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Dealing with Dirt and the Disorder of Development: Managing Rubbish in Urban Pakistan¹

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Abstract

This article unveils the different ‘thought worlds’ that inform urban development policy and the reality of urban service delivery in Faisalabad, Pakistan’s third largest city. Focusing on changing patterns of residential waste removal and based on ethnographic work among minority Christian street sweepers, the ‘little sub-worlds’ involved in domestic rubbish collection are explored, showing how these articulate with larger ‘thought worlds’ about dirt and disorder. The symbolic meanings of dirt across public and private spheres are examined alongside efforts by development practitioners and donors to impose generic policy solutions related to privatised delivery. Drawing on Mary Douglas’s insights about how ritual pollution or danger-beliefs serve generally to maintain social categories and hierarchies, the article nevertheless points to the historically contingent specificities of caste-like relations in urban Pakistan and how these have been constructed. It shows how under increasing competition for scarce jobs, entitlements associated with hereditary status-based occupations are once more appealed to and reconstructed by these vulnerable waste workers, shaping in the process urban service delivery and the relations that underpin it. The disjuncture born of diverse logics about dirt and disorder reveal an institutional multiplicity and messy social reality that sits uneasily with development as an ordering and unidirectional process.

Introduction

In *Purity and Danger* Mary Douglas argued that ‘dirt is essentially disorder’ and ‘matter out of place’ (Douglas, 1991:2-35).² Dirt that is tolerated in one setting is

¹ I am grateful to David Lewis and David Mosse, as well as two anonymous reviewers for their very helpful comments and suggestions on an earlier draft of this article.

abhorred in another, while both dirt and hygiene are largely socially constructed. Beginning with a study of comparative religions and their associated rituals of purity and impurity, her analysis extended towards trying to understand what at first she referred to as moral values and social rules and later came to refer to as ‘institutions’ (Douglas, 1987). Her principal concern was to make sense of how ritual pollution or danger-beliefs served to maintain social categories and distinctions. These she saw as being reinforced through the strict observance of boundaries between the inside world of what is known and safe and the outside world of danger and chaos. Douglas did not confine her analysis to ‘primitive’ worlds but argued that ‘modern’ ideas of dirt are also expressive of symbolic systems:

Our [modern] behaviour also carries symbolic meaning. The real difference is that we do not bring forward from one context to the next the same set of ever more powerful symbols: our experience is fragmented. Our rituals create a lot of little sub-worlds, unrelated. Their rituals create one single, symbolically consistent universe (Douglas, 1991:69).

This article invokes the ideas of Mary Douglas to make sense of the interlocking ‘little sub-worlds’ that make up the disposal and removal of domestic waste and how these articulate with larger ‘thought worlds’ about the management of dirt and disorder in development (Douglas, 1987:17). It examines both the intransigence and fragility of these sub-worlds worlds in their encounter with the ‘thought worlds’ of government departments and development agencies involved in urban service delivery. Drawing on ethnographic work conducted among municipal officials, supervisors, street sweepers in the city of Faisalabad,³ the idiosyncratic logics underpinning their activities and motivations are explored, showing how they utilised, subvert and contradict the best laid plans of development policy makers and their seemingly orderly systems for managing ‘matter out of place’.

² *Purity and Danger* was first published in 1966, then again in 1984. References here are to the 1991 Routledge edition.

³ The research involved a household survey of domestic waste management practices across five areas of the city, ranging from poor to rich neighbourhoods. Ethnographic work was conducted among waste workers operating in two of these areas, one middle-income and one high-income neighbourhood. Repeat interviews and informal conversations were conducted among a sub-sample of householders living in each of the two areas.

Development, Sanitation and Solid Waste Management

The history of donor country engagement with urban services in the cities of developing countries can be traced back to the British sanitation movement led by the 19th century campaigner, Edwin Chadwick. He sought to reduce the financial burden of infectious diseases and destitution by reforming ‘the “ragged” classes’ and ‘educating them into the role of civically hygienic citizens’ (Porter, 1994:9). Chadwick’s technical approach to the provision of clean water and solid sewers was under-girded by a firm moral agenda in which dirt was associated not only with disease but with depravity (Hamlin, 1998:160-2). His solution was to address the problem as much by legislation, education and other social strategies as by public works and as demonstrated below, Victorian ideas about the moral imperative of cleanliness travelled well. Vijay Prashad has pointed to colonialism’s simultaneous appreciation of the fastidiousness of South Asian hygiene habits and abhorrence of the disease and dirt to which they were a response. This ambivalence to the ‘social body’ of colonial India, he has characterized as ‘native dirt and imperial ordure’ (Prashad, 1995:1).

