Mopping up the labour shortage: the privatisation of waste management and gendered work reorganisation

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ABSTRACT
This article explores the gendered nature of work reorganisation in Johannesburg’s privatised Pikitup waste management utility. It establishes that feminist analysis requires an exploration of the historical production of gendered and racialised divisions of labour, the continuities and disjunctures that arise with privatisation, the consequences for men and women workers in the workplace and the home and the effects of men’s gendered privileges. Because Pikitup’s profit-generating strategy mapped onto a pre-existing gender division of labour, the all-male collection workforce was shielded from labour shortages that resulted in dramatic forms of work reorganisation in the feminised street cleaning sector. Male street cleaning workers experienced the same objective transformations in work organisation as their female counterparts. However, they were less compromised due to the power associated with their masculinity in both the workplace and the home, belying any notion of convergence of experience between male and female workers.

Introduction
States in both advanced capitalist and developing countries are privatising their functions as part of neo-liberal restructuring. Research in a range of countries analyses the gendered implications of the resulting restructuring of formerly public sector work (Geldstein, 1997; Stinson, 2004). However, research on the gendered nature of workplace reorganisation resulting from ‘market hegemony’ (Kenny, 2005) in the South African private sector (Kenny, 2005; Mosoetsa, 2005; van der Westhuizen, 2005) has not been complemented by feminist research focusing on privatised public sector workplaces. Moreover, although much of the international literature on privatisation demonstrates pernicious effects for women workers, aside from important exceptions (such as Halford, 2003), it typically does not juxtapose this to the experiences of male workers, nor does it theorise why it is the case that women workers are particularly affected by workplace reorganisation resulting from privatisation.
This article seeks to address some of these silences and gaps by exploring the
gendered nature and effects of workplace reorganisation resulting from the privatisation
of waste management services in Johannesburg. It is based on an in-depth case study
of the privatised Pikitup waste management utility. The article reveals a complex
relationship between privatisation, the racialised gendering of work, and the gendered
nature and implications of work reorganisation. It argues that Pikitup’s focus on profit
generation induced it to gender the sector itself by creating a dualistic hierarchy in
which revenue-generating waste collection services were prioritised over non-revenue-
generating collective public goods (primarily street cleaning).

Resources dedicated to masculinised revenue-generating activities were protected
(and in some cases increased) whilst expenditure on non-revenue-generating
feminised activities was substantially reduced. In particular, the street cleaning
section was forced to absorb a massive cost-saving workforce reduction. This led
to dramatic forms of work reorganisation that compromised workers’ autonomy,
control over their work, sense of solidarity and safety. Pikitup’s workforce was almost
exclusively African\(^1\) and the gender division of labour was rooted in particular
constructions of African masculinity and femininity. As virtually all women were
ghettoised within street cleaning, African women workers experienced a general
deterioration in their working conditions. The overlapping of a strong gender
division of labour and a gendering of the sector thus meant that African women were
particularly affected by privatisation. However, 40 per cent of male workers were
also located in the street cleaning section. Although these African men experienced
many of the same objective transformations in work organisation as their female
counterparts, they were affected differently because of the power associated with their
masculinity at work and in the home.

This article is divided into seven sections. The first section presents the context
within which waste management was privatised. The second section analyses
Pikitup’s corporate strategy. The third section demonstrates how this strategy
mapped onto a pre-existing racialised, gender division of labour. The fourth section
elaborates on the centrality of labour cuts in the feminised, non-revenue-generating
sectors to Pikitup’s efforts to generate a profit. The fifth section explores the gendered
implications of the ensuing reorganisation of work. The sixth section analyses the
gender-differentiated experience of street cleaning workers in both the workplace and
the home. The conclusion draws out insights of relevance to the study of gender and
work reorganisation in other contexts.

\(^1\) This article is based on an in-depth case study of the Pikitup waste management utility conducted
during 2002 and 2003. At that time Pikitup directly employed 3,513 staff, and had eleven depots, five landfill
sites and one incinerator (www.pikitup.co.za). Five depots were selected for inclusion in the study largely based
on demographic considerations (Selby, Norwood, Zondi, Avalon, Marlboro). Field work included a stratified
random sample survey of 364 workers (169 female and 195 male) employed in the five depots (with an error
rate of 5% at the 95% confidence interval), sixteen focus groups with workers (stratified by depot, gender and
employment status) and thirty-eight individual interviews with Pikitup managers, shop stewards and trade
union representatives.

