Furthermore, several of the commercial contracts between CoCT and private firms were insufficient in addressing employment standards, and in some cases were outright illegal. Moreover, contracts were completely

non-existent in the case of some of the subcontractors. The unstable contractual framework functioned as an impetus for contractors and subcontractors to reduce the job security of their workforce. The 'joint and several liability' for the employee, which the Basic Conditions of Employment Act calls for (RSA 1997:82.3), often boiled down to both parties evading this responsibility – or at least failing to monitor employment conditions adequately.

The case of Cape Town showed that outsourcing allowed municipal labour to be further exploited: through an intensification of the labour process, as with the institutionalised system of overtime at Wasteman (see Section 7.2.2); but also through neglect of occupational health and safety standards, which was evident with the night-soil teams in Khayelitsha (see Section 7.2.3). The relationship between health risks and subcontracting was not only confined to the case of the 'bucket system' in Khayelitsha. This was evidenced by the fact that CoCT outsourced the removal of asbestos from the now defunct Athlone Power Station, work that was associated with extreme health risks (*SAMWU shopsteward 9*). While the situation in the externalised parts of the municipal labour regime deteriorated, the lives of CoCT employees have also been affected. Some workers undoubtedly experienced new career opportunities as a result of restructuring but, again, rewarding certain groups of employees came at a price. Labourers on the lowest pay scales were deemed as over-valued by business-oriented managers, and were consequently marginalised in the new labour regime. In addition to wage issues, CoCT staff also felt the effects of the remapping of their workplace, as relocation and increased travel-to-work costs again put the social burden of restructuring onto the workers.

Crucially, new geographies of work in Cape Town lead to *fractured worker and working-class solidarity*, and the threat posed by fragmentation in CoCT extended beyond the workplace. When workers went home after work, they did not only feel the squeeze of cost recovery in relation to their access to municipal services, they also felt that new municipal labour practices placed them in a scramble for jobs where they were pitted against fellow community members whose ability to demand a fair wage was minimal. It has been suggested that public sector labour has a potential ally in citizens whose access to affordable water and electricity are

jeopardised, and that the geographical proximity between the producers (municipal workers) and the users (community members) of municipal services could further encourage such political cooperation (Xali 2005; Lier and Stokke 2006). But while neoliberalisation represented a common enemy in the form of cost recovery policies, neoliberal labour practices placed different groups of workers in very different positions regarding their access to municipal employment. Two workers on the same refuse truck could have had different employment rights and wages for years. Depending on the logo on their jacket, people sweeping the same streets could either have a lifetime employment guarantee or be out of work next week. Workers emptying toilets for the municipality could even work without a jacket or protective boots, which would protect them from the health risks their job represented. Whereas some workers had a strong union which would accompany them to court, others had to rely on the community organisations that employed them to represent them as workers.

In summary, workers and communities faced a momentous task in uniting around a common identity as 'municipal workers'. As a result of this, SAMWU members – whose stance was to prevent these jobs from being casualised – struggled to present their anti-casualisation stance to the community without appearing as a threat to the people who were relying on these jobs. Finally, union members also felt the peril of neoliberal restructuring in their attempts to exert political pressure on the employer. Membership decline and the shift of power from their tradition of social movement unionism towards the service unionism of IMATU can be interpreted as a dismantling of workers' political strength and the individualisation of employment in Cape Town. As the communication channels between SAMWU and the employer continue to be severed, labour remains sidelined in the ongoing restructuring process other than in their capacity as individual employees trying to secure their career at the expense of an overall weakening and fragmentation of municipal labour as a whole. In other words, the industrial relations of CoCT underwent a trend towards *depoliticisation* and *individualisation*. While this chapter has painted a bleak picture of the social impacts on municipal workers, Chapter 8 will serve as an important reminder that even though labour was on the defensive, a political trade union culture like the

one championed by SAMWU's Metro branch did certainly not give up – but rather employed an array of political strategies to engage with and resist these changes.

8 Resisting restructuring: SAMWU's political responses

8.1 Introduction

The two previous chapters have shed light on how neoliberal restructuring has played out in Cape Town on three analytically distinct but practically intertwined levels: the casualisation of the municipal labour regime; commercialisation trends in service delivery; and the individualisation and depoliticisation of employment relations. These processes have, in turn, had deep-seated social impacts on municipal workers in their multiple roles as wagedworkers, service users and members of organised labour. But, true to the spirit of the labour geography tradition outlined in Section 2.4, an in-depth examination of the constraints placed on the lives of workers by new state spaces and geographies of capitalism is incomplete without a proper consideration of the *agency of labour*. Thus, this chapter will focus on the active role played by workers in the restructuring of Cape Town. Following on from my analysis of structural constraints, the following discussion will not be looking at political strategies in isolation. Rather, it allows for a dialectical understanding of proactive workers facing neoliberal state restructuring. In this way, it answers the call for a re-embedding of our understanding of the agency of labour (Castree 2008; Coe and Lier 2008). As workers always face various constraints and levels of coercion, labour agency is best conceptualised in relation to the agency, processes and structures of capital and the state. To rephrase Marx: workers might be shaping the geographies of capitalism, but not necessarily with their own maps.

As was argued in Chapter 2, workers are complex subjects with multiple identities – as citizens, consumers and family members – that go far beyond the workplace. Even within the workplace, their loyalties and identities are riven between their occupational roles, their interests as wage earners and their union affiliation. All these subject positions may lead workers to act as spatial agents, sometimes in contradictory ways. This can sometimes take the form of collective worker agency, e.g. through a political organisation like SAMWU. But labour geography has arguably shown a tendency to conflate worker agency with union agency, thus overlooking individual actions and considerations. In this case, a relevant example in this regard would be the thousands of people from Eastern Cape who have chosen to move to Cape Town in search of employment. Instead of creating a sharp separation between individual/non-political and collective/political agency, this chapter focuses on a case which shows that these binaries are indeed porous. True, a trade union organisation – SAMWU’s Metro branch – is central to the case in question. That being said, this union has been involvement in the politics of municipal services in Cape Town in ways which far transcends the role of organised labour in industrial relations. The politics of the Metro branch represent an attempt at bringing together workplace and service delivery issues, as well as the building of solidarity between the different groups marginalised by these processes.

Following from the discussion in Chapter 7, SAMWU’s Metro branch was faced with a momentous task in challenging neoliberal restructuring and the interrelated processes of commercialisation, casualisation and deunionisation. In very general terms, commercialisation and casualisation was directly threatening the *livelihoods of the workers* they were representing, whereas deunionisation was threatening their *ability to represent* these workers. Casualisation worked on both these levels, however. It was more often than not a direct threat to the workers they were *not* formally representing, and thereby leading to the crisis of representation which was discussed in Section 4.5. Moreover, whereas commercialisation of service delivery was an issue which served as a basis for *bringing together* different constituencies in their fight for basic services, casualisation was potentially a much more *divisive issue* as far as the relations between communities and the union were concerned. The structure of this chapter attempts to

address the union's responses to these challenges. Section 8.2 examines SAMWU's efforts to recruit externalised municipal labour and Section 8.3 discusses the representation of these new members in the workplace and in the political system. In Section 8.4, attention turns to a more well-known part of the union's repertoire, namely their longstanding community involvement and their recent initiative to stop the roll-out of prepaid water meters in the city. The Metro branch was trying to combine these tactics – which transcended sectoral lines and the traditional distinction between workplace and community – with their commitment to represent ten thousand CoCT employees through an immensely complex restructuring process. This nature of this social partnership is discussed in Section 8.5, followed by a closer look at certain key forums and scales of negotiation in Section 8.6. By way of conclusion, *Research Question 3* in Section 4.10 is revisited as Section 8.7 tries to answer through which political strategies organised labour has engaged with and resisted neoliberal restructuring in this particular case.

8.2 Unions and externalised labour: Recognising the need to reach out

When SAMWU stepped up its efforts to recruit workers in the growing number of private companies involved in municipal service delivery, a policy process in the union movement had already been underway for some time. A shift could be detected around 2000 – both in the policy documents of their national union congress COSATU and in the actual strategies of SAMWU's local union branch – from a rather crude stance of opposing privatisation in all its forms to a more hands-on approach to tackling actually existing practices of outsourcing and casualisation. While COSATU 1997 congress resolutions merely contained a warning that “[i]nternational competitiveness and labour flexibility will lead to greater profits for bosses and greater misery for workers, resulting in lower wages, longer hours, job losses, casualisation and sub-contracting” (COSATU 1997:np), a special congress two years later acknowledged the need to deal with this in a more grounded manner:

“Whilst we should not adopt a blanket opposition to privatisation, there is a need to analyse the direction employers both public and private are going, learn lessons from countries where similar strategies have been adopted, and develop a bargaining and campaigning strategy” (COSATU 1999:np).

However the union federation was still weak on actual policies, and their resolution to pursue a “prohibition of labour brokers” and for “COSATU locals to organise and build unity with unemployed workers to counter divisions developing between employed and unemployed” had limited practical-political impact (COSATU 1999:np). Still, in 2000 COSATU called on all their affiliates to “commit to recruitment and unionisation of informal sector and atypical workers as a major part of the recruitment drive” (COSATU 2000:np). In 2007, the provincial organiser of COSATU in the Western Cape explained the ongoing challenges presented by this strategy:

“We certainly want to advocate that unions need to be organising those workers. At the moment we are shying away from them. Because it’s probably a new terrain, and we need to find ways to make sure we are going to be committed to recruit those workers, because it also creates tensions between permanent and casuals” (*COSATU representative 1*).

Until the turn of the millennium, SAMWU had concentrated its efforts on opposing government policies and influencing the new legislative frameworks around employment and local government which were in the making. The union also tried to develop and promote policy alternatives to privatisation, such as so-called public-public partnerships (PUPs) (Pape 2001). The PUP model in South Africa was a labour-initiated response to the spread of public-private partnerships (PPPs) and involved service delivery cooperation between municipalities and other state organisation (e.g. water boards) or tiers of government without any private sector involvement. Despite positive experiences with alliance-building between the state, communities and trade unions, the PUP model never gained momentum in South Africa due to problems over financing and insufficient political support from national government (Pape 2001; Hall, Lethbridge et al. 2005). In

short, outsourcing, privatisation and PPPs remained in favour with municipal managers across the country. In its 6th National Congress, SAMWU resolved to recruit non-COSATU members working in private sector companies and that COSATU-members in these companies should be transferred to SAMWU (SAMWU 2000). This was a clear indication that the union was starting to see privatisation and casualisation not only as a policy to speak out against, but as a dynamic which fundamentally changed the playing field for local government unionism:

“Unions have not paid sufficient attention to dealing with the problem of casualisation, often being more concerned with their core, permanent membership and improving their associated benefits and wages. Ironically this regulatory and organisational gap provides good incentives for employers to reduce particularly their non-wage costs by employing such forms of labour.” (former SAMWU union organiser Rob Rees, cited in Webster 2006:28)

This was not a strategy which SAMWU adopted without qualms. It implied recognition of the fact that SAMWU’s successful approach in the past had led to a wage level which made outsourcing an even more tempting option for employers. For the union to be able to counter this dynamic it had to make outsourcing less profitable, but this could only be done by engaging with the process and pursuing strategies that to some seemed to legitimise public-private partnerships. This dilemma was acknowledged in their 8th National Congress strategy papers:

“We face the contradictory choice that while we are opposed to private sub contracting we may have to be demanding longer term contracts with more established companies from a union sustainability view point. We also face the problem that establishing any greater regulation to prevent the grossest of exploitation is likely to mean seeking to establish labour standards in tendering procedures, or a separate chamber in the SALGBC; if we are lucky.” (SAMWU 2006:30).

By 2006, SAMWU penetration into the private sector was still relatively low nationally, with 1074 members paying union fees in

subcontracted waste companies and 732 members in privatised business units which the union ‘followed into the private sector’ (SAMWU 2006). This represents a small fraction of a total national membership of 118,973¹².

In Cape Town, the Metro branch started recruiting actively in private companies in the years after the Unicity amalgamation. Crucially, if the union was to represent the entire municipal workforce in Cape Town, they would have to organise a diverse set of workers: employees of private firms; so-called ‘entrepreneurs’ which were reliant upon private firms to supply them with capital and equipment; people employed by EPWP schemes on an extremely low salary; and even ‘volunteers’ who were picking up garbage without receiving a wage in the hope of eventually being employed by one of the previous employers (Samson 2004). But for the existing member base – who identified themselves as ‘council workers’ – embracing these new groups of workers was not unproblematic. According to a former trade unionist who participated in the above-mentioned IHRG project together with SAMWU shopstewards, the cautious attitude that the ‘council workers’ showed towards other workers was not unique to the municipal trade unions:

“I think that initially within the country a lot of the reaction from workers was hostility towards subcontracted workers, casual workers – and that organisations and unions that were facing the erosion of permanent jobs were [...] allowing the wave of anger to the threat of casualisation resulting in conflict and stigmatising those workers as being the problem rather than seeing it as an opportunity to organise”
(*External researcher 1*)

According to the SAMWU organiser who dealt with these new members in Cape Town, however, the reason why the union needed time to recognise these workers as potential union members was not fear and hostility. Rather, it was a sense of convenience – until reality caught up with them:

¹² Membership figures according to SAMWU’s own membership figures as at 7 July 2006.

“When those private companies came in our members didn’t see that as a threat to them, to their own employment. They saw it as these workers coming in to assist them in fulfilling their own functions. So naturally it meant now that they need not have to work as hard as had been the case of them being 200 as opposed to 500, you had a supplement of workers coming to assist you.

Almost like a lower tier of labourers?

Exactly. So at some stage with the formal, permanent becoming less and less – at that stage workers began to consciously conclude for themselves: *‘We are actually being pushed out to make way for these private company workers who earn a salary less than half of what we are earning.’* And it was at that stage that we effectively struggled in order to get those services remunicipalised.”

(Conversation with SAMWU representative 4)

In other words, faced with a metropolitan structure where outsourced services and a flexible labour regime comprised an integral part of the running of the city, the union could no longer solely rely on pre-emptive strikes. In a memo written by an organiser at the Metro branch, conceived as a strategy document for a National Collective Bargaining Workshop in March 2007, SAMWU went as far as admitting that “our very own members are in part to blame for the situation we have today” (SAMWU 2007:2). The same document also acknowledged the dangers of worker fragmentation as discussed previously in this thesis:

“[The] two main reasons for the establishment of trade unions have generally been; the building of unity amongst workers to collectively defend their interest; and preventing workers competing against each other. Assuming we all subscribe to the above, we cannot, and should not, devise policy that favours our members formally employed by municipalities if such policies are against [our] members employed by private companies” (SAMWU 2007:1).