Moreover, the great Victorian sanitation movement lives on today in the discourse of development, particularly in relation to urban infrastructure and services, which remain important targets in the human development element of many aid budgets today. While the language of science has replaced the tones of moral panic and high dudgeon, urban development policy is still infused with a similar logic. This can be seen, for example, in calls for mobilization around or investment in urban sanitation and hygiene programmes. These are often most Chadwickian in tone in relation to the management and disposal of solid waste.⁴ For instance, a recent study commissioned by the UK’s Department for International Development (DFID) states:

Good solid waste management is an important component of a strategy for improving environmental health. In addition to the obvious aesthetic

⁴ The technical term ‘solid waste’ serves to sanitise the subject matter, which is not just recyclables such as paper, glass and plastics but more rank elements like faeces, blood, putrefying vegetable remains and decomposing flesh. This organic waste has no value. Nobody likes it, nobody wants it and it is difficult to dispose of in the dense, steaming and under-resourced cities of South Asia (Flintoff, 1984).

importance of a garbage-free living environment, uncollected solid waste rapidly putrefies in tropical climates, creating noxious smells, giving rise to polluting leachates, providing breeding areas for countless flies and, in the wet season, mosquitoes. Vermin also abound. A particularly important indirect effect is the blocking of drains, which causes local flooding with its associated environmental health risks and economic disbenefits (Snel and Ali, 1999:5).

Unlike smoke, carbon emissions and even sewage, until it is removed garbage remains a visible reminder of what we produce and consume. Thus as well as being a public health concern, it is also linked to aesthetics, which in turn feeds into issues of class.

Realising that improved solid waste management (SWM) is about more than simply getting the technology right, development cooperation has moved away from the export of high-tech designs, such as compactor trucks, towards the development of locally manufactured and appropriate technology.⁵ In terms of the organisation of waste collection, there has also been a global shift away from purely public sector service delivery, towards increased private involvement in waste management. In developing country contexts integrated SWM has mainly been focused on introducing private contractors in waste collection and integrating informal recycling into the overall waste management system (Cointreau, 1987). Another significant focus has been on involving household members in neighbourhood level waste management. The latter, dubbed community waste management either holds householders responsible for some element of neighbourhood cleanliness or encourages community-based organisations to become contractors of waste collection services (Moningka, 2000; Muñoz and Lapid, 1997; UNDP, 1993; Van de Klundert and Lardinois, 1995).

Social Relations and Waste Management in South Asia

This article explores why generic solutions to problems of SWM that are predicated on private involvement – contracting out services to large-scale private operators and involving communities in neighbourhood level waste collection schemes – invariably

⁵ In Faisalabad, for example, support has been for tractor-trailers for which parts are available locally, while new handcarts and donkey carts were designed for use by municipal sweepers, which were both larger in capacity and easier to manoeuvre along the narrow streets and lanes of the city's residential areas (Beall, 1997a; Rouse and Ali, 2002).

run into trouble in the context of South Asia. Here social relations intersect with the management of waste in a very particular way. All over the world waste workers are stigmatised and are likely to be from marginalised groups such as ethnic or religious minorities or rural migrants. The low social status of people dealing with rubbish is compounded in South Asia by the association of this work with caste. Following Mary Douglas, Dipesh Chakrabarty argues that household dirt creates a symbolic enclosure for the purpose of protecting 'the inside' from disorder, while 'the outside', where one meets strangers, can be 'rubbished' (Chakrabarty, 1991:17). Forming a bridge between the inside and outside worlds are particular categories of people who are deemed to be ritually polluted and born to work with dirt (Searle-Chatterjee, 1979).

In Pakistan, although the existence of caste is often denied on the grounds that Islam is ultimately inclusive, caste-like relations continue to operate. They do so in terms of a hierarchy of *quom* or *biradari*⁶ and as a result of adherence on the part of many to ancestral occupations. This applies unequivocally to the management of waste in Faisalabad, the third largest city in Pakistan and located close to Lahore in Punjab Province.⁷ Here waste work is primarily undertaken by three hereditary occupational status groups of Hindu or animist origin. Two are associated with waste picking and recycling. They fall under the generic category *Pakhiwas*, a nomenclature that embraces all the indigenous nomadic tribes of the Punjab, and groups that in India would be classified as 'scheduled tribes'. The third group are sanitary workers, known as 'sweepers' and they derive from a village-based Hindu *quom* from Punjab, which in the parlance of contemporary India would be categorised as 'scheduled caste'. Known as *Chuhras*, they are considered to be ritually polluted or unclean, the egalitarian values of Islam notwithstanding and despite converting to Christianity *en masse* under the British in the late 19th Century (Pickett, 1933; Streefland, 1979).⁸ Traditionally they were agricultural labourers but through successive waves of rural-urban migration, they came to dominate

⁶ The term *quom* which can mean tribe, sect, race, breed, a people or nation is also associated with a shared ancestral occupation (Ahmad, 1977; Barth, 1960). *Biraderi* derives from the Persian word *baradar* and literally means brotherhood. In the strict sense it refers to a group of people related by blood, usually common patrilineal kinship ties and living as a socio-economic unit. In the broad sense it can include any type of brotherhood based on shared mutuality (Yusef, 1980).

⁷ First a British agricultural town, Faisalabad gained a reputation as the 'Manchester of Pakistan' on the back of a successful textile industry. Now with a population of around two million people, its rapid growth over the last half century has strained the city's infrastructure and services (Beall, 1997a).

⁸ Today they continue to form part of the small Christian minority in Pakistan, which is 97% Muslim.

the lower echelons of municipal sanitary work in Karachi and all the major cities of the Punjab (Streefland, 1979).