\(^2\) The terms ‘African’, ‘Indian’, ‘coloured’ and ‘white’ were used to classify racial groups during apartheid
and are still employed in post-apartheid legislation and policies (such as in the implementation of the Employment
Equity Act) which seek to redress apartheid inequalities. ‘African’ refers to people indigenous to Africa, ‘Indian’ to
people of Asian descent, ‘coloured’ to people of mixed race and ‘white’ to people of European descent.
iGoli 2002 and the privatisation of waste management

The privatisation of municipal waste management services in Johannesburg was carried out as part of a broader local government restructuring process known as iGoli 2002. Developed in 1999, iGoli 2002 was unilaterally implemented by the City Council in January 2001 despite strike action by the two major municipal unions who opposed the plan.

iGoli 2002 was overtly based on implanting market logic into the heart of the municipality and fundamentally reconceptualising the city as a business (GJMC, 1999a:6). Only a minimal number of council functions were identified as being ‘core administration’ and kept within the council. The core administration itself was divided into a central administration that played the client role and eleven regional administrations that played the contractor role. A number of Council departments, such as the gas works, were classified as non-core and sold to the private sector. The remainder were transformed into utilities, agencies or corporatised entities (UACs). The UACs are all private companies in which the city is the sole shareholder. They are differentiated from one another on the basis of their perceived profitability, with utilities deemed most capable of generating a profit (GJMC, 1999a:20).

Waste management was targeted for transformation into a utility and on January 1, 2001 the existing municipal waste management departments were dissolved and merged to form Pikitup Pty Ltd. Pikitup is the largest private waste management company in Africa (www.pikitup.co.za). A Service Delivery Agreement between Pikitup and the Central Administration contracted Pikitup to fulfil the Council’s constitutional and legislative waste management responsibilities.3

Gendering the sector - the prioritisation of revenue-generating activities

As noted, utilities were distinguished from agencies and corporatised entities by their perceived ability to generate profit. Water, electricity and waste services were each transformed into utility companies. Water and electricity are both delivered to individual consumers who can be charged per unit consumed. Within the waste management sector consumers can be billed for waste collection services that are provided to individual households and institutions. However, Pikitup was also required to deliver collective public goods, such as street cleaning, for which individual customers cannot be charged. As a result it was much more difficult to generate a profit in waste management than in water and electricity. Whilst Silva argues that this should have disqualified waste from being transformed into a utility (Silva, 1999:2-3), the city argued that ‘the establishment of a utility will encourage a business focus, and increase incentives for cost-efficiency and innovation’ (GJMC, 1999b:19). Accordingly the Pikitup Mission Statement includes commitments to ‘provide acceptable returns to our shareholders’ and to ‘balance good service delivery with financial returns’ (Pikitup, 2001:12).

3 It should be noted that commercial waste management services such as the disposal of medical waste and the collection of bulk waste are not the responsibility of local government and hence are open to competition with the private sector.
Pikitup therefore adopted a sophisticated strategy aimed at minimising expenditure on non-revenue-generating activities and maximising income and profits from revenue-generating activities for which user fees could be charged (see Table 1).

Table 1 - Revenue-generating and non-revenue-generating activities of Pikitup

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Revenue-generating</th>
<th>Non-revenue-generating</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Round collected refuse (RCR – collection from households and institutions, collected weekly)</td>
<td>Street cleaning (street sweeping, litter picking, cleaning of illegal dumping sites, lane flushing)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bulk services</td>
<td>Garden sites</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dailies (daily collection from restaurants, supermarkets and other establishments that generate large quantities of organic waste).</td>
<td>Community education and participation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hazardous waste and medical waste</td>
<td>Waste minimisation and recycling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special waste</td>
<td>Composting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carcasses (from private dwellings)</td>
<td>Carcasses (street reserve)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special events</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disposal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incineration</td>
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</table>

Source: Pikitup, 2001:15

If gender is understood as the construction of dualistic hierarchies in which the powerful/privileged half is associated with masculinity and the weak/devalued half with femininity, it can be argued that the utility’s corporate strategy resulted in a gendering of the sector itself, in which masculinised revenue-generating activities were valued over feminised non-revenue-generating activities. As will be argued below, this abstract gendering of the sector gained potency due to its mapping onto a strong pre-existing gender division of labour within the workforce.