Hence, in principle, the union was recognising the need to recruit externalised labour. This acknowledgment paved the way for concerted efforts to translate ideas into practice at a local scale.

8.3 Organising private firm workers

By 2006, SAMWU had established a presence in at least seven private companies in different service sectors and one of the four union organisers in the Metro branch was assigned to recruit in non-CoCT workplaces. (see Table 8.1).

Table 8.1 *SAMWU recruitment in private companies*

Name of employer	Type of company	Estimated membership 2005-06
ACE Parking Services	<i>Parking services</i>	N/A
Firstex Engineering Holdings	<i>Asbestos removal</i>	N/A
Interwaste	<i>Refuse removal</i>	N/A
Masibambane Recruitment	<i>Labour broker</i>	170-230
Minizu Waste Management	<i>Refuse removal</i>	35-50
TMT Services & Suppliers	<i>Traffic management</i>	7-13
Wasteman Group (Pty) Ltd	<i>Refuse removal</i>	130-170

Source: Membership figures acquired from SAMWU.

One of their more successful recruitment drives was the unionisation of Wasteman (see also Section 7.2.2). Other attempts to build union organisation at Wasteman workplaces in the past had only been partially successful. The South African Transport and Allied Workers' Union (SATAWU) was involved in the late 1990s, but retrenchments following an illegal strike effectively curbed the union. Following this experience, an independent union attempted to organise the workforce, but soon found itself in the untenable situation of having their general secretary not only leading the union but simultaneously functioning as a *de facto* labour broker for the company (*SAMWU shopstewards 2 and 3*). These unsatisfactory experiences with previous unions paved the

way for SAMWU's subsequent involvement. At the time of research, this was the only private employer with which SAMWU could claim majority representation in the Cape Town area. Wasteman employs around 500 workers, and out of this workforce total SAMWU's official statistics had 165 workers registered as members at the beginning of 2006. The following year, SAMWU shopstewards claimed that "more than 300 people" were SAMWU members (*SAMWU shopstewards 3*). The human resources manager, representing the employer, even estimated that the union had "probably about 90 per cent" representation in the company (*Private sector representative 4*).

Despite a massive presence in terms of paid-up membership, SAMWU has faced some fundamental difficulties in representing these workers effectively. One of the main reasons for the poor working conditions and salary levels at Wasteman related to institutional coverage: whereas CoCT employees were covered by the South African Local Government Bargaining Council (SALGBC), Wasteman employees fell under the auspices of the National Bargaining Council for the Road Freight Industry (NBCRFI). According to the regional secretary of SALGBC, the NBCRFI had set a "minimum wage that is really the minimum, minimum wage" and did not have collective bargaining around wage issues (*SALGBC representative 1*). Institutional coverage did not only affect the wage levels of these workers – hence creating an impetus for municipal managers to tap into this pool of cheap labour – it also prevented SAMWU from doing their job. This paralysis was very frustrating to the workers at Wasteman and their representatives:

"We are not under the same bargaining council as the council workers. That is a big problem. [...] Whatever we decide as workers, if we come to an illegal strike or whatever we are doing, they will say that the five unions on the [National] Bargaining [Council for the] Road Freight [Industry], they will decide. We can do nothing. So from our workers' side, we have no representatives sitting on that board. Nobody come back to us. [...] We just must accept that is what they decide" (*SAMWU shopsteward 2*).

While SAMWU was one of three parties in SALGBC, together with IMATU and the employer organisation (the South African Local Government Association (SALGA)), they were not represented in the NBCRFI. This meant that the union was not allowed to negotiate wages and conditions of service with Wasteman. They were, however, allowed to deduct union fees, organise union meetings and elect shopstewards. SAMWU had two shopstewards at Wasteman, held meetings with management representatives, and had regular workplace meetings with the workers early in the mornings before work commenced (see Appendix 2). But because of the issue of institutional coverage in sector, negotiations between the employer and the union were mainly restricted to occupational health and safety issues.

SAMWU was of the opinion that as their members performed municipal services, albeit through a contractor, they should be covered by the local government bargaining council. Judicially, what differentiated the institutional coverage of these two groups of workers – who performed seemingly similar tasks – was how the status of their employer matched the scope of the SALGBC, as specified in their constitution. This all seem to hinge on the definition of a *local government undertaking*, being “the undertaking in which the employer and employees are associated for the institution, continuance *and* finalisation of any act, scheme or activity normally undertaken by a municipality” (SALGBC 2001:np, emphasis added). The word ‘and’ was significant, as private waste companies only performed *part* of the service delivery function, as opposed to the function in its *entirety*. Consequently, they were deemed outside the scope of the SALGBC. According to the Wasteman representative, the scope of the NBCRFI encompassed “the transportation of goods” which, in his opinion, better described the operations of the private waste companies (*Private sector representative 4*). Claiming that this was inappropriate amidst a reality of widespread outsourcing of local government services, SAMWU wanted to use Wasteman as a test case. In 2007, they were in the process of launching a demarcation dispute in accordance with Section 62 of the 1995 LRA (RSA 1995), which would change the wording of the ‘local government undertaking’ definition from ‘and’ to ‘or’. This would imply that SALGBC should extend its jurisdiction to encompass subcontracted functions, in addition to municipal service units in

their entirety. This was a complex and time-consuming process which involves other institutions and political scales than that of the Cape Town Metropolitan area, such as the Department of Labour and the CCMA. The union was also in a similar dispute with the utilities companies in Johannesburg which, at the time of research, remained unsettled.

The SAMWU members at Wasteman were well aware of these ongoing fights, but had little room for participating actively in this struggle. Rather, they were watching a slow, bureaucratic process with growing frustration (*SAMWU shopstewards 2 and 3*). A victory in the case of Wasteman would be a significant step in SAMWU's fight against the commercialisation and casualisation of municipal services. It would also send a strong signal in terms of what was defined as a public responsibility in South African society (*SAMWU representative 7*). If institutional coverage was to be extended to these workers, it would also facilitate a change in the union's approach from being to a narrow *public sector union* to becoming a broad-based *public services union* (Foster and Scott 1998). However, this process faced a lengthy process in the Department of Labour (*SAMWU representative 4*), and the representative from Wasteman expressed little concern that a change in institutional coverage would actually come to fruition. The idea that refuse removal was a function which was "normally undertaken by a municipality" was also flawed, according to the Wasteman representative, as this could also be used to argue that every function that municipalities had been involved in at any given point in the past should fall under the auspices of SALGBC. If, on the contrary, the formal political system would defy his expectations and force Wasteman employees under the SALGBC agreements, he foresaw an end to Wasteman's involvement in municipal functions due to lack of profitability (*Private sector representative 4*).

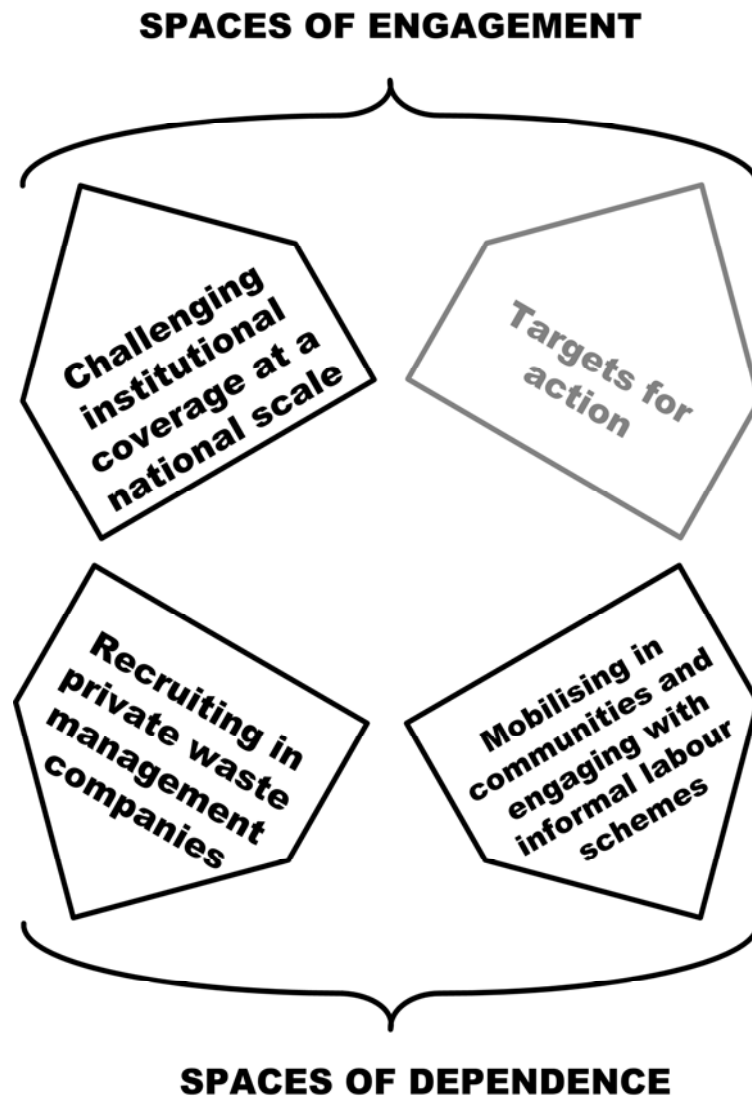
SAMWU's organising efforts in externalised municipal services did not end with Wasteman. The union also managed to unionise workers employed by the labour broker company Masibambane Recruitment (see also Section 7.2.1). By April 2006, 176 workers of Masibambane were SAMWU members. Labour broker companies posed a difficult challenge for unions, however, as they employed workers in various workplaces across the metropolitan area, often for short periods of time. This made it difficult to recruit members

and to keep them in the union for long. Also, most of Masibambane's members were working in the private sector and not for CoCT (*Private sector representative 1*). As SAMWU were organising municipal workplaces, they would – even with considerable success in their recruitment drives – never get more than half of the Masibambane workforce on the membership lists. In other words, the nature of the labour broker industry was a real obstacle for achieving majority representation in the company.

Another area which was shockingly lacking in organisation rights, employment conditions and union presence was the third-party subcontractors, such as the community-based sanitation companies discussed in Section 7.2.3. But this was not to say that SAMWU had not made any efforts in this sector. In March 2007, workers in one of the smallest of these subcontractors, Just-A-Wish, contacted the office bearers at the Metro branch to ask for assistance. Subsequently, the branch chairman contacted a worker representative in this company and union representatives also visited their workplace to observe employment conditions and to collect photographic evidence. After this, a meeting was set up between union representatives and the manager of Just-A-Wish. Here, certain demands were presented with a particular emphasis on protective clothing and wages. The workers at Just-A-Wish also signed up with the union, although this initial interest never actually led to them becoming SAMWU members. A few weeks later, the union was urged by the workers themselves to “drop down the issue”, as the workers had been offered protective gear and a pay rise in return for not organising (*Casual worker 1*). Interestingly, the worker representative was also offered a significant individual wage increase in turn for a promise not to join the union. In the end, these limited concessions – combined with fear of employer intimidation – kept the workers at Just-A-Wish from joining the union. Still, this episode illustrated how an employer proved more willing to meet workers demands when faced with the prospect of unionisation (*Casual worker 1; SAMWU representative 8*). The worker representative at Just-A-Wish expressed frustration about the union's inability to represent them effectively. SAMWU, on their part, found it even more difficult to represent workers in these third-party subcontracting companies – where contracts and tender documents were non-existent – than was the case in larger firms like Wasteman (*SAMWU representatives*

4 and 8). SAMWU had not had a similar involvement in Nombulelu Cleaning Services, the other subcontractor that Sannitree used in Khayelitsha. Neither had the union confronted Sannitree directly on this issue.

One of the main motivations behind SAMWU's drive towards externalised labour was to expand its domain of political mobilisation and identify new sources of recruitment, which corresponds with the idea of the new geographies of community-oriented unionism as discussed in Section 2.8. In short, neoliberal reforms had forced the trade union to solidify and intensify its spaces of dependence (Cox 1998). As illustrated in Figure 8.1, which is an adaption of Figure 2.3, the union could perhaps be said to have been less successful in establishing spaces of engagement through this strategy. Industrial action at Wasteman or in other private employers seemed unlikely at the time of research – hence no identifiable *targets for action* in Figure 8.1 – and the most tangible attempt to engage political authorities on issues of externalised labour was SAMWU's (still unresolved) legal challenge to bring private firm workers into the local government bargaining council, SALGBC.

Figure 8.1 *Organising strategies against casualisation in municipal work*

Notwithstanding the Metro branch efforts to establish itself in the private sector, SAMWU's presence in the waste and labour broker sectors remained relatively insignificant. Their overall private firm membership accounted for less than 5 per cent of their membership. Also, the general unionisation rate was generally low in the externalized municipal services. In other words, if SAMWU

was to undermine the rationale for outsourcing municipal services by effectively raising the conditions of these workers, they still had a long way to go.

8.4 Community-oriented campaigns on service delivery issues

In contrast to their rival union IMATU, which was narrowly concerned with the employment aspects of restructuring, SAMWU argued that it was impossible to separate these concerns from the commercialisation of basic services. A telling example of SAMWU members' engagement in service delivery issues was the fact that municipal workers in both Johannesburg and Cape Town had been reported to use their work expertise to illegally reconnect households which had been cut off from their water supply due to payment difficulties (Xali 2005). This section will focus on the attempts by SAMWU's Metro branch in Cape Town to pursue a wider community-oriented union strategy around these issues, in particular the establishment of the Cape Town Anti-Privatisation Forum at the turn of the millennium and their more recent participation in the campaign against the introduction of prepaid water meters.