There is a school of thought deriving from comparative method – an approach shared by Mary Douglas – which argues that virtually all of the norms, values and practices associated with caste can be found in other societies (Berreman, 1979).⁹ Indeed, classic caste-like characteristics can be found among the hereditary occupational status groups that characterise Pakistani society, overlain with very specific notions of ritual pollution associated with Islamic religious injunction (Ali, 2003; Barth, 1960; Beall, 1997a).¹⁰ As between high and low castes in India, considerable interdependence accompanies the social distance between Muslim householders and *Churha* sweepers, with the execution of impure tasks by the latter being necessary for the maintenance of purity by the former. Although it can be argued that social and occupational hierarchies in Pakistan are as likely to derive from feudal relationships and even more contemporary divisions of labour, the mutual but hierarchical interdependence which exists in relation to dirty work relates to a different, if related symbolic universe linked to notions of caste. Helpful though this recognition might be, the analyses on which it is based stand in danger of being essentialist.

Essentialist approaches to caste are most commonly associated with Louis Dumont's *Homo Hierarchicus*, first published in French in 1966 and translated into English in 1980. He saw hierarchy as the ruling principle of Indian society, as expressed in the opposition between pure and impure and the division of labour in Hindu society as going 'hand in hand with the permanent attribution to certain professions of a certain level of impurity' (Dumont, 1980:49). In reaction to this over-determined and static approach to caste, Nicholas Dirks mounts a constructivist argument, suggesting that:

... caste, as we know it today, is not in fact some unchanged survival of ancient India, not some single system that reflects a core civilizational value, not a basic

⁹ Quigley (1994:37) identifies caste-like characteristics as follows: social position acquired at birth; lineage-based kinship organisation; differentiation between noble lineages and others; group endogamy; ritual to structure social relations; ritual pollution, which stress the purity of women, nobility or priests; monarchical institutions; untouchability and scapegoatism.

¹⁰ For example, Muslims are entreated to guard themselves from impurity and to bathe if they become polluted, never praying without washing first. Islamic injunctions on purity state that 'If strong pollution falls into water, then it will also become strongly polluted' (Thanvi, 1991:73). This is significant for waste work, where 'strong pollution' cannot be contained, particularly work with 'wet' waste (contaminated waste that has come into contact with excreta and other sources of 'strong pollution').

expression of Indian tradition. Rather ... [it] is a modern phenomenon, that ... is, specifically, the product of an historical encounter between India and Western colonial rule. By this I do not mean to imply that it was simply invented by the too clever British But I *am* suggesting that it was under the British that “caste” became a single term capable of expressing, organizing, and above all “systematizing” India’s diverse forms of social identity, community, and organization (Dirks, 2001: 5).

There is certainly evidence that local government and municipal management under the British Raj (which of course embraced both present-day India and Pakistan) served to entrench and reinforce the social relations associated with caste. Whether the argument can be extended, as it is by Dirks, to suggest that caste was thoroughly reconfigured by ‘conscious design’ under colonial rule is moot (Dirks, 2001:249).

Writing on sanitation and sweepers in colonial Delhi, Vijay Prashad broadly concurs with a constructivist stance, arguing that:

... the logic of capital during colonial rule produced a municipal sanitation regime which relied upon the control over the labor of manual sweepers mediated through jobbers, overseers and contractors. Far from being the embodiment of “tradition”, the sweepers since colonial India bear on their bodies the marks of capital ... demonstrating the integral relation between the logic of capital and barbaric colonial rule (Prashad, 1995:1).

Moreover, on the basis of research on sweepers in Bombay under the Raj Jim Masselos has similarly argued that the British callously utilised caste in the interests of ‘the pragmatism of convenience, economy and efficiency’ and in a fashion that was far more exacting than that pertaining under the caste system as it existed in the rural areas:

Their nineteenth century entrapment did not derive from the structured world of overarching Hinduism although social division into castes aided that entrapment. It derived rather from an urban context and needs of urban government (Masselos, 1990:103).

Compelling though these arguments are, it is still necessary to explain the existence of caste before colonialism and the persistence of caste or caste-based attitudes in contemporary South Asia. Here the middle-ground position of Susan Bayly is helpful. Looking back, she has argued that ‘caste has for many centuries been a real and active part of Indian life’ (Bayly, 1999:3-4). Moreover, she insists that even if it was accorded greater importance and consolidated under colonial rule, even at this time Indians also helped shape ‘constructions’ of caste (Bayly, 1999:97). This is the position adopted here in relation to contemporary Faisalabad and the way in which the social relations associated with urban waste management have collided and colluded with development policy and practice in Pakistan.