Service hierarchies and the gender division of labour

Persaud argues that the forging of a labour force is intimately bound up with constructions of race, ethnicity and gender. According to Persaud:
Race and ethnicity, combined with gender…are generative of the patterns of labor practices, that is to say, who does what, where, the rewards that appertain, and the worth conferred on particular kinds of labor activity. These patterns are direct descendants of various forms of racialized labor regimes, colonial practices, and practices of sovereignty (Persaud, 2003:129-130).

This is particularly true of the historical construction and transformation of the waste management labour force in Johannesburg.

The racialising and gendering of jobs is historically and socially constructed and therefore not static. What is the norm and assumed as ‘natural’ in one period can differ markedly from preceding eras. Indeed, the composition of the waste management labour force in Johannesburg has evolved and changed over time. During apartheid the local government workforce was initially comprised of African contract migrant workers. Workers in different municipal sections were drawn from different ethnic groups, in a process whereby ethnicity was linked with particular jobs as a result of the ways in which both were socially produced. Waste management workers in Johannesburg were overwhelmingly drawn from the amaBhaca group in the Transkei and were exclusively male. After the first major strike by municipal workers in Johannesburg, significant numbers of contract migrant workers in all departments were dismissed and deported back to their respective homelands. They were replaced by African male workers from other homelands as well as from Johannesburg, thus breaking down the ethnic exclusivity in the allocation of jobs in different departments (Interview, Mashishi, 11/09/2003; Interview, Mawbey, 03/05/2004).

The formal demise of influx control in 1986 further facilitated the shift towards the utilisation of locally based African workers in waste and other municipal sectors. The weakening of the migrant labour system also opened the door for African women to be employed in waste management. By this time, as a result of unionisation and collective action, African male workers had won the rights and benefits associated with permanent employment. However, the African women were hired as casual workers. Because they worked on a continual basis, over time they were included on the payroll and secured some minimal rights. In recognition of their long-term status they were referred to by the somewhat bizarre term ‘permanent casual’, which differentiated them from the ‘casual casuals’ who were hired on a daily or short-term basis.

Since the 1980s, feminist scholarship has shown how ideological constructions of the supposedly natural characteristics of ‘third world’ and ‘racial-ethnic’ women have dialectically shaped and been shaped by the kinds of jobs for which they are hired (Fernández-Kelly, 1983; Mies, 1986; Mohanty, 1997; Nakano Glenn, 1991; Salzinger,

4 Although by the late 1980s waste management workers were drawn from a range of ethnic groups, community members continued to refer to them as amaBhaca (and indeed continue to do so), as a form of insult and derision. This was because of the ways in which constructions of ethnicity had become intimately bound up with the work that the amaBhaca had long performed. This mutually reinforcing devaluing of ethnicity and occupation has been noted in the waste management sector in other countries. For example, Beall notes that in South Asian cities people who work with waste are stigmatised because of the nature of the work that they do. Their low status is further entrenched by the belief that certain groups are born to work with waste due to their caste, tribal origin or ancestral occupation (Bell, 1997:74).

5 During apartheid the state denied Africans citizenship of South Africa and made them citizens of nominally self-governing, ethnically-based homelands that were, in reality, an integral part of the South African state.
Similarly, African women’s entry into Johannesburg’s waste management sector was brokered on highly gendered and racialised terms linked to their presumed role in the household. One veteran explained how African women entered street cleaning:

_They said they’re hiring ladies for street cleaning because the ladies can clean the house, they can look after the kids, do the washing, cleaning and everything. Now the men, they didn’t sweep properly._ (Interview, IMATU Selby Shop stewards, 29/01/2003)

Another African woman worker noted that women were hired for street cleaning because ‘the job of picking up litter is just the same as domestic work’ (Focus Group, Avalon Women Pikitup Workers, 12/12/2002).

As a result of the association between sweeping and African women’s ‘natural talents’ cultivated within the private sphere, they were hired exclusively to work in street cleaning. Jenson notes that jobs themselves and the value attached to them are gendered. She argues that jobs ‘exist in social relations of hierarchy reproducing unequal relations of gender power’ (Jenson, 1989:148). The entry of African women into street cleaning therefore resulted in a re-gendering of this section of the waste management sector and the forging of a clear association with femininity. The rest of the sector continued to be cast as masculine, although due to pejorative assessments of waste and those who collect it as well as the continuation of derogatory ethnic stereotyping of waste workers, it was still derided and looked down upon by those external to the sector.