SAMWU had set up an anti-privatisation campaign nationally by the late 1990s and even appointed a campaign organiser to mobilise against local government privatisation. Also, the union's national congress in 2000 explicitly called for anti-privatisation forums to be set up (SAMWU 2000). The proposed restructuring plans in Cape Town and Johannesburg – the Unicity Commission's report and the *iGoli 2002* plan, respectively – triggered a determined, joint effort from SAMWU and community groups to stop the neoliberal project they saw disguised in these plans. Initially known as the Local Government Transformation Forum, the Cape Town Anti-Privatisation Forum (APF) was a network of community groupings, NGOs, activists and trade unions that tried to unite popular opposition to the privatisation and commercialisation of service delivery. The APF emerged as a direct response to the Unicity Commission. At this point in time CoCT was in the process of implementing policies flowing from the recommendations of the Unicity Commission. SAMWU's

Metro branch saw an opportunity in this process, which allegedly had a 'participatory' element, to bring in a broad front of community organisations who opposed the commercialisation and privatisation of municipal service delivery. Since 2000, nearly 40 organisations of varying size and form have been involved in some way in the APF, but the participant base has been very unstable. The forum provided a regular meeting space for grassroots organisations and stimulated social movement activity in Cape Town, with the most highly profiled of these movements being the Western Cape Anti-Eviction Campaign (AEC) – a network of the various 'anti-eviction committees' that had sprung up across the Cape Town area (see also Section 4.8).

SAMWU's anti-privatisation initiative could be seen as an attempt to rebuild the social movement unionism tradition in a post-apartheid context. Political cooperation between SAMWU and social movements was hoped to be beneficial for both parties: on the one hand, the union would be allowed to build stronger links with the different communities affected by service delivery issues; the social movements, on the other hand, would be able to receive much needed organisational support through the union's resources. Ironically, the Anti-Privatisation Forum in Johannesburg – which was more successful in building substantial popular backing – in fact became so politically powerful and militant that the local SAMWU branch chose to withdraw from what it perceived as a political threat to the ANC. In Cape Town, the Metro branch retained its involvement in the APF until 2005, when union representatives finally decided to prioritise other civil society forums in their alliance-building efforts.

However, research conducted by the author on the political dynamics of this forum (see Lier 2004; Lier and Stokke 2006; Lier 2007), suggests that the way the APF was challenged in this bridge-building exercise offered some interesting insights with relevance to the discussions on community-oriented unionism in Section 2.8. As a post-apartheid attempt to build a broad social movement based on working class unity, the APF faced certain *structural constraints* in a changing moral economy. Post-apartheid South Africa was experiencing an income inequality as unfair as ever before, and substantial parts of the working class failed to see real improvement in their living standards and social security. In this context, new prospects of individual upward mobility, career paths

for unionists and resistance leadership and an increasingly fragmented labour market certainly challenged class solidarity. Related to this, SAMWU trouble in mobilising a popular political front can also be attributed to the *national-political landscape* and ANC's hegemonic position in civil society. Even though the APF was conceived as a targeted mobilisation against privatisation of public services it gradually took on a broader leftwing profile. The APF was seen by sections of the political elite as a revolutionary vanguard which was aiming at establishing a workers' party to challenge the ANC government from the Left (Lier 2007). As in Johannesburg, this political stance became increasingly untenable for SAMWU, whose allegiance to the party in power prevented it from taking on a more active role in the APF. In other words, political unionism at a local scale was contingent on the political configurations of the nation-state.

But the case of the APF was also clear evidence that local forms of social movement unionism opened up some dilemmas concerning *organisational democracy and political legitimacy* on the ground. Cooperation between trade unions and civil society actors in Cape Town was as much about encompassing different organisational forms and tactics as it was about reconciling political positions. As a network between local organisations, the APF had to bridge very different organisational cultures ranging from the formal bureaucracy of SAMWU (with a paid-up membership, congress resolutions and written mandates), via the informal networks of the AEC (whose mandate often came from open community meetings), to the agendas of individual activists, sympathisers and NGOs. This diversity by no means ruled out cooperation but it did raise some questions about politics, methods and organisation, such as: Who represented who? How did these groups work together? And, how were they to challenge the system?

Many of these lines of conflict were also evident in the APF's *attempts to scale up social movement unionism* through participating in national initiatives such as the Social Movement Indaba (SMI). The SMI was initially a breakaway fraction of the civil society forum that took place during the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg in 2002. The intention behind the SMI was to bring together the multitude of social movements and progressive NGOs around the country to offer mutual support and strengthen their collective political firepower. In turn, several

attempts were made to create national coordination and meeting structures. Delegates from the APF and the AEC in Cape Town have attended some of their meetings. But as was the case with coalition-building initiatives at the metropolitan scale, this national forum faced severe divisions which arose from questions around funding, leadership and the power geometry between community organisations, trade unions and non-governmental organisations (Lier 2007). While this forum was viewed by some participating activists as a conscious attempt at up-scaling, Staeheli (2008:36) has a point when she says that this “networked sense of community” is often more real in the academic mind than in the struggles on the ground. In fact, many of the participating organisations probably saw the SMI meetings more as an opportunity to access some short-term benefits for their local struggles – rather than building a national movement.

Even though the APF initiative came to figure lower down on SAMWU’s agenda, this did not mean that the union had given up on their community-orientation. In part based on the realisation that the APF had been “trying to be too much and to do too much for everybody” (*Community activist 1*), the Metro branch sought to establish viable alliances of workers and poor which were rooted firmly in place-specific and case-specific struggles directly addressing the livelihoods of those involved. This narrow focus was perhaps the opposite of what protagonists of the social movement unionism approach have labelled a move from *tactical* to *strategic* civil society cooperation (Munck 2002) or, alternatively, from *instrumental* to *transformative* identities (Lipsig-Mumme 2003). Still, given the hegemony of the ANC in South African society, direct action around particular issues might prove less controversial in political terms and hence more effective than broad-based oppositional coalitions. One such issue that the union actively tried to encourage joint mobilisation around was the fight against the introduction of prepaid water meters in various poor communities across the Cape Metropolitan Area. Prepaid water meters were seen as an instrument of cost recovery (see Section 6.5). In the view of senior management in CoCT, strict cost recovery mechanisms were necessary to combat a ‘culture of non-payment’ and to secure the financial viability of these services. In SAMWU’s opinion, cost recovery was a way of forcing poor and unemployed people to pay market prices, when what was needed

was rather a redistributive system of cross-subsidisation. Prepaid water meters and the more recent Water Management Devices were also seen as a health risk, as adequate hygiene levels and fire safety depended on access to water.

The campaign, interchangeably known as the *Anti-Prepaid Water Meters Campaign* and the *Water for All Campaign* (WFAC), was fronted by COSATU's Western Cape provincial office, but was also marked by an active involvement of SAMWU office bearers. Unionists in the SAMWU office were not the only ones mobilising around these issues, however, and the campaign was driven by a committee consisting of activists from different organisations. Marches, petitions and several public meetings made sure that this aspect of CoCT's service delivery regime has been put on the agenda (see Appendix 5). The WFAC initiative was interesting in that it brought SAMWU together with representatives from the APF and other opposition groups. But at the same time, representatives from the South African Communist Party (SACP), local branches of the South African National Civics Organisation (SANCO), and officials from the National Union of Metalworkers South Africa (NUMSA) had been present in their committee meetings. In other words it bridged – on paper, at least – the above-mentioned ANC divide in civil society. Interestingly, a march took place in the city centre in May 2007, organised by the ANC, which explicitly addressed prepaid water meters. To many activists, this represented a paradox as ANC politicians in the past had been responsible for rolling out these water meters. NUMSA's involvement in these campaigns was also interesting. Not only did it signal the commitment to this cause by another big union with strong activist credentials, but NUMSA also happened to organise workers in manufacturing plants where the water meters were manufactured and assembled. The case of the WFAC can also be seen in relation to the discussion community-oriented union geographies in Section 2.8. It directly dealt with the use of and access to a basic service, and by bringing together actors from both sides of a divided civil society it certainly made sense to conceptualise this strategy as opening up to different *domains of mobilisation*. In other words, it allowed the union to reach beyond their traditional constituency of permanent CoCT employees.

But perhaps more significant was the fact that the prepaid water meter campaign evoked the notion of new *targets for action*. As the

campaign brought together community groups, a municipal workers' union and a union in the manufacturing sector, it identified two different targets for action against prepaid meters. One potential target for action that was identified was the *point of production*. In other words, the campaign could put pressure on the producers of prepaid water meters to effectively make sure that these devices did not see the light of day. However, even though strike power was a real potential, NUMSA expressed reluctance to use their industrial muscle on this issue (*NUMSA representative 3*). This research did indeed find evidence that NUMSA shopstewards had met with managers at a manufacturing plant in Atlantis (north of Cape Town) to enforce an oral agreement ensuring that this kind of water meter would not go into production (*NUMSA representative 1 and 2*). Both SAMWU and NUMSA were committed to stop these meters from being installed, but the links between these unions and community organisations remained uncoordinated and fragmented. Complicating matters further were the political differences between NUMSA and SAMWU, for example around the issue of extending this campaign to concern *prepaid electricity meters*. Opposition to electricity meters was much more controversial within the union movement, not only because it was already rolled out extensively across the country, but also because many jobs in the manufacturing sector depended on this production. SAMWU had tried to champion this issue at a COSATU congress but resistance from other affiliates, in particular NUMSA, forced the union to put this issue to rest. Since then, nothing has been done to pursue this strategy (*NUMSA representative 3*). NUMSA and SAMWU also had some unresolved tension relating to their positions on REDs and the transfer of electricity distribution away from local government authority. This was another issue which had potentially great ramifications with regards to the job security, wage level and union affiliation of the workers in the electricity sector. Consequently, it represented an obstacle to unity within the WFAC alliance (*SAMWU representative 8; NUMSA representative 3*).

The other target for action was the *point of regulation*. In other words, the campaign could direct its ammunition at the political authorities. After all, politicians had taken the decision to use these controversial devices and senior municipal managers were in charge of implementing them. This strategy has in fact been fairly

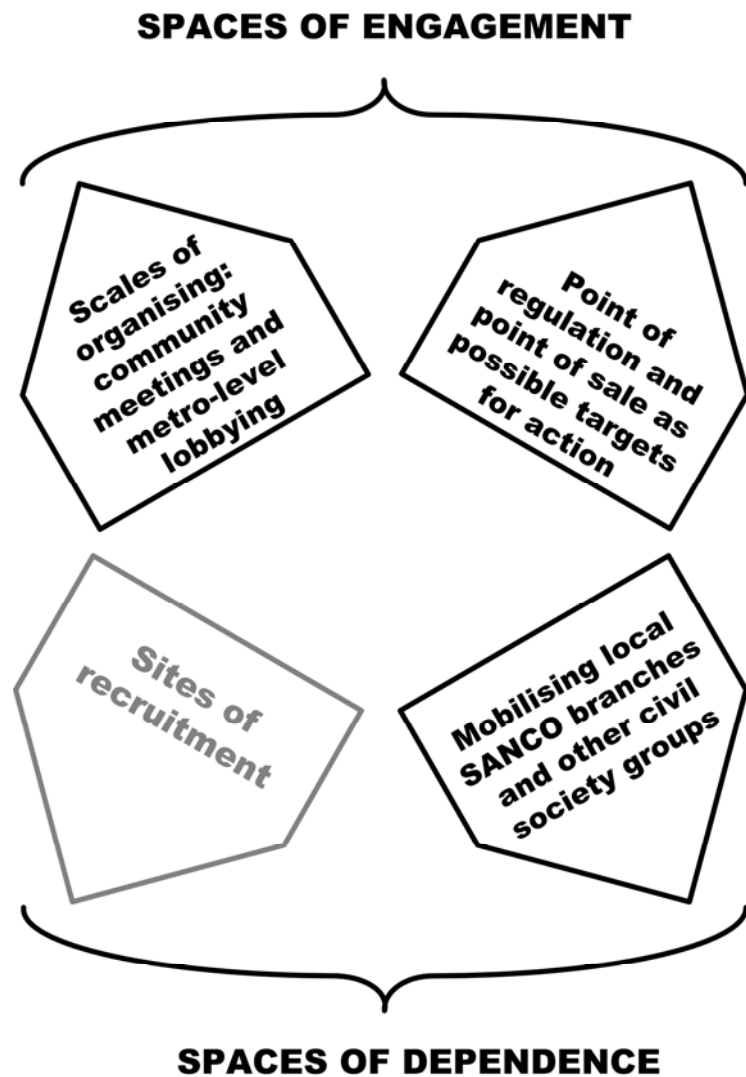
successful in the Cape Town case. SAMWU organised workers in local government, and they could potentially use strike action as a way of putting pressure directly on their employers. Even if SAMWU (like NUMSA) expressed reservations about engaging in industrial action on prepaid meter issues, the political experience and contacts that came with organising in the municipal sector meant that SAMWU was a key asset to the campaign. It should be noted, at this point, that there was a strong sense amongst CoCT senior management that SAMWU did not have a mandate to negotiate, or even be consulted on, service delivery issues (*CoCT senior manager 2 and 4*). Still, the campaign did not only engage CoCT through meetings between union representatives and senior management. The most successful strategy proved in fact to be a mobilisation of communities, notably through the local SANCO structures and meetings in community halls. At one of these, with both the city Mayor and media present, the campaign presented the community and the authorities with evidence that prepaid water meters were being rolled out, contrary to the Mayor's assurances to the community. Consequently, they received a commitment by the highest political authority in the city that these devices would not be rolled out whilst she was in office (*SAMWU representative 8; Community activist 1*). The events of this crucial meeting were later described by the chairperson of the Metro branch:

She was extremely red-faced. And it's then when she said, I think it was in the heat of the moment, she said: '*This has happened behind our back*'. She had not signed that report, she had not allowed any of those things. As far as she was concerned, and as far as she is Mayor, this will go no further, and she will stop it with immediate effect. Done! [N]ext morning it was all over the news. And because she had committed herself and that it was now in the press, I think she now had to continue (*SAMWU representative 8*).

Subsequently, this decision was formalised during the CoCT council meeting on 30 August 2005 (COSATU 2005). While this represented a significant victory for the campaign, a new political administration was in office at the time of research, and this struggle was therefore likely to go on. Nevertheless, it illustrated an interesting combination of tactics on the union's part. Again, it is

helpful to illustrate the socio-spatial strategies represented by SAMWU's involvement in WFAC through adapting Figure 2.3 (see Figure 8.2). While SAMWU's involvement in service delivery campaigning did not involve a direct recruitment of members, the other three movements as described in Figure 2.3 were all explored by local union branch .

Figure 8.2 *Mobilisation against the policies and instruments of cost recovery*



On service delivery issues, SAMWU and WFAC was quite successful in widening their spaces of engagement, although any direct industrial action from organised labour remained a potential – rather than actual – threat to CoCT or the manufacturing plants. The challenges and opportunities represented by combining a community-oriented approach with SAMWU's role in the industrial relations of CoCT will be dealt with more specifically in the following section.