Urban Development and Solid Waste Management in Faisalabad

In the early 1990s the Water and Sanitation Agency (WASA, 1993) acknowledged that the sewerage situation in Faisalabad was far below acceptable standards, having been designed for an area of 10 square kilometres. Physically, Faisalabad had by then experienced a fivefold expansion in the geographical size of the city, along with rapid population growth. This put the system under tremendous pressure such that Faisalabad became a city in sanitary crisis. A survey conducted by the Faisalabad Development Authority found that 50 per cent of households across the city reported having had at least one member suffer from a water and sanitation related disease in the previous year, with diarrhoea being the most frequently contracted disease (FDA, 1994). This was at a time when the water supply was deemed to be profoundly unsafe, with 80 per cent of areas not conforming to WHO standards (SEBCON 1991:13). Research reported on a decade later suggested that things had improved only marginally and that ‘two-thirds of Faisalabad’s two million people live in areas with little or no official provision for services’ (Alimuddin *et al*, 2001:1).¹¹

Considerable institutional constraints affect urban management in Faisalabad. There is ambiguity between some of the functions of the Faisalabad Municipal Corporation (FMC) and the Faisalabad Development Authority (FDA) regarding their respective responsibilities and boundaries. Although the FMC is the older and more established

¹¹ Although most focus is placed on water supply and sanitation provision, it is increasingly recognised that there is a close relationship between water contamination and poor solid waste disposal, which leads to blocked and stagnant drains and water pollution if dumped in lowland areas.

body, the FDA is the most important in terms of environmental infrastructure. Thus the FDA is accountable for water, drainage and sanitation, while the weaker FMC is responsible for SWM, itself considered as the Cinderella of urban services. In response to this situation, Faisalabad has been the focus of a number of multilateral, bilateral and NGO urban development projects, some of which have included engagement with the FMC on issues of SWM. The World Bank, for example, has systematically pushed the downsizing of municipal payrolls in respect of solid waste services. The issues from their perspective are clearly illustrated in this excerpt from one of their strategy documents for Pakistan:

Solid waste managers ... are burdened with unproductive and undisciplined operational staff. They are not free to terminate employment, except in extreme cases and through burdensome procedures. Since the labour supply comes largely from a small Christian minority, labour unions representing solid waste workers are strong and able to resist efforts to increase work loads Hiring, however, has been frozen in many cities and reduction through natural attrition is slowly occurring (World Bank, 1996:5).

This statement reveals engagement only with the most visible and public face of SWM in Faisalabad, displaying chronic oversight of much of the private and informal world of waste collection described below. The Faisalabad Area Upgrading Project (FAUP), which was started by the British and later taken over by Pakistan, paid more attention to some of the informal dynamics associated with waste management. However, this was primarily confined to addressing the role of waste pickers in recycling, leading, for example, to the establishment of a flexi-time school for the children of *Changars*, a group associated with scavenging in Faisalabad. While constituting an important advance in recognising the social relations underpinning SWM in Pakistan, initially the project failed completely to identify the informal dynamics of waste collection, operating within and alongside the formal services provided by the FMC (ODA, 1994).

The formal organisation of SWM in Faisalabad is a function of the FMC's Department of Health and the ultimate responsibility of two Chief Medical Officers of Health (CMOHs) who jointly head the Department. Below them are 12 chief sanitary inspectors and 29 sanitary inspectors. Secondary collection, which involves the

transport of waste by large trucks and tractor-trailers from transfer points dotted around the city to a final disposal site on the outskirts, is centrally organised and falls directly under the CMOHs and the Chief Sanitary Inspectors. Primary collection, which involves the removal of street level waste to local transfer points, is by contrast highly decentralised. Primary collection is the responsibility of the sanitary inspectors, each of whom controls an area embracing several wards and is responsible for supervising the sanitary workers employed by the FMC. There are about 2,500 sanitary workers or sweepers. They are on the lowest grade for FMC employees but enjoy job security and benefits, such as a lump sum at retirement and a pension after 25 years service, making sanitary work highly prized if stigmatised employment.

In theory, sanitary workers are assigned to wards in rough proportion to the number of people living there. However, there are deviations and workers might be taken from their usual beats and sent to parts of the city where a visiting dignitary is attending, or to clear silt from blocked drains and fill potholes on main roads during the monsoon season. The first arena in which informal arrangements begin to kick in is that services are less likely to be disrupted through the redeployment of workers in high-income areas or in areas where there is a strong councillor.¹² Thus, low-income residents and those who are poorly represented are more likely to experience interruptions in service. Second, local councillors are apt to commandeer municipal sweepers to undertake private cleaning work in their homes, pointing to an example of quite widespread malfeasance by political actors in relation to public service delivery in the city. Third, for reasons spelt out in the following section, sweepers try by all means to avoid both main road and drain work and working in councillors' houses. To guarantee this means sweepers ingratiating themselves with supervisors and sanitary inspectors, including through acceding to cuts being taken from their wage packets. In theory, municipal sweepers are supposed to sweep the streets and remove waste from street bins to local transfer points, in other words, undertake the public good elements of SWM. In reality they supplement their income, both individually and through the deployment of members of their families, by also collecting waste from inside homes

¹² Currently and as a result of the landmark Local Government Ordinance of August 2001, Pakistan now has elected assemblies and local governments. This is in accordance with the decentralisation policy of the military government that came to power in October 1999. At the time the research was conducted local elections had been suspended but councillors prior to this suspension continued to act as sitting councillors.

and doing cleaning work for householders. In other words, they also provide private good elements of waste collection and disposal.