Whilst it is often assumed that privatisation has only negative gender effects, it is important to note that the African women workers employed by Pikitup made some significant gains in the _iGoli 2002_ process. Just prior to _iGoli 2002_ the South African Municipal Workers’ Union (SAMWU) had begun to organise the ‘permanent casuals’. During negotiations, it secured agreement from the council that the existing ‘permanent casuals’ would all be transferred to the new UACs and made permanent workers (although Pikitup unilaterally decided to phase this in over a three year period)\(^6\). None of the parties interviewed had conducted a gender analysis of the implications of this decision. However, survey data revealed that 62 per cent of women in Pikitup versus only 39 per cent of men were ‘permanent casuals’. Although not intended as a means to rectify gender inequality in the labour force, this decision clearly improved the situation of women workers\(^7\).

Despite this not insignificant gain, the racialised and gendered nature of the workforce forged during apartheid persisted in the Pikitup era. In the five depots surveyed, 99 per cent of Pikitup employees were African, and the remaining one per cent were coloured; 40 per cent of workers were women. African women had not

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\(^6\) However, Pikitup also increased the subcontracting of street cleaning work. As a result, whilst the status of women currently employed by the utility improved, new women entering the sector in the employ of these subcontracted companies received far lower wages and benefits. See Samson (2004) for further details of the gender implications of outsourcing.

\(^7\) Due to problems in maintaining levels of service provision with few workers, DSOs later saved on wage costs by increasing the utilisation of part-time and seasonal workers who qualified for fewer benefits (Patterson and Pinch, 1995).
broken out of the feminised street cleaning ghetto and 93% of women were employed in street cleaning.

Table 2: distribution of employment by gender at Pikitup

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Street cleaning</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collection</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depot</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Pikitup

Virtually no women were employed in collection. In keeping with the historical association of men with skills and technology (Jenson, 1989), in Pikitup men were linked with machinery and strength. There was a tremendous taboo precluding virtually any formal association between women and trucks. Within the entire survey population there was not a single woman operator. There were only four women drivers, one of whom was a messenger and three of whom drove street cleaning trucks. No women drove the larger vehicles used for collection. Women workers were clear that their exclusion from these positions was based purely on gender discrimination:

*A compactor is operated by someone special and the driver is just sitting. Woman can also do that but it's just that they do not want us. They do not want us to do those things done by men. That thing is very simple* (Focus Group, Avalon Women Pikitup Workers, 12/12/2002).

The hierarchy between revenue-generating collection services and non-revenue-generating street cleaning services therefore mapped directly onto the gender division of labour and virtually all women were employed in the devalued, feminised street cleaning sector. As the remainder of this article will establish via an exploration of Pikitup’s strategy to reduce the workforce, because these two hierarchies overlapped, Pikitup’s market-oriented corporate strategy had highly gendered impacts on the already racialised and gendered waste management labour force.

**Reducing the workforce by stealth – capitalising on attrition**

Waste management in South Africa is very labour intensive. In 2002-2003 salaries and allowances amounted to R208,915,000, or 45 per cent of Pikitup’s total annual budget (Pikitup, 2002:35). It was therefore imperative for Pikitup to reduce its wage bill in order to minimise budgetary shortfalls and eventually make a profit. A common method for reducing wages in privatised public services is to reduce the size of the workforce. During the aborted negotiations on *iGoli 2002* the Council had made a commitment that no jobs would be lost within the first three years of the plan and Pikitup was prohibited from retrenching workers during this period. However, it retained a moratorium on hiring new workers, which had been instituted by the Council during the 1997 financial crisis, that precipitated *iGoli 2002*, and natural attrition rapidly
depleted Pikitup’s labour force. In its business plans the company explicitly identified this as an important way to reduce expenditure on wages (Pikitup, 2002:36).

**Shortage of general workers**

As a result of natural attrition, all depots experienced workforce reductions. Table 3 details the workforce shortage in each of the five depots surveyed, which ranged from 10.5 per cent to 29.9 per cent.\(^8\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Depot</th>
<th>No of workers short</th>
<th>% of Pikitup depot workforce</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Zondi</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>11.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selby</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>12.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marlboro</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>29.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norwood</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>10.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avalon</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>18.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Compiled by the author based on information provided by Depot Management

The workforce cuts were not distributed equally across all sections. In promotional literature advertising its commercial services, Pikitup boldly declared that ‘[w]e have a new Commercial Services Contract team ready to discuss and analyse your specific needs right now. And teams of workers ready to respond’ (Pikitup, undated a:5). The prioritisation of revenue-generating collection services shielded collection from the labour shortage. Management in all five depots sustained workforce levels in collection by filling vacancies with male street cleaning workers. Zondi Depot was the only one that cited a shortage of workers in revenue-generating collection activities. However, it addressed the shortfall by utilising labour brokers. In all of the other depots the permanent redeployment of men from street cleaning to compensate for attrition in collection meant that street cleaning had to absorb virtually the entire staff shortfall.