8.5 Negotiating space: Opposing restructuring as a social partner

The Civic Centre is a monumental office building located east of the Central Business District in Cape Town. Stretching across several blocks, it almost appears as a wall in the urban landscape separating the economic heart of the city from the Cape Flats and the suburbs. The Civic Centre is not only a barrier in an architectural sense. As it accommodates most of the central functions of the CoCT, no community group or labour organisation hoping to have a political influence can afford to neglect this bastion of bureaucracy. The Civic Centre is certainly a strong symbol of power in Cape Town and has been an important social arena where community and worker struggles have been played out. So far, this chapter has been a story of SAMWU engaging with other social forces – being brought face to face with different groups of workers and different community constituencies in ways which have created opportunities for solidarity as well as challenges for unity. But while many SAMWU unionists have become experienced community organisers over the years, they have also been forced to engage more actively with the men and women behind office desks in the Civic Centre. This section will focus on the role played by SAMWU's Metro branch in forging a social partnership with senior management and politicians in CoCT. It serves as an illustration of the daunting task of engaging in local state corporatism at a time when the state itself is undergoing fundamental transformation.

Approaching the interactions of a municipal trade union and local government officials from an analytical point of view immediately raises some questions about individual agency versus

institutionalised structures. At one level, this social partnership has been as a series of conversations between a handful of individuals in the union and in CoCT senior management. These people all have a particular vision of how the metropolitan municipality could play a role in the social development of the city. From this point of view, it was evident through the personal reflections offered by the informants in this research that some of these individuals in fact shared many opinions and values around these issues. But on another level, these encounters were neither between individuals nor between their personal values and beliefs. Rather, their communication and meeting activity were the formalised and institutionalised negotiation between social forces; these individuals' roles as industrial relations partners gave them very limited mandates and hence less room for a direct influence on policies. This point is an important one. Consider, for example, the process of casualisation, which SAMWU is principally opposed to. On an individual level, one key senior manager in charge of human resources in CoCT in fact seemed to agree with, and even substantiate, SAMWU's position on the use of casual labour:

“With a casualised job the person doesn't – first of all – get medical aid. So where do they go for their medical aid, or their family? To our local clinic. So we pick up the cost there. It isn't included in [the labour] cost, but we have to pay it. They don't get pensions, so where do they get their pensions? They get it from the state. They don't have a house because they don't have permanency. They cannot go to the bank and get a bond to buy a house, even at a relatively senior level of casualised jobs. [...] So where do they get a house from? Again, they are knocking on our door or they are settling in one of our squatter communities. Again there is a direct cost to government. [...] The hidden cost of outsourced labour is incredibly high on the state” (*CoCT senior manager 9*).

In other words, the person in charge of casualisation wanted to get rid of it. And the irony did not stop there. It was moreover agreed by trade union representatives and CoCT management alike that, as the use of labour broker staff declined and CoCT employed more permanent staff from 2007 and onwards, SAMWU had in fact played a very limited role in accomplishing the reversal of this

trend (*SAMWU representative 6 and 8; CoCT senior manager 1 and 9*). To rephrase, the main opponent to casualisation in the municipal sector had little impact on the actual process of de-casualisation.

Related to this, there were interesting frictions *within* senior municipal management. Managers and politicians who, at any given time, comprised the CoCT municipal authority might have spoken with one voice in their written correspondence with SAMWU or the meetings of the SALGBC. But by closer inspection it became clear that these individuals encompassed a range of (sometimes conflicting) views on neoliberal restructuring, and these topics were taken up in informal talks between union representatives and CoCT managers (*SAMWU representative 8*). As the quote above indicates, some bureaucrats did in fact oppose casual labour practices from a social welfare perspective (*CoCT senior managers 2 and 9*). Other respondents from senior management chose to focus on the short-term business gains that could be drawn from using labour brokers (*CoCT senior managers 1, 4 and 7*). The controversial plans to corporatise the service delivery directorates were also approached quite differently: on the one hand, those directly in charge of delivering services explicitly argued against a social welfare perspective.

My own personal view sitting in the electricity business is that [...] local government is far too intrusive into the electricity business. Corporate HR policies are forcing decisions that should be based, not on corporate views, but on business views.

What kind of HR decisions?

How you can appoint staff? How many can you appoint? Who has the authority to create new posts? If you have a vacancy you need to motivate why you need to fill that post. From a business perspective it is absolutely vital. But now you have to compete with a doctor in Khayelitsha – adjudicated by essentially a group of councillors looking at social interests and not looking at the network. So, you are giving decisions not necessarily aligned to the electricity business.

(Conversation with *CoCT senior manager 1*)

Those in charge of staffing issues and industrial relations, on the other hand, rather focused on the potentially harmful effect on employees. Moreover, they did not have a personal gain from these directorates being corporatised. A manager in the Corporate Services directorate showed sympathy with the reactions from workers and communities in relation to corporatisation of services, emphasising the negative effects such a scheme would have for the building of trust in industrial relations.

It might be a harsh comment I am making, but from my perspective, the concept [of corporatisation] wasn't properly thought through by the government. [...] Maybe ideologically it sounded that economies are bringing all of these together, but the facts were that the salaries they were giving those top people were way over the top. And the workers started looking at this and said: *'That's more than the chief executive of the City gets.'* Their CEO was earning more than the manager of this huge structure of Cape Town. And their support staff was getting, and they had the most expensive offices down.

Yeah, I spoke to [CoCT senior manager 1]. They've got beautiful offices.

Yes, now that is probably prime platinum-grade offices. Now what do you think the workers and the unions said? They said: *'A-ha. These three top people, all in the million-rand salaries, the best offices – we can see where the money is going.'* You know what happens? When they get down to looking after the workers, our members, they are gonna run out of money.'

(Conversation with CoCT senior manager 2)

Overall, the position of the Corporate Services and Supply Chain Management directorates seemed to be that casualisation should be minimised and that constructive industrial relations were necessary for CoCT's long term objectives. In contrast, senior management in the Utility Services directorate preferred a more unilateral approach to industrial relations and restructuring. Divided opinion amongst decision-makers and management were also documented by the MSP project (McDonald and Smith 2002).

SAMWU was aware of these cracks in CoCT's policy stance, and was trying to use this inside knowledge to build constructive relationships with those whom the union regarded as more understanding and willing to cooperate.

Following the above discussion, it is important not to confuse the political visions of these individuals with the actual agency they performed in achieving institutional change. SAMWU's role in the social partnership with the CoCT should not be understood as a straight-forward power play between two social actors and their policy positions, but rather a fundamental challenge for the union to stake out *negotiating space* that would allow the voices of progressive social forces within and beyond the union to take part in the policy-making process. This negotiating space was intensely contested, and the discussion in Section 7.4 relating to deunionisation process suggested that restructuring had arguably reduced this space after 2000. The contestation was in part rhetorical, and several representatives from unions and CoCT management referred to a disagreement on the union's mandate in these talks – often in relation to the words 'consultation' and 'negotiation'.

“The union will always try and negotiate with you. But not everything needs to be negotiated. There's a big difference in negotiation and consultation. And the difference, very simply, is that if I consult with you, I share information with you, I am open with you and tell you what I am going to do, when I am going to do it, what the effect is on you or your workers, and then I move ahead” (*CoCT senior manager 8*).

“I think very fundamentally what shapes the relationship with the trade unions now, is [that] the employer got caught, many times over, in not understanding the difference between consultation and negotiations. That something that is a consultation issue ends up being bargained over in the bargaining council. And what does that do to service delivery? [...] Now you can't do anything and you bargain for the next two years” (*CoCT senior manager 4*).

In other words, while SAMWU was insisting on bringing all different issues from their broad political agenda to the negotiation

table, CoCT did not recognise them as legitimate negotiation partners around service delivery issues. But this tension also extended to in-house, workplace issues such as the Organisational Realignment process, where the leadership of the Metro branch accused CoCT of implementing the staff restructuring plan in a ‘unilateral fashion’.

“In the Placement Agreement that we were wanting to have with the City, it says [...] there needs to be a high worker participation in the consultative process to be able to get a buy-in, ownership, all of this, you see? So the City acknowledges this. But what they say and what they do is different.” (*SAMWU representative 8*)

Overall, the organisational democracy of SAMWU and their organisational culture of social movement unionism met some hurdles in gaining access to a local government authority which seemed to prefer the professionalised business unionism of IMATU. As an employer, CoCT’s approach corresponds closely with the notion of ‘managerialism’ – identified as one of the tenets of NPM reforms as defined by Dibben and Higgins (2004, see Section 3.6) – which clearly entails a change in the power geometry between the employer and the employees. According to CoCT senior managers, the main problem was that SAMWU wanted to reverse the restructuring that *had* taken place, at a time when these changes were long overdue and the public called for an acceleration of the restructuring process.

“SAMWU says: ‘We are a partner in service delivery because our members do the work, so if you want to restructure you partner with us – we decide together how we restructure’. Now, when an employer says: ‘Sorry, that’s not how it works, I run the business, you only have members’, then obviously there’s gonna be a fall-out.” (CoCT senior manager 4)

“Everytime we have tried to talk to them, they put on the table a veto. In other words: ‘Yes, we want to talk to you, but stop everything you are doing, we want to approve your structure, we want to approve your service delivery plan’. Let me tell you one thing, they are not accountable for service delivery here. Who are they accountable to? Nobody voted them in. These

politicians have been voted in through a legitimate, free-and-fair election. And they are accountable through their various parties to the electorate for service delivery. In the management role, it's the City Manager – in terms of the Systems Act and the Structures Act – and [...] managers like ourselves and the directors who are responsible and accountable. Not the union. And therefore we cannot go into consultations with the union where they say: 'We will tell you how to structure your organisation. We will tell you how to deploy your workers'. It's not their expertise. Nor is it their role." (CoCT senior manager 2)

With reference to one of the analytical assumptions of this thesis, namely that municipal workers and the local state inhabit multiple roles in relation to each other, it was clear that CoCT took a very different stance towards SAMWU members according to which hat the union took on. First and foremost, CoCT acknowledged them as employees with certain *individual rights*. Secondly, the employer only allowed their union to play a *limited role in bargaining matters* concerning employment issues. Thirdly, SAMWU was vehemently *denied any mandate* as a legitimate representative on service delivery issues.

8.6 Scales of engagement

The attempts by SAMWU and CoCT leadership to meet, consult and negotiate in particular forums and at particular political scales generated an interesting dynamic throughout the restructuring phase. On several occasions, as will be shown below, this culminated in open confrontations which took union-state interaction out of the offices of the Civic Centre and onto the streets surrounding it. Still, their relationship was first and foremost one of debate and negotiation. The dynamics of the provincial chamber of the SALGBC provided a telling example of the restrained negotiation space in this social partnership. Here, representatives from SAMWU and IMATU met employer representatives as well a number of councillors, meaning that employee and employer representatives met face to face with elected politicians. This space was seen by the Metro branch as an

opportunity to take a broad-based approach towards service delivery issues, occupational health and safety issues and so on (*SAMWU representatives 6 and 8*). However, the union representatives argued that the employer side of this council was pressing for a *depoliticisation of labour relations* in CoCT. For example, CoCT proposed to exempt politicians from participating in committee meetings on the grounds that these committees were only dealing with ‘technical issues’ without interest to the general public. SAMWU, on the other hand, saw this as an attempt to remove important political discussions of service delivery, workplace health and racism from the political sphere and into ‘management’. This disagreement was significant and has relevance not only for the notion of managerialism (as discussed in Section 3.6), but also to the idea of neoliberal governmentality (see Section 3.5.1) – meaning that political processes are reduced to neutral instruments of administration. Bringing complex and un-quantifiable issues into the space of negotiation between the employers and employees were seen as too messy.

Another dynamic that affected the political opportunities of SAMWU as a social partner related to the *scalar configuration of these politics*. Both the Metro branch and the CoCT were organisational parts of national hierarchies with a relatively high level of central coordination. In the case of CoCT, many of most contested local government restructuring issues were also directly linked to, and heavily constrained by, national legislation and directives. Firstly, as discussed in Section 6.1, this pertained to the political party dynamic between the DA and the ANC: whereas the former represents a local political fraction that has been in power for the majority of the post-apartheid era, the latter holds a firm control over national government. Secondly, another national-local dynamic with particular significance for the social partnership in question could be found in the Section 78 process which effectively made outsourcing a local, not a national issue. This meant that what had been an intensely contested issue between national political actors had become an issue to be fought out between the local union branch and the metropolitan authorities, as confirmed by one of SAMWU’s national office bearers.

“What we have discovered is that it is not possible to engage on the principle of privatisation and table that as a demand nationally, because in a way COSATU

have chosen to take a Section 77 note [related to Section 78 of the 2000 Municipal Systems Act], have basically removed it from the realm of mutual interest matters and into the realm of socio-economic matters. So the concept of privatisation as a form of restructuring is out of our hands at that level” (*SAMWU representative 7*).

In addition, evidence suggested that this process had been firmly placed in the realm of ‘consultation’ – rather than ‘negotiation’ – in the case of the RED1 pilot project (see Section 6.5.2). In other cases, even the consultation process had been completely bypassed (*CoCT senior manager 4*). Thirdly, National Treasury and their ‘restructuring grant’ played an active role in controlling staff expenses, and was therefore directly influencing outsourcing and staffing decisions during the restructuring process. All these points meant that SAMWU was not only dealing with CoCT’s direct attempts to close the negotiation space that was accessible to the union, but that this space was also circumscribed by the room for manoeuvre that existed between different tiers of government.

But the scalar dilemmas of the union’s social partnership did not end with the local-national dynamics described above. At the time of research, new sub-local scales of negotiation were being proposed, again as a result of national policy. SAMWU’s national collective bargaining officer saw opportunities in these forums.

“What we can challenge, and what we can challenge locally, is that in terms of the organisational rights it makes provision for what is called a Local Labour Forum” (*SAMWU representative 7*).

These *local labour forums* would facilitate sector-specific negotiations in metropolitan government (*CoCT senior manager 9*). In part, this was an acknowledgment of the different challenges facing the different sectors and parts of the municipal organisation. These forums were advocated by management (*CoCT senior managers 2 and 4*) and representatives from the employers’ association (*SALGA representative 1*) as a way of directing the attention of the negotiations between SAMWU and CoCT towards the issues facing each department, and hence avoiding the stalled process existing at a central level. The willingness expressed by the national office bearer in the quote above notwithstanding. The Metro

branch remained cautious in their approach to these sectoral forums. According to a representative from the employers' association, SALGA, this was due to the fact that the local union organisation was lacking the capacity to effectively take up these struggles in each separate department.