Until very recently, Christian sweepers acted as pretty effective gatekeepers, ensuring that jobs with the FMC remained the preserve of *Churhas* on the basis of their ascribed social status (Streefland, 1979). Families of sweepers have existed over decades, with one generation inheriting the jobs of the last. This system operates not only with regard to municipal employment but also to private jobs for householders, one of whom described the situation like this:

You see we have a tradition that once we have a sweeper at our house privately, we will never terminate their job until his death. If that sweeper wants to leave, he nominates his alternative to the household. Like [sweeper X], he has taken over his mother's post. She was working here at the time of her retirement and she is still working in those houses privately, in which she worked during her government job because you still have to fill your belly even after retirement.

Those from families who have been municipal sweepers across a number of generations and who have accumulated some assets and security, sometimes 'sell' their jobs, passing on their work as private sweepers to others in their networks. Some, having inherited the right to a municipal job, 'rent' it out to others who perform and get paid for the work on a month by month basis but do not get paid in their own name and cannot claim the lump sum payout and pension on retirement, which of course goes to the legal job holder. In these and other ways, sweepers also bend and rupture the formal system. Hence the reality of SWM in Faisalabad is far more complex than a first glance at the formal arrangements for waste collection might suggest. The latter conceal a multiplicity of practices that give rise to a disjuncture between the conventional expectations of urban service delivery in development and the imperatives and rationales that drive those involved.

Unruly Rituals Across Private and Public Space

It is widely believed that, by virtue of their secure employment and additional income earning streams, Christian sweepers in Pakistan are becoming upwardly mobile, and for many this is true, although opportunities outside waste work are few and the social stigma they face remains. For these reasons, sweepers engage in elaborate strategies

to retain access to waste work and ensure the goodwill of service users. To understand the rituals involved it is necessary to recognise both the practices of caste-like and gender relations in Pakistan (Beall, 1997b).

Papanek has argued that women's status within the household cannot be separated from the placement of that household in the social hierarchy and that class mediates gender relations (Papanek, 1979; Papanek and Minault, 1982). This was the case in Faisalabad where women in low-income and high-income households had relative freedom and mobility compared to women in middle-income households, who were more likely to be segregated from society and where *purdah* (both veiling and seclusion in the home) was observed more strictly. Within the home dealing with rubbish was women's domain, usually the youngest or least powerful woman of the household. However, as soon as a family can afford to employ others to work for them, it is the dirty work that is the first to be delegated. For example, fieldwork was conducted in a middle-income area called Nazimabad and a high-income area called Gulberg. In Gulberg 84 per cent of households used a private sweeper and the majority of households employed domestic workers. In Nazimabad very few houses employed domestic workers but 68 per cent employed a sweeper to do private work.

Private sweepers are mostly but not exclusively women, either municipal sweepers themselves or relatives of municipal sweepers. They are invariably Christian and are considered to be ritually impure. Domestic workers are also invariably women but are mostly Muslim, for reasons explained by a Gulberg housewife:

People prefer to have Muslims if they can get them because if you employ Christians in domestic work you run the risk of touching things they have touched. I know in England you people don't hesitate about this, but here we hesitate. So if you employ a Christian worker then he or she can only wash the bathrooms and floors. And of course we prefer females. If there are two females, a Christian and a Muslim then we would prefer a Muslim woman because she can do washing and utensil cleaning and even cooking. At the same time she can perform the duty of a sweeper as well.

In the more traditional lower-middle-income area of Nazimabad a woman explained the relationship with her private sweeper thus:

I don't have a domestic worker. I don't trust them and prefer to do the work myself, even though I get no help from my mother-in-law. I have a sweeper who sweeps and swabs when she comes to take the garbage Also people will not accept it if she does more because she is Christian. Religious-minded people object to them doing other tasks. For example when I recruited a Christian woman to do washing, my neighbour told me I could not say my prayers in clothes washed by a Christian.

Nevertheless, privately employed women sweepers in Nazimabad were often seen doing some of the tasks reserved for Muslim domestic workers in Gulberg, such as washing bed sheets and cleaning utensils, although this was never done conspicuously and separate utensils were maintained for sweepers. When it came to male sweepers, the physical barriers of both *pardah* and ritual impurity were regularly transgressed but replaced by symbolic boundaries. Describing her interaction with the male municipal sweeper who did private cleaning work for the household, a woman from Nazimabad said:

Sardar comes daily but is honest and doesn't need supervising. He just shouts '*Kora!*' [rubbish] and we know to hide ourselves [behind a veil] until he has gone. Neighbours recommended him when we came to this house and he will come with us when we move.

This ritual involved both parties acceding to and participating in carefully choreographed patterns of behaviour as a male sweeper explained:

Sweeper: The only thing you need for this job is that you should have *lahaz* [hair in your eyes] and sweetness on your tongue.
Myself: What do you mean, 'hair in your eyes'?
Sweeper: Let's suppose this our sister is sitting here with us, we will not look at her with *burri nigah* [dirty eye or sexual look]. Do you understand? ... We don't do that with the women of the households.

Thus a modest gesture of the veil or an averted gaze substituted for high walls or strict physical divisions between public and private space, in the mutual interests of co-dependency.