Pikitup also suffered from high levels of absenteeism, which many managers attributed to the prevalence of HIV/AIDS amongst the workforce. Whilst in the past management had hired ‘casual casuals’ to replace absent collection workers, depot management now developed three different strategies to ensure a full daily workforce complement in collection. Firstly, both Selby and Zondi Depots permanently allocated extra workers to collection so that when workers were absent the teams could still complete their rounds. Secondly, each depot made limited use of labour brokers to provide male workers to replace absent loaders. Thirdly, the most commonly employed strategy was *ad hoc* redeployment of male street cleaning workers. As a manager from Selby Depot explained:

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\(^8\) This table is based on information provided by depot management. In interviews, management, shop stewards and workers frequently referred to recent declines in the workforce almost equivalent to the total number of the workforce shortage provided by management. It is therefore likely that the shortage was in fact even higher than the figures in Table 3 would suggest.
If we are short of staff we shift staff to [collection] as it is the only income generating area. Street sweeping is a social service, and people don’t pay for it. (Interview, Selby Operations Management, 04/06/2004)

The strategy of reducing employment in non-revenue-generating public services further entrenched the prioritisation of collection over the feminised street cleaning section. Due to the strong gender division of labour in the sector, only men were redeployed from non-revenue-generating to revenue-generating activities and suffered from the insecurity and exploitation related to such permanent or temporary redeployment. However, as the next section will demonstrate, the impacts were felt indirectly by others too: as a result of the labour shortage, women workers and the men who worked with them in street cleaning were subjected to dramatic forms of work reorganisation.

**Work reorganisation in street cleaning**

The shortage of street cleaning workers necessitated far-reaching changes in work organisation with profound effects on the (predominantly female) workforce.

Management adopted three strategies to cope with the reduction of the street cleaning workforce: reducing the number of workers in a particular area, introducing ‘gang sweeping’, and adopting a more flexible approach to the daily deployment of workers.

**Working in isolation**

Prior to privatisation, each street cleaning worker was assigned a particular set of streets that s/he was responsible for cleaning on a weekly (or sometimes daily) basis. In some depots the streets were measured in order to ensure that each worker was given the same length of street (Focus Group, Marlboro Women Pikitup Workers, 03/12/2002). Street cleaners rarely worked alone and typically there would be at least one worker on each side of the road. In this way the workers could assist and protect each other (Focus Group, Avalon Women Workers, 12/12/2002). Barchiesi (2001) notes that erosion of this system began in the final years of municipal delivery when some street cleaning workers were forced to sweep both sides of the street. However, with Pikitup this situation was exacerbated as a result of the severity of the labour shortage.

Due to high levels of natural attrition, in Pikitup each worker was forced to do the work of many. As one street cleaner noted:

…right now with Pikitup there are people who have died, there are people who went on pension and there are people who resigned. They do not replace those people. You are taken to fill up the space, which was done by six people. A job of six people is now done by one person. So the work is killing us here.

(Focus Group, Norwood Women Pikitup Workers, 02/12/2002)

Especially for workers servicing the working class townships, the workforce reduction was exacerbated by the ever-increasing size of the area to be serviced (Focus Group, Zondi Women Pikitup Workers, 28/11/2002).

Workers reported that many of them were required to work alone. They argued that this made it impossible for them to complete their work, increasing their stress and strain and compromising the quality of the service delivered. Due to the fact that street cleaning workers work outdoors, labouring alone created additional safety problems.
Numerous workers reported being victims of crime. Most commonly tsotsis (gangsters) would steal their plastic bags and personal possessions. Given the high levels of rape and sexual assault in Johannesburg it was particularly dangerous for women to work alone. Women workers’ fear was palpable:

*You work alone in a street, and you have to sweep a street on both sides. And during lunch time they do not allow you to go and sit with the other employee, you have to be alone. What if I get raped while I am alone? So if I try to insist on sitting with the other worker in the other street, the supervisor refuses. He says that it’s [against company policy]. If I get injured it’s my problem and my children’s alone.* (Focus Group, Selby Women Workers, 27/11/2002)

Workers were also concerned that if they fell ill whilst working alone there would be no one to assist them. Indeed, a woman worker from Zondi depot had lain injured in the streets for many hours until someone came to help her (Focus Group, Zondi Women Pikitup Workers, 28/11/2002).