“I think there is a fear from the trade union, that they think they are going to be marginalised if they go into local labour forums” (*SALGA representative 1*).

SAMWU also argued that, as the final municipal structure was yet to be finalised at the time of research, the parties should wait with setting up labour forums until they knew exactly how these were to be demarcated institutionally (*SAMWU representative 8*).

In sum, the perceived ‘unilateral restructuring’ process of CoCT and the difficulties in establishing effective spaces and scales of negotiating created frustration amongst SAMWU members and increased tension between SAMWU and CoCT representatives. This frustration materialised in industrial action through a series of strikes and pickets in 2007 and 2008. Although most of this activity took place at a metropolitan scale, coordinated by the union officials of the Metro branch, it also involved other scales of the union hierarchy. In June 2007, SAMWU’s Metro branch engaged in a sympathy strike during a country-wide wage dispute between the government and public sector unions organising in provincial and national government (local government employees had their own wage framework). However, the Metro branch took this opportunity to also vent their frustration about their stalemate with CoCT management. On 13 June 2007, thousands of municipal workers gathered outside the Civic Centre where their employer representatives were located. Eventually they made their way past the security officers and occupied the ground floor of the building, demanding to meet the Mayor to hand over a memorandum. After hours of occupation, the City Manager eventually met with union leaders in front of the crowd to receive the document which, amongst a message of support for the other public sector workers, contained demands around restructuring issues. SAMWU demanded a stop to the unilateral restructuring process, sharing of information with the trade unions on restructuring issues and a call for metropolitan government to

engage with national government to lift the budgetary constraints encouraging wage caps and casualisation.

CoCT claimed that they had no influence over national government (as had been implicated in SAMWU's demands). They were moreover both embarrassed and angered by this militant show of force, which was described by the manager in charge of CoCT industrial relations as an illegitimate action.

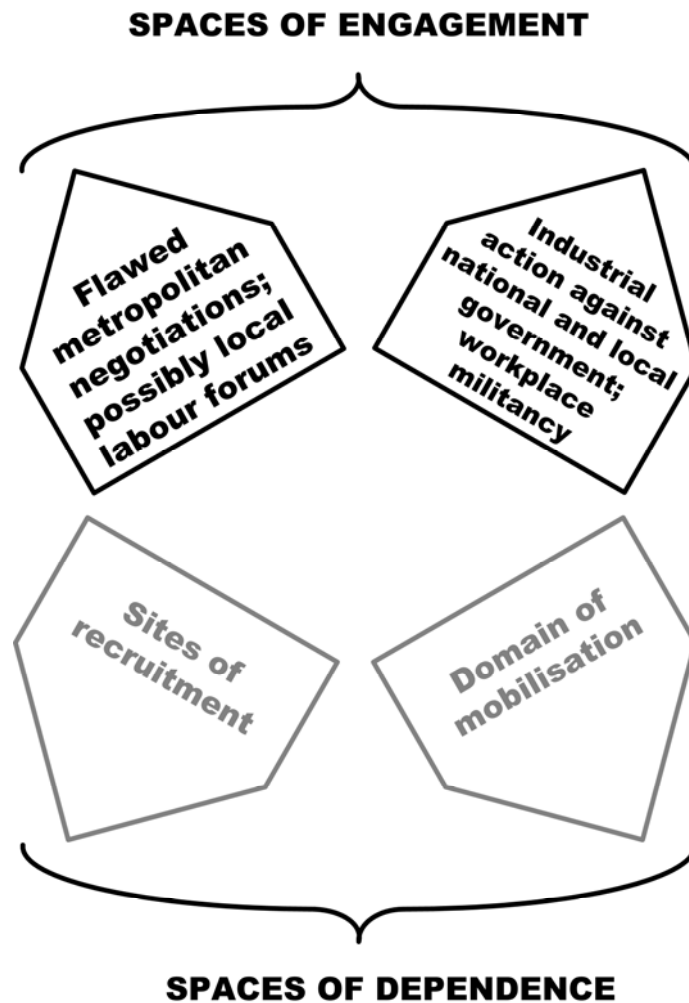
“You can't come and clothe yourself to strike in sympathy and then: *By the way, we are actually striking against you*’. If they want to strike against us they have to follow processes for that.” (CoCT senior manager 2).

This move by the union grabbed local media headlines – for good and for worse – as the Civic Centre occupation was followed by waste workers publically displaying a bucket of human waste and emptying litter bins in the streets of the Central Business District (CBD). An extremely provocative act in the eyes of CoCT authorities and local newspapers (Cape Argus 2007), it was nevertheless a symbolic act by the union members – highlighting their (otherwise) important role in ‘keeping the City clean’, as well as their dirty and potentially dangerous working conditions. Just as these isolated acts were spontaneously done by individual workers, the June 2007 strike was also followed by some local workplace strikes initiated by shopstewards with little coordination from the Metro branch. A new round of city-wide industrial action ensued in January 2008, where a SAMWU march clashed with police in the CBD and where several SAMWU members were shot with rubber bullets (Cox; SAMWU 2008). These acts of union militancy and state brutality did not lead to a breakthrough in negotiations between the union and CoCT, although talks were ongoing in both camps at the time of research.

SAMWU's strategy of establishing a social partnership with CoCT management during a period of intense restructuring of the municipal organisation was very much a fight for the union's space of engagement (McDonald and Smith 2002). The space created by this local form of corporatism was under continuous threat of being depoliticised and narrowed. Consequently, SAMWU employed a mixture of tactics, spanning from militancy to formal negotiations, indicating that there are (literally) many ways to ‘approach the Civic Centre’. Moreover, the scalar configuration of

union-state interaction was extremely complex – in part circumscribed by national directives, in part transformed through new, sublocal forms of interaction such as the local labour forums. Revisiting Figure 2.3 once more, it is apparent that the two upward-pointing arrows are the most relevant in this regard, namely ‘scales of organising’ and ‘targets for action’ (see Figure 8.3).

Figure 8.3 *Contested interactions between SAMWU and CoCT*



Importantly, a trade union such as SAMWU would not be able to exert *any* political leverage in these spaces of engagement without a solid base, in terms of membership and popular support.

Therefore, the limited success that the union did achieve through this social partnership was only possibly through establishing a firm grip on its spaces of dependence, in part through the alternative strategies described above, but more importantly through a political history of workplace unionism in the CoCT organisation. Signing up members in CoCT depots across the city (*sites of recruitment*) and mobilising formally employed employees around workplace issues (*domain of mobilisation*) thereby still represented the cornerstone of SAMWU political organisation.

8.7 Concluding remarks

This chapter aimed to address the third research question in Section 4.10, namely the political strategies through which organised labour has engaged with, and resisted, the neoliberal restructuring of the CoCT. While SAMWU has been unable to control the outcome of local state restructuring, the union has certainly influenced its pace and direction, and this particular case has some insight to offer the discussion on state restructuring in Chapter 3. The fractured social partnership between the Metro branch and CoCT management is a good example of Jessop's notion of the state being a social relation. The local state in Cape Town has been a site which has hosted key struggles around social reproduction. Economic processes, class forces, social actors (and their organisations) and particular political projects have all been constitutive of the political restructuring of the municipality. Again resonating with the Jessop-Brenner perspective, CoCT has actively sought new ways and new scales through which to secure growth and regulate social relations, paving the way for an uneven, customised and multiscalar local state geography. But this unevenness did not arise from the plains of a Fordist welfare society, but rather exploited the opportunities offered by the upheaval of the post-apartheid moment.

Consequently, enduring inequalities and marginalisation have led to contestation from many social actors in the city. While post-apartheid Cape Town has undergone a democratisation process – e.g. through sublocal ward structures and limited efforts by municipal management to consult with communities – popular opposition to a neoliberal state project remains fragmented and localised. The Metro branch of SAMWU is still representing about

10,000 members, possesses considerable political firepower and has identified itself as a potential gravity field for the mobilisation of progressive forces. This ideological and political ambition has forced it to fight several simultaneous struggles. Firstly, it has had to confront an eroding constituency by engaging with its main cause, the casualisation of the municipal labour regime. While it has played a peripheral role on influencing the policies of casualisation within CoCT management, it has had limited success in organising externalised labour which has the potential of reducing the managerial benefits of outsourcing. Secondly, it has attempted to keep the tradition of social movement unionism alive in a post-apartheid context by forging alliances with civil society actors around service delivery issues. This strategy has not only mobilised new groups in society around the union's political agenda, but it has effectively broadened the union's agenda to encompass issues affecting SAMWU members as service users (as well as workers). Thirdly, it has tried to secure its spaces of engagement in the local state through negotiations with the employer and participation in the local government bargaining council. Destabilised by the fundamental transformation represented by the metropolitan restructuring process, this partnership has been extremely contentious since 2000. For SAMWU to be able to exert pressure through these spaces of engagement, their main challenge is to keep these spaces open and resist an ongoing tendency of depoliticisation. Whether new scales of negotiation can offer the union increased leverage, rather than further circumscribe their political opportunity structures, remains to be seen. By going back to the notion of community-oriented unionism as four socio-spatial strategies, as stated in Section 2.8, it has emerged from this chapter that SAMWU's political strategies can be seen as a complex combination of securing spaces of engagement and dependence. On the one hand, the union has been in the process of adapting a new approach to the municipal labour market and regaining its presence in civil society, both of which signal a widening of their spaces of dependence. On the other hand, this has been accompanied by a search for effective scales of organising and targets for action. Having presented the empirical material in Chapters 6 through 8, and taking the analysis of these findings towards some preliminary conclusions, it is now time to summarise and synthesise the theoretical and empirical. This will be the task of Chapter 9.

9 Conclusion

9.1 Introduction

The theoretical discussions of the opening chapters placed this thesis firmly within a *labour geography tradition*. Here, workers were treated as rather abstract and general – as seen through the ways in which labour takes part in shaping the geographies of capitalism. Building on this, the empirical analysis of the case study depicted the *particular labour geographies* forming the working lives of municipal employees and their communities in Cape Town. In this way, the labour geography framework has been adapted to confront something very tangible – workers trying to have a say in the re-shaping of their city. The municipal reforms in the case study have been seen in relation to the general trend of *new geographies of work* discussed in Chapter 2, which challenges job security, worker solidarity and workplace unionism across the world. While they indeed pose a threat to workers in the public sector, these changes are part of broader neoliberal restructuring processes that have fundamentally transformed the states of industrialised Anglo-American economies, as well as those of post-colonial societies like South Africa. Chapter 3 used a state theory perspective to create a more sophisticated analysis by examining some key dynamics behind these *new state spaces*: the assignment of new political roles to local state scales; the unevenness and customisation of the territorial dimension of the neoliberal state; and, finally, the blurring of the public-private divide through allowing the principles and interests of capital accumulation to play a more direct role in neoliberal governance. All these criteria apply to the *post-apartheid reality*. As upheld in Chapter 4, they are closely linked to the concept of crisis, both in relation to the local state and to organised labour. Firstly, a perceived fiscal crisis-in-waiting

legitimised these governance reforms. For local government in South Africa, a newfound autonomy as a separate tier of government, accompanied by new developmental responsibilities, has led to unfunded mandates suggesting a form of 'crisis displacement' for the national political economy. Secondly, for South African trade unions, new geographies of work and new state spaces have together led to a *crisis of representation*. Because the stronghold of the labour movement lies in formal employment, and because it has maintained political alliances with the party in power, trade unions find it increasingly difficult to be relevant to the wider working class – characterised by poor households, casual labour and a growing political opposition in the communities. In the case of Cape Town, the post-apartheid state restructuring process brought all the above-mentioned dilemmas together at a particular time and in a particular place. This chapter starts with a summary of the key findings from the empirical material of this research project in Section 9.2. Section 9.3 distils the conceptual relevance of this project and its contribution to a wider theoretical framework. Finally, the key limitations and constraints of this thesis will be discussed in Section 9.4, also in relation to a possible future research agenda.

9.2 Summary of key findings

The empirical findings of this thesis can be summarised according to the three research questions that were first posed in Section 4.10. The first of these was: *In what ways has local government restructuring in Cape Town transformed service delivery and employment relations in the municipality?* The restructuring process in Cape Town has been in the making since the apartheid regime was overthrown, but has taken its current form since the Unicity Commission submitted their recommendations to the City of Cape Town (CoCT) Council around the turn of the millennium. The establishment of the Unicity in 2000 marked the end of the formal amalgamation of spatial structures which until the mid-1990s had been encompassing more than sixty political authorities. It also signalled a new, more ambitious planning regime where spatial planning was to be integrated with socio-economic development. In this way, changes to municipal boundaries and institutional systems came to have a fundamental impact on municipal

employment relations and service delivery systems. Municipal workers saw 39 different employers merge into one. This created administrative challenges, with 26 different conditions of service coexisting in the same organisation. Senior management also argued that the amalgamation created a surplus of staff, even though service delivery requirements and developmental responsibilities were rapidly increasing. Municipal authorities have faced strong opposition from trade unions in reducing the benefits and wages of existing staff, and are still in the process of achieving parity amongst CoCT employees. With restructuring and negotiations waiting to be finalised, CoCT imposed a moratorium on staff appointments and promotions in 2000. This effectively reduced staff expenditure in proportion to general expenditure. It also led to widespread use of labour broker staff, conceived as a temporary measure to fill posts. Finally, it encouraged the outsourcing of service delivery functions and labour-intensive government schemes. In sum, this meant that thousands of workers doing work *for* the municipality were not employed *by* the municipality.