Men were more likely to engage with sweepers outside the home. In both Gulberg and Nazimabad they were the ones to supervise street level work, pay private sweepers, distribute gifts at *Eid* and hand over discretionary payments, known in Punjabi as *chai e pani* (tea and water). In Gulberg men would report municipal sweepers to the FMC

supervisor or area councillor if things went wrong and relations between sweepers and male householders were often tense and sometimes fraught. In Nazimabad, by contrast, most male householders were on greeting terms with sweepers and prominent community members mediated between them and householders whenever there was a need. In return, such community figures could rely on sweepers to do jobs for them such as cutting back of over grown trees, removing hornets' nests, clearing gutters and unblocking drains. Although extra was paid for these jobs, strong bonds of obligation and reciprocity existed between many of the householders and sweepers, whether private or employed by the municipality. Although there seemed to be few clear limits to the demands made by community members, the sweepers themselves set limits by using recourse to custom and prejudice. Thus while ostensibly unskilled work, managing relations with householders in Faisalabad was a considerable 'craft' at which sweepers worked assiduously.

Unruly Rituals Across Public and Private Service

In order to maintain sufficient autonomy to take on private work, while retaining employment within the municipal system, required efforts to secure benign neglect on the part of supervisors and sanitary inspectors, achieved through equally complex relationships and unruly practices within the FMC. If sweepers agreed without complaint to cuts from their pay on the part of supervisors and sanitary inspectors, they were only monitored during the first part of the morning shift. Once the register was taken they were free to organise and balance their FMC and private work as they wished. Sweepers who did not comply with the system of pay cuts could expect surprise visits throughout the day and extensive sessions on main road and drain duty. Sweepers also devised other ways of handling impediments to the flow of their private work. For example, in order to undertake private work alongside their municipal duties, sweepers got help from their families, including children who assisted before school hours. Some used their own donkey carts to speed up the work process or paid others to help them. All these efforts were preferable to losing the goodwill of householders with whom they had private arrangements. Table One shows the relationship between private and municipal work among the sweepers and how many of the private sweepers in Gulberg and Nazimabad were also working for the FMC and how many were doing this private work during FMC time.

Table One: Identity of Private Sweepers Employed by Households In Gulberg and Nazimabad by Percentage (Count in brackets)		
Identity of Sweeper	Gulberg	Nazimabad
1. Municipal sweeper working only on FMC work in FMC hours	42% (20)	9% (4)
2. Private sweeper directly employed by household during FMC hours*	37% (18)	66% (29)
3. Municipal sweeper working privately outside FMC hours	21% (10)	25% (11)

*Sweepers in this category may work for the FMC but not to the knowledge of the householder. However, they are usually retired or relatives of FMC sweepers.

In Karachi, access to private work is acquired through a system of informal property rights whereby certain lanes or streets were 'owned' by particular sweepers or groups of sweepers (Streefland, 1979) with the amount paid for these rights having gone up over time (Ali, 1997a). However, in Faisalabad, a city that has not fully shaken off its rural character, the situation was found to be somewhat less formal as evidenced by the following discussion with male sweepers in Gulberg:

Sweeper One: It is quite possible that I can manage both works if my new duty place is near to Gulberg. If it is too far I will be unable to do the work, then the household can look for a new person themselves or they can ask me to arrange someone for them.

Myself: Do you ask for compensation?

Sweeper One: No, no. When you leave the work you just give it to the next person.

Sweeper Two: That system of which you speak is in Karachi. Here the situation is different. Let's say if you are going to another city for some time, you can even temporarily hand over your private work to any worker. When you come back, you will be able to claim your work back.