Resigned to the fact that they would continue to work alone, the workers argued that the Council and Pikitup should introduce them to the community and request residents to help them if they required assistance (Zondi Women Pikitup Workers, Focus Group, 28/11/2002). Whilst this had not been done, Zondi Depot management sometimes capitalised on workers’ pre-existing social relations by deploying them to the areas where they lived, which seemed to have decreased their vulnerability slightly (Focus Group, Zondi Women Pikitup Workers, 28/11/2002). Ironically, as will be noted below, in the other depots changes in workplace organisation ruptured relations between workers and the communities that they served, further exacerbating safety problems.

**Gang sweeping and the flexible deployment of workers**

With a reduced number of workers the only way to clean all areas was to take a flexible approach to the deployment of workers. In most of the depots the shift to a more flexible deployment of labour was linked to the adoption of the gang sweeping system in which teams of variable sizes were deployed on a daily basis to clean selected areas. When they finished they would be moved to a new area.

The shift towards a more flexible deployment of the workforce is often justified by arguments that assert an increasing need for flexibility in post-Fordist production systems and claim that this is empowering for workers. However, Pikitup managers were explicit in insisting that the primary catalysts for flexibilisation were cost-saving reductions in the labour force and the desire to increase managerial control and surveillance of workers. For example, one street cleaning supervisor explained that, because of workforce reductions, if he continued to assign each worker to specific streets he would only be able to clean 40 out of the 130 streets in his area (Interview, IMATU Selby Shopstewards, 29/01/2003).

Some managers argued that the constant shifting of workers was useful because ‘familiarity breeds contempt’ and gang sweeping made it easier to control workers and

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9 A wide body of literature has challenged the supposedly progressive nature of ‘post-Fordist’ work organisation. Changes in work organisation that result in multi-tasking, as opposed to multi-skilling, force workers to increase surveillance of one another, and do not reap real benefits for workers. A number of authors argue that current trends should more appropriately be cast as neo-Fordism as opposed to post-Fordism, in order to highlight continuities with the Fordist era (for more on these debates see Wood, 1989).
their productivity. Management further argued that in the old system streets were cleaned even if they were not dirty and gang sweeping therefore created greater efficiencies (Interview, Wilson, 14/01/2003).

However, workers argued that gang sweeping and flexible deployment greatly reduced the quality of the service delivered. The first problem was that streets were not cleaned on a regular basis and workers were only deployed when an area was in great need (Focus Group, Norwood Men Pikitup Workers, 04/12/2002). Workers were despondent because, as a result of flexible deployment and gang sweeping, it was impossible to keep the city clean and that, ‘with that system we do not see progress’ (Focus Group, Norwood Women Pikitup Workers, 02/12/2002).

The second problem related to the ways in which gang sweeping and flexible deployment decreased many workers’ sense of accountability and pride in their work. When workers were moved to different areas each day it was difficult for the supervisor to hold any particular worker responsible for poor quality:

*The system that you work here today and tomorrow you work there does not make the place clean. During the municipality you had your own streets so you worked hard because you knew that if the place is dirty they are going to ask me…Having your own streets to work in was better because complaints come directly to you. So if you work here and there it’s a problem.* (Focus Group, Norwood Women Pikitup Workers, 02/12/2002)

The workers noted that by decreasing the number of workers and re-organising work, ‘[t]hey [management] are causing tension amongst us workers’ (Focus Group, Avalon Women Pikitup Workers, 12/12/2002).

The shift to gang sweeping also decreased the workers’ sense of control over their own work and made it more difficult for women workers to balance their paid work and their domestic responsibilities. One woman worker explained that in the past, if she needed to go to a meeting at her child’s school she could increase her pace of work and leave early. However, this was not possible with gang sweeping (Focus Group, Avalon Women Pikitup Workers, 12/12/2002).