Restructuring also affected service delivery directly, as the Unicity Commission employed a New Public Management rhetoric to argue that the local state should focus on being an *ensurer* of public services, rather than a direct *provider* of these (Cox 1998). Corporatisation of services through ring-fencing of business units was encouraged, as was the outsourcing of non-core (and increasingly core) service functions. Reforms played out differently in the three service delivery sectors of this study. In Water and Sanitation, full-fledged corporatisation has still not been achieved, but there are clear signs of marketisation in this directorate through cost recovery as a pricing principle, albeit combined with a limited free water policy for poor households. It is unclear how this policy has affected different groups of poor people, but debt management practices such as cut-offs and water management devices have certainly provoked debate in the communities. Outsourcing has been limited in the water sector, with the widespread outsourcing of sanitation services of informal areas as a notable exception. In the Electricity Services directorate, a large-scale corporatisation project, through the pilot project RED1, ultimately failed. Still, this sector has moved the furthest towards becoming a separate business unit of the three. Prepaid electricity

meters are the norm in South African households, and the electricity tariffs for households are facing significant increases in a country plagued by electricity crises. The sector with the highest levels of outsourcing has been Solid Waste Management, particularly in the outskirts of the city and in informal areas. In addition to the entry of several larger private contractors, there is an extensive use of casual and community labour in the daily operations of waste management.

The second question asked: What have been the social impacts of neoliberal restructuring on municipal workers, other community members, and the relationship between these groups? This is clearly an immensely complex question. The municipality is involved in many aspects of people's lives and the local state has an important role in regulating the politics of reproduction and consumption. For example, the restructuring process has reshaped the geography of the municipal workplace, and changed the travel-to-work patterns of many workers. By focusing on the neoliberal component of this restructuring process, this analysis has highlighted critical aspects of the social reality of municipal workers and other constituencies. Firstly, as a result of the downsizing of CoCT staff through the moratorium, the municipal labour regime has come to comprise a formal-informal continuum of workers doing work for local government. Labour broker staff has been working side by side permanent workers, often doing similar work for unequal pay and security. In the Delft and Kuilsrivier municipal depots community structures were, to different degrees, involved in the recruitment and coordination of so-called 'community workers'. Workers on the Wasteman refuse trucks had employment and remuneration standards inferior to those working on CoCT trucks, and this trend was also visible in other private contractor firms. Private firms have gradually become significant service providers in the waste management sector. Sanitation services in Khayelitsha provided an example of the growing number of third-party subcontractors who do work for the private contractor firms. Often recruiting local labour under extremely precarious conditions, this group of workers was not effectively monitored by municipal authorities, allowing exploitative labour practices to persist. Occupational health and safety issues and the lack of effective worker representation characterised all subcases in this thesis. Some of the casual labour

schemes served to place unemployed community members and municipal workers in competition for the same jobs, at least indirectly. But there were also situations where these people had a common interest in relation to local state restructuring. Pricing policies, debt management practices and other service delivery issues meant that both municipal workers and other community members were affected as service users. Finally, municipal workers were, partially as a result of the restructuring process, faced with a challenge to their collective political strength through a trade union. Union membership has declined as the staff complement decreased, and a shift of members towards a conservative, service-oriented rival union meant an erosion of the political power of organised labour.

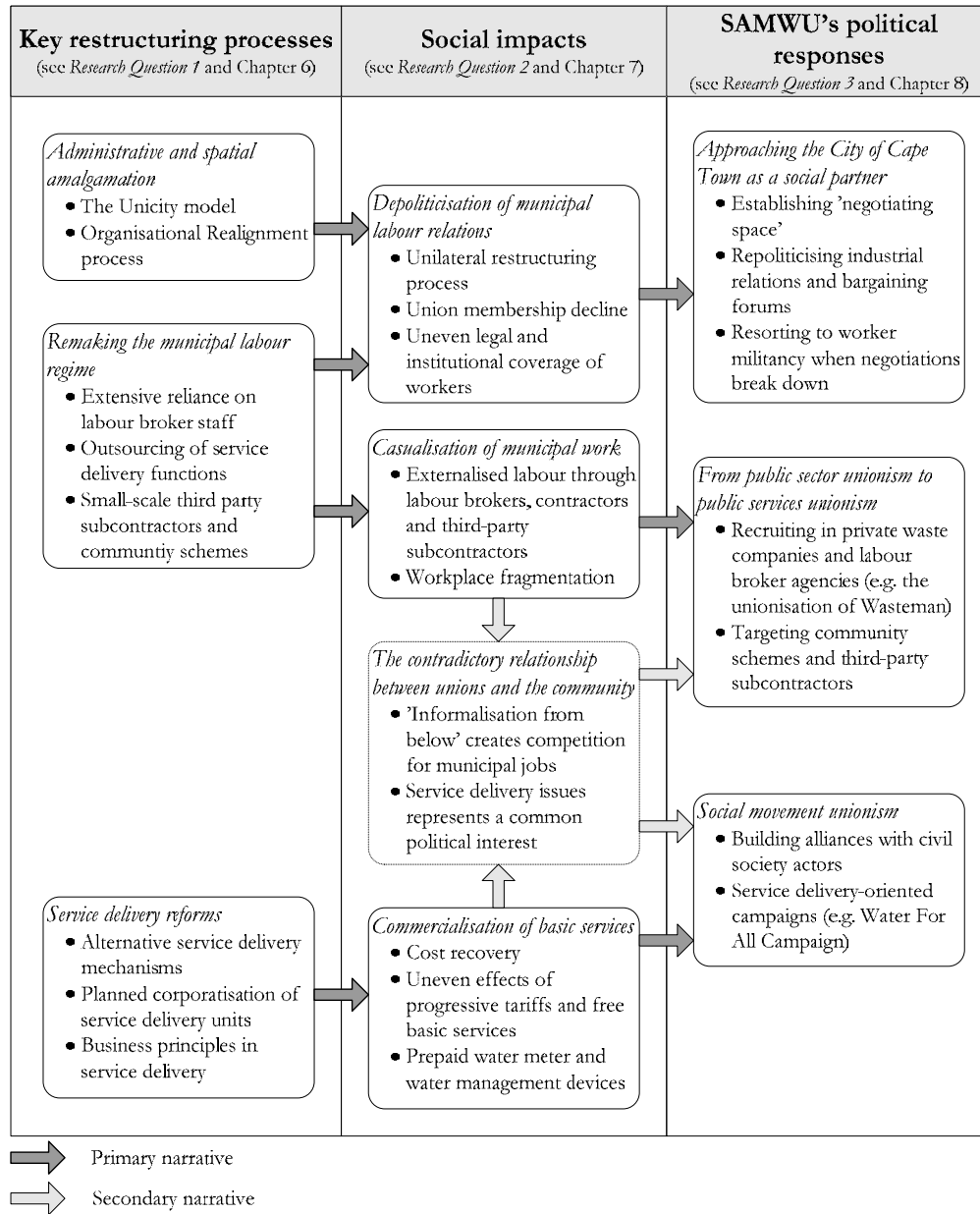
This leads on to the final research question, which focused on the politics of SAMWU: *Through what kinds of political strategies has organised labour engaged with, and resisted, neoliberal restructuring?* One of the latest strategic shifts in SAMWU has been the efforts to organise externalised labour – i.e. workers in municipal services who are employed by employers other than CoCT. The recognition of the need to reach out to these groups of workers has been imminent in the progressive trade union movement since the late 1990s, but it was not until relative recently that the union adopted policies and launched legal disputes in relation to the growing level of externalised labour that is threatening the unity of public sector labour. SAMWU has managed to successfully unionise some workplaces in the private waste industry, but there were persistent problems of effectively representing these workers due to issues of institutional coverage. At the time of research, the private firm membership as proportion of SAMWU's total membership and as a proportion of the total number of externalised labour in Cape Town remained very small. The potential, however, is significant relying on the success of ongoing unionisation efforts and legal disputes. Parallel to this strategy, SAMWU has maintained their commitment to community-oriented campaigns around service delivery issues, a political culture which the union has nurtured since their anti-apartheid days. In the post-apartheid era, SAMWU has continued their tradition for social movement unionism at a local scale. Earlier attempts to establish a broad political front have largely been left in favour of more targeted, single-issue campaigns. Balancing their

political alliance to COSATU and the ANC with their wish to engage in community politics around pressing issues has proved difficult. Moreover, grassroots alliances between trade unions and other community groups have often faced obstacles with regards to different organisational cultures. Still, the Water for All Campaign (WFAC) against prepaid water meters did prove successful, and the union continued to be involved with other community activists. Finally, the union's advances into the private sector and into the communities have been combined with efforts to maintain constructive relations with senior management and employer representatives. The relationship between CoCT and SAMWU became increasingly unstable and contested as negotiations around restructuring issues failed to be resolved. The union has struggled to maintain a negotiating space, as the delayed restructuring process called for expediency and depoliticised industrial relations. The relationship between the local state and SAMWU has also been complicated by the scalar complexity presented by new government policies influencing service delivery management, and by a new decentralised industrial relations regime in the making – notably through the introduction of local labour forums. In sum, these different pressures have presented the union with dilemmas and challenged the political culture of the organisation. The last three years have been marked by failed attempts at negotiation with CoCT, followed by militant responses by the union in the form of protests and strike action. This being said, the politics of labour and service delivery in the CoCT are still unsettled and SAMWU continues to be a strong force in the political landscape of the city.

As evident from this summary, this analysis has presented the empirical findings through a narrative which started by identifying some key restructuring processes, their social impacts on workers and service users, and how these processes in turn have triggered particular responses from the most politicised labour organisation in the city, SAMWU's Metro branch. Following this *primary narrative* into the realm of union strategy, it becomes clear that in order to effectively challenge neoliberalism at a metropolitan scale, the union must simultaneously employ three different approaches (as shown in Figure 9.1). But this three-pronged political front contains certain contradictory dynamics, especially those related to the parallel pressures of casualisation and commercialisation. As

illustrated by Figure 9.1, these tensions can be read as a *secondary narrative* running alongside the primary one, and complicating the compatibility of these three related union strategies.

Figure 9.1 *The politics of neoliberal restructuring*



9.3 Conceptual insights

While some of the key restructuring processes envisioned by the Unicity Commission are getting closer to their completion, others are still ‘under restructuring’. Moreover, the social impacts of this upheaval are still very much unknown, and the political dynamics between SAMWU and CoCT are still changing. But even with a case *in flux*, certain analytical insights can be extracted. These will be presented and discussed in the following sections.

9.3.1 Towards a labour geography for the public sector

At this point, it is worth asking to what extent the research project presented in this thesis has contributed to labour geography as an analytical framework – which was identified as an important task at the end of Chapter 2. I would argue that this theoretically informed study has indeed got some important lessons to offer in this regard. The first of these relates to the core concept of labour geography, namely *labour agency*: this study clearly shows that forms of labour agency are best understood when are analysed in light of the structures they are embedded in. In other words, explaining the political strategies and actions of workers in the case of Cape Town is only possible when they are seen in relation to the transformation of state institutions and local labour markets that has unfolded over the course of the last decade. Labour agency is variegated and embedded, and useful abstractions of unionism must simultaneously be situated in the political economy and seen in relation to the institutions and social forces that comprise this political economy.

A second insight is that the new geographies of work described in general terms (but mainly originating from studies of low-paid service work in the US) in earlier chapters, are certainly relevant to the South Africa and to the context of the public sector. Moreover, fragmentation has proved a useful gate of entry in exploring the social reality of these work geographies. The multiple processes constituting workforce and workplace fragmentation admittedly suggest that it is a chaotic concept. Still, what is appealing with fragmentation as an approach is that it is conceptualised based on the experiences of a particular subject – the organised worker – as its starting point, rather than terms such

as neoliberalism or economic restructuring, which are formulated from the standpoint of Marxist capital analysis or economics.

Thirdly, the exploration of the scale concept in labour geography has also been taken up by this thesis. It is argued that scale is a useful analytical tool for labour geographers, in particular related to the notion of *scales of organising*. That being said, scale is not an exhaustive term which captures every socio-spatial dimension of the politics of organised labour. Based in a discussion of community-oriented unionism, this thesis has offered a four-pronged approach to the geographies of labour agency. Together with scales of organising, *targets for action* has been recognised as ways for trade unions to establish 'spaces of engagement' (Cox 1998) – in relation to employers, state institutions and other spheres of power which workers want to exert their influence. Many unions across the world, SAMWU included, have come up with creative and alternative solutions to securing new scales of organising and identifying new targets for action to counter the neoliberal fragmentation that threatens the unity of workers.

Likewise, new geographies of work have forced unions to think anew with regards to the spaces where they find their constituency, their political support and their social networks. Conceptualised as *sites of recruitment* and *domain of mobilisation*, respectively, these correspond to Cox' (2006) notion of 'spaces of dependence'. The multi-faceted politics of SAMWU illustrate that this differentiation of union geographies is a useful one. Their three main strategies can all be mapped according to this framework, generating a complex mesh of negotiating partners, allies and political targets. This complexity stems in part from the fact that their status as public sector workers place them in contradictory relationships to both the state and civil society.

Public sector workers, as a research focus in its own right, draw attention to the final point, namely the sectoral bias in the literature. This research project has two important insights which are relevant to future research on public sector unionism. First, the politics of work in the public sector have some characteristics that set them apart from union struggles in other sectors. Their multiple roles *vis-à-vis* the local state presents them with new opportunities for political mobilisation, but this in turn requires considerable organisational and bureaucratic capacity in the union

organisation or with their allies. Their role in service delivery also puts public sector workers in positions which can open up potential for social movement unionism around service delivery issues, while concomitantly presenting them with obstacles when organising against casualisation of work. In sum, there is a case for a further theoretical and empirical exploration of unionism in the public sector.

Ironically, the second point goes some way in contradicting the first, as this analysis of municipal workers in Cape Town arguably raises the following question: do processes of neoliberalism render a sector-based approach to unionism outmoded? By extension, it can be argued that if externalisation of state employment means that a narrow public sector unionism will inevitably lead to a crisis of representation for organised labour, then using a sector-based approach as a lens through which to understand the politics of labour is also becoming increasingly inappropriate. Hopefully, this thesis has showed that by employing an inclusive understanding of the state as a social relation, the particular political challenges of municipal workers can be addressed without excluding other worker identities and constituencies from the story. What this suggests, practically and politically, for public sector unions is that *community orientation* and a move towards a broader, sector-transcending *public services unionism* might represent a viable strategy in a neoliberal world.