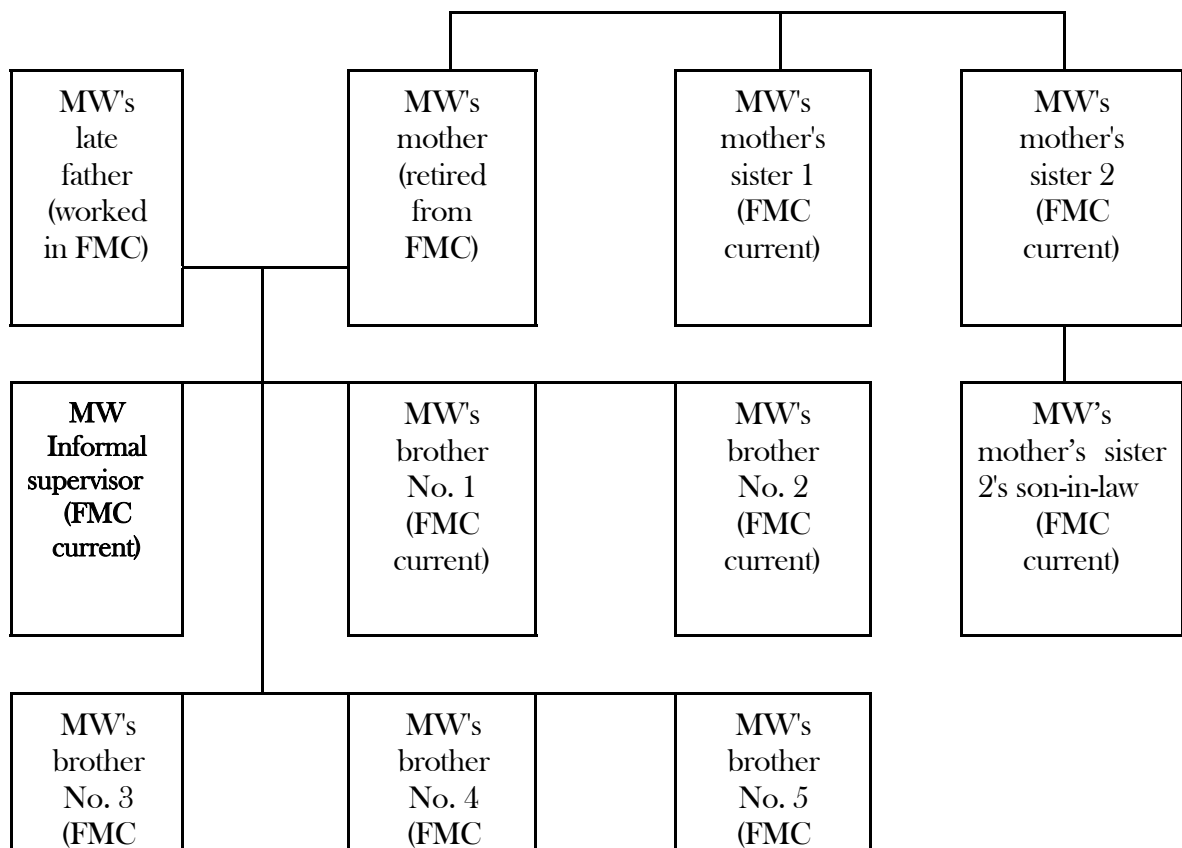
However, practices differed between the middle- and high-income areas in Faisalabad. The position in Gulberg more closely resembled the Karachi situation. Here sweepers were vigorously monitored by FMC officials who took a cut from sweepers' wage packets

for access to private work, with transfer from the area on to drain work being the fate meted out to sweepers who failed to oblige. Transfer was considered by sweepers to be the worst of all possible sanctions because it meant losing out on a long investment into gaining private work in the area, in a context of fierce competition from domestic workers. As one sweeper in Gulberg put it:

You have to fit your feet in the area. You have to be extra polite for days and days. You have to work more than the usual routine so you can establish good relations with people in your work area. This all takes time and in the meanwhile you cannot sustain your household merely on your pay.

In Nazimabad, the sweepers themselves had more control, with one dominant man and his mother controlling each of the two blocks and informally supervising most of the sweepers within them. The family connections of the son, all of whom worked in one block of Nazimabad are shown in Figure One.

Figure 1: Kinship Ties Among Sweepers Working in a Nazimabad Neighbourhood



current)		current)		current)
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A factor disrupting the security of Christian sweepers is greater competition for FMC jobs both within the ever-growing Christian community and from outside. This is also occurring in a context of growing donor pressure for more privatised options in SWM so that municipal sweepers are increasingly being employed on temporary contracts rather than in establishment posts. Some religious groups seeking to convert *Pakhiwas* to Islam have used their connections to lure them into conversion through the promise of permanent municipal jobs. Moreover, given the high levels of unemployment overall in Faisalabad, poor Muslims who would normally eschew waste work, are beginning to enter the employ of the FMC voluntarily where they can. *Dindars* - the name given to those *Pakhiwas* newly converted to Islam - are currently estimated to be around 500 strong and have not yet broken the stranglehold of Christian sweepers in the FMC. Nor have they competed effectively in terms of access to private work in houses. However, a hierarchy seems to be developing among FMC sweepers and this may change. For example, *Dindars* refuse to do main road and drain clearing work on the grounds that they are Muslim and cannot touch wet or polluting waste. The net result is that this duty falls to Christians, usually men, who consequently lose their grip over neighbourhood relations and are then unable to maintain their private work. *Dindar* sweepers are disadvantaged as they are often chosen by councillors over Christians, to do private work in their houses. This is on the grounds that they can do both waste collection and cleaning as well as other kinds of housework where ritual pollution becomes an issue, such as laundry work and food preparation. A *Dindar* sweeper working in Gulberg recounted the following conversation with his supervisor when he was ordered to work in the local councillor's house:

That supervisor said to me, 'You are Muslim so you must go to the councillor's house to work'. I said to him, 'Look brother; try to understand my position sympathetically. I will be highly obliged if you give me another job anywhere like other sweepers. I want to work on the beat'. So I politely requested 'Put any Christian sweeper there but please excuse me from such a dangerous job'. But he said 'No, you have to work there because the councillor has a buffalo and he requires a Muslim man to feed and milk it'.

He was subsequently suspended from FMC duties for refusing to work for the councillor and when I interviewed him he was working as a waste picker on the Gulberg dump. As he put it 'we are the people who always salute the rising sun and an officer is always an officer'. While all sweepers, no matter their religion, have to 'salute the rising sun', the entrance of *Dindars* into the FMC has challenged the prevailing division of labour and threatens to destabilise the delicate arrangements between formal and informal residential waste management.