In addition, flexible deployment and gang sweeping fractured the relationships that workers had cultivated over years with the people who lived and worked in the areas that they serviced. Numerous workers noted that this had negative implications for their safety because when they worked in new areas where people did not know them nobody would assist them if they were injured. In addition, community members were unlikely to let unknown workers onto their properties to use the toilet facilities. Given the lack of public toilets in Johannesburg this posed significant health and safety problems for workers (Focus Group, Norwood Women Pikitup Workers, 02/12/12).

**Gender and work reorganisation – the gender division of labour and the power of masculinity**

Because of the gender division of labour that ghettoised women in street cleaning, virtually all women workers at Pikitup were affected by the work reorganisation that resulted from the labour shortage. Since the majority of men worked in collection they were shielded from these transformations. Work reorganisation associated with
privatisation thus had gendered effects. It is, nevertheless, important to complicate the analysis by exploring the position of the not insignificant number of men working in the feminised street cleaning section.

Forty per cent of the men surveyed worked in street cleaning. A small number of these men worked as drivers and loaders on the street cleaning trucks. These men were largely unaffected by the changes in work organisation. However, the majority of men in street cleaning laboured beside women workers. Many of them had been shifted to street cleaning because they were deemed too old or sick to keep up with the pace of loading work in collection. They experienced the same objective changes in work organisation as the women. However, it is necessary to explore how the power associated with their masculinity resulted in different subjective experiences of these transformations.

Although working alone was also dangerous for male workers they were less vulnerable to attack by criminals and did not face the risk of gender-based sexual violence that so threatened women workers. Similarly, whilst ruptured relations with the community also compromised their access to toilet facilities, they were spared the challenges associated with menstruation. It was also far easier and more acceptable for a man to relieve himself in public. Whilst men could ‘use their backs to conceal their manhood’, one woman worker was actually arrested for public indecency for urinating in public (Focus Group, Norwood Women Pikitup Workers, 02/12/2002). As a result, male workers did not express the same need to limit their water intake and dehydrate themselves as their female counterparts.

Research on gender and work reorganisation in South African private sector companies has established the importance of examining effects within workers’ households (Kenny, 2005; Mosoetsa, 2005). This is particularly important in the case of privatisation because workers are also recipients of municipal services. In addition to the effects of increased stress and strain experienced at work on their family lives, the Pikitup workers were affected by the poor quality in street cleaning services in the areas where they lived.

Despite some limited campaigns by Pikitup, illegal dumping sites remained an uncontrolled presence throughout Johannesburg’s working class African townships. Women workers were particularly worried about the effects on the health and safety of children:

*Yesterday I found something I don’t like in a dump. I found that they threw away injections and condoms. And the children go to the dump and play there…. the children play with these condoms — they say they’re balloons. So that is filthy, and it’s bad for us because after work you have to go and clean that dump because the children will get injured. (Focus Group with Norwood Women Pikitup Workers, 2/12/2002)*

The majority of women workers (64.7 per cent), as opposed to 21 per cent of men workers, were the main person responsible for child care in their households. As a result, women workers were three times as likely as their male counterparts to bear the burden of caring for children affected by the problems associated with poor street cleaning.

Women workers therefore had a stronger compulsion to compensate for inadequate street cleaning services. As one woman worker noted, ‘[f]or the streets to be clean you
just need to wake up and sweep your yard and the street’ (Focus Group with Norwood Women Pikitup Workers, 2/12/2002). A deeply entrenched gender division of labour in the household meant that this task fell overwhelmingly onto women. Just over half (52.6 per cent) of women workers, compared with 20 per cent of men workers, surveyed bore primary responsibility for sweeping in their own households\(^\text{10}\). Other adult women below the age of pensioner were the largest group responsible for this task in households where the worker did not bear primary responsibility. Sweeping within the households of waste management workers was, therefore, a highly gendered activity.

Both men and women workers noted clearly-defined gender roles that precluded most men from sweeping in the private sphere. For many, these roles were cast as natural. As one woman worker said, ‘a woman has been created to clean’ (Focus Group, Selby Men and Women Night Shift Pikitup Workers, 04/12/2002). Similarly, a male worker noted, ‘[n]othing will change…Her job is hers and my job is mine. It can never change’ (Focus Group, Norwood Men Pikitup Workers, 04/12/2002).

Although they were living in urban areas, many workers based their arguments on culturally-defined gender roles in rural areas:

*In our homes a man is a man, especially in rural areas…Our jobs are not overlapping to an extent that he could help me…Even in a single day a man will never clean the house when you are home. The best thing when you are sick he would call a neighbour to come and see what to do because you are sick. Not that he would clean the house* (Focus Group, Zondi Women Pikitup Workers, 28/11/2002).