9.3.2 Contested neoliberalism and local state crisis displacement

The next point is related to the articulation between neoliberal restructuring and other structural processes (Klein 2007). The politics of a giant urban-institutional complex like CoCT invite some reflections regarding the dynamics of neoliberalism and system change. Regulation theory asserts that neoliberalism is a response to internal crises in the Fordist-Keynesian accumulation regime. This notion has been subject to academic debate, and has also been faced with some provocative perspectives from outside academia, for example in Naomi Klein's (2007) *The Shock Doctrine*. Here, she not only states that neoliberal reforms are often disguised as remedies for externally imposed crises such as hurricanes and tsunamis; she also argues that natural disasters,

military intervention and (actual or perceived) fiscal crises are used as pretexts to bypass democratic decision-making (Larner 2000:168):

“[T]he crusade that Friedman began managed to survive the dreaded transition to democracy – not by its proponents persuading electorates of the wisdom of their worldview, but by moving deftly from crisis to crisis, expertly exploiting the desperation of economic emergencies to push through policies that would tie the hands of fragile new democracies.”

While her global narrative might be labelled a sweeping account, it nevertheless resonates with the post-apartheid experience. Here, much of the political room for manoeuvre that had opened up in the wake of the regime shift was shut down in the late 1990s with reference to looming fiscal crises in the major cities and sluggish national economic growth. Parallel to this macro-economic shift was a crisis displacement of certain national-political stalemates – such as the privatisation issue – to the scale of the local state. The restructuring plans of cities like Cape Town and Johannesburg involved an explicit shift towards a neoliberal growth model, but were framed as fiscal crisis management – and legitimised through calls for rapid service delivery roll-out, democratisation and deracialisation. The restructuring process following the Unicity Commission’s recommendations effectively suspended ‘business-as-usual’ in Cape Town. Restructuring was described in terms of ‘necessity’, ‘expediency’ and ‘efficiency’ – in line with a discourse of neoliberal governmentality (Castree 2006). This served to depoliticise labour relations and the politics of service delivery, leaving a decreased negotiating space for SAMWU. It also allowed for the implementation of cost-saving measures such as the extensive reliance on labour broker staff. These practices were labelled transitional in 2001, but as they gradually became normative a question can be asked: how temporary is temporary?

“Look, if they are termed ‘temporary employment services’ you can’t have a person working in temporary employment services for five years on a continuous basis. Then it’s not temporary. Then my English is wrong.” (*NUMSA representative 3*)

According to an expert on South African labour law, the 1995 LRA does not circumscribe “what is temporary about temporary employment”. This allows employers to exploit a “gaping legislative loophole” by using temporary work as a quasi-permanent employment arrangement for many workers¹³.

As this case has showed, when neoliberalisation becomes entangled with other processes of institutional restructuring, new dilemmas are opened up for the proponents as well as for the opponents of such a political paradigm. Offloading the political dynamics of outsourcing and corporatisation to the local scale through the so-called Section 78 process (see Sections 6.3 and 8.6) – and the resulting requirements for consultation with citizens and workers around these plans – presented senior management in CoCT with a messy path towards policy reform. While opposition from workers and communities has not been enough to stop these processes, they have certainly dragged them out and possibly deterred policy-makers from pursuing the most radical privatisation agendas. When contested neoliberalisation is faced with democratic practices and an increased level of state regulation, it becomes time-consuming and onerous for both parties. Again, it seems appropriate to invoke Castree’s (2003:4) reference to the intimate relationship between particular processes of neoliberalisation and the “raft of other social and natural phenomena” with which they are intertwined; but while Klein seems to see these as generally facilitating neoliberal change, it is not necessarily so. For trade unions, however, to exploit the range of democratic channels and political opportunity structures allowing them to challenge post-apartheid neoliberalism, it requires a higher organisational capacity to fight these fights at the scale of metropolitan government than that possessed by SAMWU’s Metro branch in the mid-2000s.

9.3.3 The fragmentation of the post-apartheid workplace

The empirical findings of this case have also provided an apt illustration of Jessop’s claim that the state is a *social relation* and a *site*

¹³ E-mail correspondence with Jan Theron, Researcher at the Institute of Development and Labour Law, University of Cape Town on 4 July 2008.

which hosts struggles over production and reproduction. The focus on local state structures and basic services served to bring these abstract discussions nearer to the life experiences of workers and to particular actors and processes. Even though it has not been a main ambition on part of this thesis to assess the applicability of either Jessop's strategic-relational approach or Brenner's spatial matrix (see Chapter 3) to the South African state in general, some interesting points are worth mentioning. Firstly, the post-apartheid experience is essentially very different from the neoliberal trajectories of the US and the UK, which often serve as the backdrop against which state-theoretical analyses have been conceived. Unevenness was a central tenet of the apartheid state. Moreover, the restructuring processes that have accommodated post-apartheid neoliberalisation often contained explicit elements of universalisation and paretisation – at least in their formal sense. More than just allowing market forces to customise and create unevenness across territories, South African neoliberalism was framed as a way of reducing poverty and promoting empowerment in a strongly racialised and classed landscape. At the same time, there were some important similarities between neoliberal state restructuring in South Africa and elsewhere. While the establishment of a local tier of government mirrored similar developments in Western countries during Fordism, the focus on cities as competitive sources for investment was very much in line with contemporary urban neoliberalisations documented elsewhere. The same can be said of their social impacts, although the apartheid legacy arguably created even more extreme outcomes in working-class communities in South Africa than elsewhere. Paradoxically, the CoCT restructuring exercise brought municipal workers together under one employer, and was in that sense a defragmentation process. But the concomitant externalisation of municipal work to labour broker agencies, private contractors and third-party subcontractors served to fragment this new, metropolitan workplace in more ways than one – challenging organised labour. SAMWU were faced with a new and changing landscape of workplaces in their recruitment campaigns, but even in the same workplace (or on the same refuse truck) different employment arrangements were working side by side. It is clear that the connection between new state spaces and new geographies of work, documented in the neoliberal heartlands by Anglo-

American geographers, are also to be found in post-apartheid South Africa.

9.3.4 Contradictions between different working-class constituencies

The perhaps most important insight arising from this case study regards debates around trade union strategy and the potential for effective, popular resistance against neoliberalism. Neoliberal restructuring was contested in Cape Town based on two overlapping rationales. On the one hand, organised labour opposed the remaking of the municipal labour regime – as outsourcing, casualisation and corporatisation moved many jobs out of the realm of formal employment. Service delivery reforms, on the other hand, met resistance from communities who found that the commercialisation of basic services worked to the detriment of poor households. SAMWU organised members with vested interests in both of these sets of grievances, and tried to exploit their critical location in the urban economy to launch a broad-based political mobilisation against neoliberal restructuring in the city. However, processes of casualisation and commercialisation created not only sources of solidarity, but also axes of conflict (see Figure 9.1). Notwithstanding their common stance on service delivery issues, casualisation was a problematic issue between different groups of workers. Tension between permanent and casual workers, on the one hand, and between the union's fight for re-municipalisation and the community's involvement in casual labour practices, on the other hand, posed practical-political dilemmas for joint mobilisation. Around service delivery issues, however, the conflicts of interest were less visible, although the disagreements between SAMWU and NUMSA around the production of, and opposition to, prepaid meters suggested that not even this was a straightforward issue.

Still, this research project has showed that SAMWU maintained its *social movement union* profile and its engagement in community struggles, which has characterised the politics of the union since its inception. Some of these issues, like the prepaid meters issue, required close dialogue with the communities and an active framing of the problem countering the pamphlet information distributed by local government – a war of competing propaganda.

At the same time, the limited potential for effective social movement unionism – especially around casualisation processes – has forced the union to explore other strategic options. The *social partnership model* which many South African unions had pursued in post-apartheid corporatist forums has been maintained by SAMWU, albeit in a deeply fractured and contentious fashion. Also, *new organising strategies* targeting casual work are being tried out – possibly signalling a above-mentioned move from a narrow public sector unionism to a broader public services unionism. Clearly, the union recognises that political pressure is not sufficient to stem the tide of neoliberal reform in local government. The efforts to unionise private workplaces are rather attempts to intervene in the local labour market and make this option a less profitable one for corporate-minded senior managers in CoCT. A successful recruitment drive in this sector would also serve to bolster the union's political strength *vis-à-vis* the employer and the rival union, and make sure that SAMWU would better represent the post-apartheid municipal worker and hence address organised labour's crisis of representation.

Importantly, the evolution of each of these three strategies can only be understood *in relation to each other* and in relation to the ever-changing political economy of the South African state and the local labour market. This echoes the temporal aspects of unionism mentioned in Section 2.8, and in particular the interplay between internal learning processes and external conditions. The social movement unionism that took SAMWU from the anti-apartheid struggle to a democratic state was combined with a social partnership model which was seen as better suited to a social democracy. When this model failed to offer organised labour with an effective platform for opposing post-apartheid neoliberalism, new organising strategies were employed in an increasingly fragmented labour market. None of these strategies fully substitutes the other. By using Cox's terminology of spaces of engagement and dependence as sensitising concepts, it became clear that each of these strategies involved alliance-building and/or confrontations with structures and actors in the local state, in the private sector, in other trade unions and in civil society (see Figures 8.1-3).

9.3.5 Case study analysis in a politicised field

The final point worth revisiting at this stage is the implications of doing research in an intensely politicised field, as discussed in Section 5.5. The relatively antagonistic character of industrial relations in the CoCT and the political and discursive divide between municipal authorities and labour has bearings on both the research conduct and on the analysis of the data generated by this conduct. On a methodological note, this raised questions about access and trust as the researcher was forced to balance a network and a list of informants which included individuals and roles positioned in open conflict with each other. Still, by being allowed to do so (thanks to some very accommodating individuals on both sides of this political divide), this project has been able to trace the politics of municipal services in Cape Town beyond a sole focus on union strategy – or, alternatively, on local state decision-making. In other words, the *contested practice of neoliberalism* has not been reduced to the internal logic of either side.

But despite the obvious advantages of this triangulation of sources, it also entails some challenges in terms of analysing and presenting of the case. The deep-seated political fronts that have evolved in Cape Town can easily persuade the researcher to reduce the political dynamics of this complex case to a two-dimensional labour-state battle; and it could be added that using a Marxist-inspired theoretical framework risks cementing such a binary. The obvious pitfall here is that other positionalities are easily overlooked. This has been a concern throughout this project, and the analysis has also tried to include ambiguous roles within the local state, between different groups of workers and in relation to private sector representatives. By doing so, an important point is highlighted: the practice of neoliberalism is not only contested, but also *complex and multi-relational*. Still, even the most many-sided of analyses must choose a focus, and this project is no exception. A focus is selective by its very nature, and will therefore necessarily place some limitations.

9.4 Limitations and possible future research agendas

Some of the limitations that can be ascribed to this analysis arise from the unique experience that the post-apartheid reality represents. In a city in fundamental conflict with itself, stemming from years of racial oppression and spatial segregation, there is arguably a silence in this analysis as far as racial dynamics goes. Not only are the processes of restructuring legitimised by racial redress, but the political mobilisation that has emerged after apartheid is very complex with regard to racial and geographical constituencies. In part, the focus on class identity and industrial relations is a choice on the part of the researcher, as this approach most closely addresses the research questions. But the relatively light emphasis on racial dynamics can also be found in the discourses and rhetoric of the political subjects themselves. Still, it can be argued that a contemporary analysis of the role played by ethnicity and race in the politics of reproduction in Cape Town remains a gap to be filled (notable exceptions in other areas of South Africa include von Holdt (2005)).

Much the same can be said about the gendered nature of labour and community politics in Cape Town. Not only has it received relatively little attention in this account, but it has also been acknowledged by representatives of the political organisations in the field that gender dynamics remain poorly understood and frequently glossed over: The following quote from a SAMWU and Anti-Privatisation Forum representative seems to support this observation:

Even us as women haven't been focusing on the issue, addressing the issue of women in the APF. I think that it is not necessarily because of an oversight or that you see it as a less important issue. But I think the area of the effects of privatisation, it's so huge that you tend to focus more on what type of campaign should we have to oppose privatisation. And in that, the focus on women is then lost. (*Conversation with SAMWU representative in 2003*)

Coming out of a political culture where the fight against racial oppression overshadowed all other struggles, post-apartheid civil

society is gradually coming to terms with other identities and lines of conflict which call for political mobilisation. Arguably, the South African labour movement – often heralded as diverse and inclusive – has been slower than other social movements to incorporate these multiple subjects.

When reflecting on the limitations and constraints to the argument presented in this thesis it is also worth revisiting the discussion of shortcomings in the wider literature, as presented in the conclusion of Chapter 2. As already argued, studies of union organising as well as the more general literature on neoliberalism have shown a bias towards the experience of the UK and the US – the so-called neoliberal heartlands. However, processes of economic restructuring and political developments in the global South suggest that this kind of politics are by no means restricted to the Anglo-American world. The postcolonial context, exemplified by the post-apartheid labour movement in South Africa in this thesis, represents an important frontier (excuse the colonial language) for labour geography. Importantly, this can never be a straightforward exercise of importing the concepts and frameworks from Anglo-American cases into the developing world. As this thesis has showed, this necessitates a careful dialogue between the geographically biased theoretical literature and the real world experiences from countries in the global South. While this thesis is a step in the right direction, it can be identified as a field of numerous opportunities. For labour geographers, an interesting question is whether this expansion of the empirical basis should be done according to a *relational* or a *comparative* rationale. The interest in transnational labour organising is clearly motivated by the former (Johns 1998; see, for example, Lambert and Webster 2001; Peck 2004): as labour movements in different parts of the world have established (or are trying to establish) organic alliances between each other, this calls for researchers to trace these links across borders.

But there is also a case for arguing that some interesting, theoretically informed comparisons can be made. Here, the rationale is not to trace the links between different labour struggles across the world, but rather to compare the dynamics and the structural constraints of unionism in different contexts. While the neoliberal heartlands display some obvious similarities which have been woven together in a (by now easily recognisable) historical

narrative, other parts of the world also have some interesting traits in common regarding their encounter with a neoliberal state project. Peck (1998:396) supports this notion by calling for research on the “crisis-driven state transformations of Latin America, Africa and the former Soviet Union” (Peck 2004:398). This ‘extra-Keynesian’ neoliberalism not only represents a different state context, but the nature of these development historically forms a “critical moment in the wider process of neoliberalization” (Peck 2004:398). Despite South Africa’s unique history, post-apartheid public sector unions face dilemmas similar to those of certain other union movements, by engaging with a state that has undergone a fundamental process of social transformation (from apartheid to liberal democracy). This potentially holds some important general insights, particularly as my evidence suggests that the political transition itself conditions the process of neoliberal restructuring to a great extent – and circumscribes the responses of labour.