Women workers resoundingly rejected the idea that there was gender equity in their households. Noting the failure of South Africa’s constitutional and legislative commitments to gender equity to filter down into the home, one woman worker observed that, ‘there are instances where there is 50/50, but not like in homes. Like in parliament they say that women are equal to men and they do the same thing’ (Focus Group, Zondi Women Pikitup Workers, 28/11/2002).

The men who worked as sweepers felt that there was no contradiction between sweeping at work while refusing to do so at home. As one migrant male worker noted:

*You know what, in my culture a woman, even if she is a working woman, every day in the morning she must wake up, sweep the whole house, and the [yard] and after that she must cook. Again she must see to it that the bed is made up and the dishes are washed, etc. When I go home I go there to rest. When I am here I work and send her the money which she does not know where it comes from* (Focus Group, Norwood Men Pikitup Workers, 04/12/2002).

One of the male workers argued that, ‘I only work where I am getting paid. I will not be paid if I sweep in the house’ (Focus Group, Selby Men and Women Night Shift Pikitup Workers, 04/12/2002). Others averred that if they could get paid to sweep at home then they would consider taking on this task (Focus Group, Selby Men Pikitup Workers, 04/12/2002). Unlike their female counterparts, male workers were empowered to refuse to perform unpaid domestic labour. Despite the fact that women and men who worked

\(^{10}\) The relatively high percentage of men workers who reported that they were the main person responsible for sweeping was probably related to the large percentage of men who were migrant workers and lived alone; 22 per cent of Pikitup men lived alone compared to 7 per cent of Pikitup women.
in street cleaning were subjected to many of the same pressures in the workplace, women workers bore greater responsibility for waste management within the private sphere. As Bakker notes, this kind of inequality within the home belies the notion that there has been a real convergence between the experiences of men and women workers within the context of neoliberal labour market restructuring and the so-called ‘feminisation’ of labour’ (Bakker, 2003, 81).

Conclusions
Although Pikitup was precluded from retrenching workers, natural attrition ensured that there was a significant reduction in the labour force and Pikitup explicitly relied on the savings that accrued to its wage bill as a result. In keeping with its prioritisation of revenue-generating activities Pikitup forced the non-revenue-generating street cleaning section to mop up the labour shortage. Due to the convergence of the gender division of labour with the division between revenue and non-revenue-generating activities, the reduction in the street cleaning workforce had profoundly gendered implications. This occurred within the context of an already highly racialised division of labour in which virtually all Pikitup workers were African.

Privatisation deepened inequalities between the masculinised collection and feminised street cleaning sections. Because of the gender division of labour it also deepened inequalities between the majority of African men who were located in revenue-generating activities and African women who were ghettoised in non-revenue-generating activities, because it was the African women who were disproportionately affected by the workplace re-organisation. To a certain extent African men who worked in the feminised street cleaning section were positioned differently in these restructuring processes. Those who worked as drivers and loaders were not significantly affected by the changes in work organisation. Younger African men in street cleaning faced the strain associated with permanent and ad hoc redeployment to collection. However, for the most part, the African men in street cleaning faced the same objective transformations in work reorganisation as their female counterparts. Nevertheless, they were affected differently because of the power associated with their masculinity in the workplace and the home.

Whilst the findings of this article cannot be generalised to other privatised services in Johannesburg or other municipalities it has, perhaps, identified some methodological issues which could be of value in future studies. First, it is essential that studies include both male and female workers in their analysis. Only by doing so is it possible to discern commonalities and differences in their experiences and identify which changes are truly gender-specific. Secondly, it is important to locate the gendered effects of privatisation historically and identify areas of continuity as well as discontinuity. This helps in ascertaining the reasons why women and men workers are, or are not, affected differently. Thirdly, analyses of workplace reorganisation must explore the effects on workers in both the workplace and the home. This is particularly important in studies of privatisation because workers are also citizens, in this case residents who receive municipal services. Lastly, it is crucial that studies of gender and workplace reorganisation foreground the ways in which gendered privileges result
in different subjective experiences of the same objective transformations within the world of work. These concerns are not only academic. For, as Halford (2003) argues, understanding the subjective experiences of workplace reorganisation can assist in finding better ways for workers to organise and developing strategies to counter and contest privatisation.

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