Having generated in-depth understanding of this complex phenomenon in the South African context, an important next step would be to examine these dynamics in another region experiencing concomitant social transformation and neoliberal restructuring. While the potential for fascinating new research here is vast, I will by way of conclusion concentrate on one possible avenue. As indicated by Peck, the post-communist world could possibly represent an interesting comparison to this thesis. Pickles and Smith’s (1998) theorisation of the post-communist transition in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) suggests that some key parallels can be identified within these unique historical environments which justify a theoretical comparison. Interestingly, unions in both CEE and South Africa have experienced political transitions which were actively supported by organised labour (Webster and Buhlungu 2004), entailing a level of political loyalty to the new political regimes. But in a similar manner to South African labour, the political transition in CEE (from communism to market economies) has had adverse effects on public sector workers – both as workers and citizens. Their complex, often ambivalent, political positions during times of neoliberal reform is likely to restrain their union politics. Just like what has been a key theme in this study, there are interesting things to be learnt from

studying the interplay between these restraints and the politics of unionism.

9.5 Concluding reflections on the case

It is neither the mandate nor the ambition of this project to offer policy recommendations to the political and administrative leadership of the CoCT. The reforms and institutional processes that have taken place since 1994 were initiated for many different reasons. Many of these were not only legitimate reasons, but – taking the country’s history into account – acute in their nature. Still, it is clear from this study that the current restructuring process has had huge social costs. Workers and their families experience a loss of social security as a direct result of some of the reforms in the municipal labour regime. Even if they are conceived as temporary restructuring measures, the length of the restructuring process and the time it has taken to start a reversal of workplace casualisation are causes of concern. This study has also found that the perceived trade-off between service delivery requirements and labour costs is partly a social construction, and this rhetoric has allowed a sizable portion of the municipal workforce to be externalised – and hence removed from staff expenditure in the annual budgets. Following from this, the conflict between the demands of municipal labour and principle of equitable service delivery can be characterised as a social construction. It is also regrettable that the restructuring process has fundamentally circumscribed the voice of labour as an organised collective. While the restructuring process cannot be blamed alone for the weakening of political unionism and membership loss, it has certainly contributed to this trend.

Just as this research project was not intended to generate policy recommendations for CoCT management, it has neither been motivated by wanting to offer strategic advice to the union leadership. Even though there has been a constructive dialogue throughout the research period with some local union leaders, it is the firm belief of this author that the union knows itself best. Therefore, an overseas academic should be very cautious in offering his/her advice to any political actor in the field. As SAMWU has become well-known locally for its militancy and style, there are many people in Cape Town who has a very clear

opinion about how the union should act. Are they right in going on strike? Are they well-paid and too demanding? Are their social movement politics a thing of the past? Should they enter into local labour forums or should they keep negotiating on a metropolitan level? Regardless of whether the union has made occasional mistakes in their union tactics, this author is of the opinion that SAMWU remains the only political body in Cape Town is capable of tackling issues of service delivery and municipal work as a working class issue. Related to this, their location in the urban political economy and their organisational resources also make them the best candidate of bringing together the various struggles around the politics of reproduction in the city – even though the APF initiative presented in this thesis has run out of steam. Another interesting question raised is: Has SAMWU's multi-pronged approach to the state created synergy effects? Or, has the union leadership been too ambitious? Again, this author argues that some of these strategies have only been viable *because of* the union's community orientation; others have arguably been *jeopardised* through this same approach. SAMWU's Metro branch is faced with a local state which, all at once, played the role of employer, service deliverer, democratic institution and tier of government. From an academic-political point of view, the trade union is therefore right in making use of a wide array of tactics to more effectively represent their members and the interest of the working class. From a practical-political perspective, however, these issues depend very much on the union's organisational resources. In other words, whether the success of each of these strategies ultimately will be circumscribed or delegitimised by the union's involvement in the other, remains an issue for tactical consideration.

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Appendix 1 - 6

Pictures



CoCT waste workers at work downtown (above), in Delft (below left) and in Muizenberg (below right).

(All photos by the author unless otherwise indicated)





Early morning at Wasteman: Union meeting before dawn, then work begins.





Two different kinds of container toilets (above and left), also known as 'the bucket system'.

A port-a-pottie (right), with a sealed, detachable container under the toilet seat.





Just-A-Wish workers at work. The collection, transport and cleansing of toilet containers involves health hazards and is performed without protective gear.

(Photos taken by SAMWU)





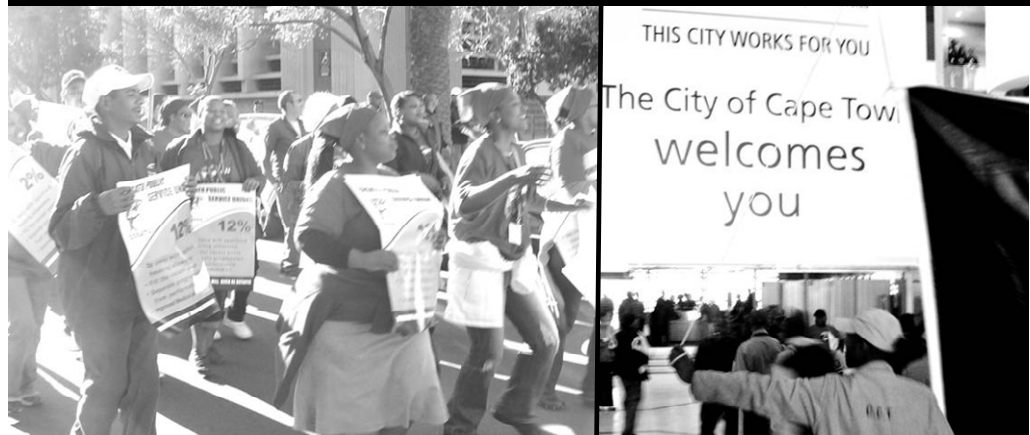
Water For All Campaign march and community meeting in Tafelsig.

(Photos by SAMWU)





June 2007: Municipal workers rallying outside the Civic Centre; later they occupy the ground floor.



January 2008 (below): SAMWU protesters clash with the police; worker displays rubber bullet wounds.



(Photo taken by S.AMWU)



(Photo taken by S.AMWU)

Appendix 7

Interview list

INFORMANT	DATE	COMMENTS
SAMWU representative 1	22.03.2007	<i>Group interview; tape recorded</i>
SAMWU representative 2		
SAMWU representative 3	30.03.2007	<i>Tape recorded</i>
SAMWU representative 4	30.03.2007	<i>Tape recorded</i>
SAMWU representative 5	03.04.2007	<i>Tape recorded</i>
External consultant 1	03.04.2007	<i>Tape recorded</i>
External researcher 1	30.04.2007	<i>Tape recorded</i>
SAMWU representative 6	02.05.2007	<i>Tape recorded</i>
Community activist 1	02.05.2007	<i>Tape recorded</i>
Casual worker 1	04.05.2007	<i>Notes taken</i>
SALGBC representative 1	07.05.2007	<i>Tape recorded</i>
Community activist 2	08.05.2007	<i>Tape recorded</i>
Private sector representative 1	10.05.2007	<i>Notes taken</i>
CoCT depot manager 1	14.05.2007	<i>Tape recorded</i>
SAMWU shopsteward 1	14.05.2007	<i>Tape recorded</i>
CoCT depot manager 2	14.05.2007	<i>Tape recorded</i>
SAMWU shopsteward 2	16.05.2007	<i>Group interview; tape recorded</i>
SAMWU shopsteward 3		
SAMWU representative 7	18.05.2007	<i>Tape recorded</i>
SAMWU shopsteward 4	21.05.2007	<i>Tape recorded</i>
CoCT senior manager 1	21.05.2007	<i>Tape recorded</i>
CoCT junior manager 1	22.05.2007	<i>Tape recorded</i>
Private sector representative 2	23.05.2007	<i>Group interview; tape recorded</i>
Private sector representative 3		
CoCT depot manager 3	25.05.2007	<i>Tape recorded</i>
CoCT depot manager 4	28.05.2007	<i>Tape recorded</i>
Private sector representative 4	28.05.2007	<i>Tape recorded</i>
SAMWU shopsteward 5	28.05.2007	<i>Tape recorded</i>
Private sector representative 5	29.05.2007	<i>Tape recorded</i>

CoCT senior manager 2	01.06.2007	<i>Tape recorded</i>
SAMWU shopsteward 6	05.06.2007	<i>Tape recorded</i>
Private sector representative 6	05.06.2007	<i>Tape recorded</i>
SAMWU shopsteward 7	06.06.2007	<i>Tape recorded</i>
Casual worker 2	06.06.2007	<i>Tape recorded</i>
Casual worker 3	06.06.2007	<i>Notes taken</i>
IMATU representative 1	08.06.2007	<i>Tape recorded</i>
SAMWU representative 8	08.06.2007	<i>Tape recorded</i>
Private sector representative 7	11.06.2007	<i>Tape recorded</i>
CoCT senior manager 3	12.06.2007	<i>Tape recorded</i>
CoCT senior manager 4	14.06.2007	<i>Tape recorded</i>
COSATU representative 1	14.06.2007	<i>Tape recorded</i>
CoCT senior manager 2	15.06.2007	<i>Group interview; tape recorded</i>
CoCT senior manager 5		
SAMWU shopsteward 8	19.06.2007	<i>Tape recorded</i>
SAMWU shopsteward 9	20.06.2007	<i>Tape recorded</i>
NUMSA representative 1	21.06.2007	<i>Tape recorded</i>
NUMSA representative 2	21.06.2007	<i>Tape recorded</i>
Community activist 3	21.06.2007	<i>Tape recorded</i>
CoCT senior manager 4	22.06.2007	<i>Group interview; tape recorded</i>
CoCT senior manager 6		
CoCT senior manager 7		
CoCT senior manager 8		
SALGA representative 1	25.06.2007	<i>Tape recorded</i>
CoCT senior manager 9	25.06.2007	<i>Tape recorded</i>
SAMWU representative 8	26.06.2007	<i>Tape recorded</i>
CoCT senior manager 10	27.06.2007	<i>Tape recorded</i>
NUMSA representative 3	27.06.2007	<i>Tape recorded</i>
CoCT senior manager 11	28.06.2007	<i>Notes taken</i>

Appendix 8

List of other correspondence

PERSON	ORGANISATION AND ROLE		ASSISTANCE
Adams, Andre	SAMWU	<i>Provincial secretary, Western Cape Provincial office</i>	Meeting; documentation on membership figures
Africa, Peter	SAMWU	<i>Secretary, Solid Waste shopsteward committee, Cape Metropolitan branch</i>	Meeting; Identifying interviewees, and providing me with list of shopstewards
Barnard, Peta	CoCT	<i>GIS technician, Solid Waste Management</i>	E-mail; acquiring GIS data
Barnard, Rudie	TEDCOR	<i>Project manager, Western Cape</i>	E-mail; stats on outsourcing
Beukman, Gawie	IMATU	<i>Regional manager, City of Cape Town office</i>	E-mail; Providing me with membership information for IMATU
Cronje, Larry	CoCT	<i>Technician, Khayelitsha depot</i>	Meeting; contact details
de Bruyn, Jaco	CoCT	<i>Informal Settlements Unit, Water Management</i>	E-mail; stats on outsourcing
Dunhofen, Monica	CoCT	<i>PA, Utility Services</i>	Arranging interviews with senior management
Field, Ron	IMATU	<i>Regional chairperson, City of Cape Town office</i>	Phone; Identifying interviewees
Grossman, Jonathan	UCT	<i>Senior lecturer, Sociology Department</i>	Meeting; Supervision and informal talks
Hendricks, Jurina	CoCT	<i>PA, Corporate Services</i>	E-mail; Arranging interviews with senior management

Henwood, Nicholas	UCT	<i>Researcher, Industrial Health Research Group</i>	Meeting; Informal talks, assisting me with information through the IHRG's research, photo material
Jacobs, Mario	SAMWU	<i>Organiser, Cape Metropolitan branch</i>	Meeting; Identifying interviewees, inviting me to union meetings and workplace visit Wasteman Group
Kennedy, Judith	ILRIG	<i>Researcher</i>	Meeting; Assisting in identifying interviewees and in acquiring documentation on prepaid meters campaign
Khan, Zeenath	CoCT	<i>PA, Utility Services</i>	E-mail; Arranging interviews with senior management
Mangiagalli, Ivano	CoCT	<i>Senior GIS operator, Corporate GIS</i>	E-mail; acquiring GIS data
Mentoor, Nobby	CoCT	<i>PA, Utility Services</i>	E-mail; Arranging interviews with senior management
Millstein, Marianne	Uni. of Oslo	<i>PhD researcher, Department of Sociology and Human Geography</i>	E-mail; Identifying interviewees and subcases
Mlokoti, Simphiwe	SAMWU	<i>Chairperson, Open Spaces shopsteward committee, Cape Metropolitan branch</i>	Meeting; Inviting me to sit in on a shopsteward meeting
Oldfield, Sophie	UCT	<i>Lecturer, Department of Environmental and Geographical Sciences</i>	Meeting; Supervision, informal talks
Parnell, Sue	UCT	<i>Associate professor, Department of Environmental and Geographical Sciences</i>	Meeting; Supervision, informal talks
Rudin, Jeff	SAMWU	<i>Researcher, National office</i>	Meeting; Identifying contact persons at arrival
Sangster, Allizon	CoCT	<i>PA, Corporate Services</i>	E-mail; Arranging interviews with senior management

Scholtz, Yolanda	CoCT	<i>Head of Recruitment and Selection, Corporate Services</i>	E-mail; Providing me with documentation on use of labour brokers and contract staff in the City
Snyman, Patricia	SAMWU	<i>Secretary, Cape Metropolitan branch</i>	Meeting; documentation on membership figures
van Niekerk, Sandra	SAMWU	<i>National Education Officer, National office</i>	Meeting; documentation on membership figures
Veotte, Lance	SAMWU	<i>Chairperson, Cape Metropolitan branch</i>	Meeting; Identifying interviewees, informal talks, documentation
Wagener, Jannie	CoCT	<i>Principal analyst, Solid Waste Management</i>	E-mail; stats on outsourcing
Wesso, Ronald	ILRIG	<i>Researcher</i>	Meeting; Informal talks, identifying interviewees
Yisaka, Stanley	SAMWU	<i>Branch secretary, Cape Metropolitan branch</i>	Meeting; Identifying interviewees, informal talks, documentation
Zemanay, Loedt	SAMWU	<i>Head of Finance Department, National office</i>	Meeting; documentation on membership figures