With increased competition so corruption has crept into the public system. While always there to some extent, things have become much worse in recent years. It is difficult to pinpoint exactly when things changed. However, older sweepers all claimed that in their day they did not have to pay anything for their jobs. Those who joined the FMC about ten years prior to the research said they paid between Rs1000-2000. Those who joined five years later paid between Rs4000-5000. At the time of the research, to acquire an FMC job as a sanitary worker required an outlay of between Rs7000 - Rs15,000, with the usual rate being between Rs10,000 - Rs12,000. Rates varied according to whether the entire amount was paid up front or whether it was paid off over time through deductions from wages. The area to which a sweeper was assigned also made a difference, with more being required for areas with high levels of private work available. Another factor was the sex of the sweeper, with women having to pay more than men for FMC jobs. Women were told they were a liability because they took off more time than men and could not be detailed on heavy work such as drain cleaning. One female sweeper was told by an inspector 'Now the FMC has stopped employing females, we are taking you women on at our own risk. That is why the rates are higher for you'.

Bribes and wage cuts of the current high order seem to date back to the mid-1980s in the FMC. This coincides with a more general increase in politico-bureaucratic corruption in Pakistan from that time but over the last decade, prices for sweeper jobs have gone up according to what 'the market could bear'. This in turn has given rise to the phenomenon of sweepers becoming 'absentee job-lords', as FMC jobs are bought by those who can afford them and sub-contracted to those who cannot. For decades Christians have used their religion and associated hereditary occupation group status to transform a position of social disadvantage into one of economic advantage, their ritual pollution according them privileged access to formal conditions of service in a

competitive, segmented labour market. However, their grip on the system is weakening. In part this is due to the entrance of *Dindars* into municipal sweeper jobs and private waste work. In part it is due to Christians sweepers manipulating and working the system perhaps one step too far, such that the customary association of waste work with *Churhas* may eventually disappear. Sweepers themselves could contemplate a future where their 'right' to waste work would come under threat. When I asked one sweeper what he would do if this kind of work came to an end, he said, 'you mean after 25 years? I will retire!' Sweepers consistently said 'this is "our" work' and 'Muslims would *never* do this work'. However, the case of *Chuhras* and that of *Dindars* demonstrate both the durability and mutability of identity, social relations and the social institutions in which they are embedded.

Destabilising Symbolic Universes

Globally work with waste is inherently infused with relations of inequality between employers and workers and these are based on social differences such as class, gender, ethnicity or age and are overlaid by asymmetries deriving from the work itself. Are then anthropological analyses overly concerned with the cultural significance of waste? Is it not the case that waste is simply disgusting and working with it a vocation of least choice, whoever and wherever you are? Is it not a fact that a moral case is always made about sanitation and hygiene, accompanied by a division of labour that separates those who undertake society's dirty work from those who would rather not get their hands dirty? It is certainly the case that everywhere waste work is seen as lowly and degrading. However, a constructivist approach helps show how the accompanying social and institutional relations are formed, mutate and adapt to changing conditions. In urban Pakistan, despite the vigorous denial of caste as anathema to an inclusive Islam, the stigma of *Churha* identity endures as a 'thought world' as pervasive as the moral order suggested by development thinking.

Nevertheless, the way in which the everyday practices and rituals of waste management are choreographed, within a context of institutional multiplicity and across porous boundaries between public and private space, suggests a subversion of both these framing 'thought worlds' and a recalibration of tasks and labour relations within work routines deemed to be ritually polluting. In practice, Christian sweepers

wash the underwear of Muslims out of sight of the neighbours, while Muslim sweepers empty rubbish bins and clean toilets for Muslim councillors with issues of ritual pollution conveniently overlooked. Mary Douglas has argued that things are not considered dirty in and of themselves but because of where they stand in a system of categories and a symbolic universe. At one level, the changes in the social relations of waste management are tiny and little has happened to destabilise the 'symbolically consistent universe'. After all, this is a universe where under the Hudood Ordinances of 1979 women are discriminated against in law; where the 1984 Qanun-e-Shahadat law of evidence sees the evidence of women and non-Muslims as less reliable than that of Muslim men; and where the recent amendment to Section 295 of the Pakistan Penal Code, popularly known as the 'blasphemy laws' carries a mandatory death sentence, which renders even more vulnerable in Pakistan, minorities such as Christians and particularly those of *Churha* descent. In everyday speech in Faisalabad the terms 'Christian', '*Churha*' and 'sweeper' are used interchangeably.¹³ However, while Mary Douglas's generalised notions of cultural order are helpful in trying to understand this, equally important is to understand the historically contingent specificities of caste-like social relations and how they have articulated with development and more specifically waste management in urban Pakistan.

What does this mean for the largely moral discourse of urban development and the increasingly neoliberal order it seeks to impose? Development discourse, whether amongst donors, politicians or government officials in Pakistan, is largely silent on the most critical social dimension of urban service delivery and especially work with waste. Rather than confronting caste-like social relations the rationale for integrated SWM strategies bears the moral overtones of the Victorian sanitation movement. As such a significant disjuncture exists between the ideal 'thought world' of urban development practitioners and the 'little sub-worlds' that make up the social reality of waste management in the city. At one level the order of development has been destabilised by the disjuncture of its encounter with existing systems of waste collection. For example, recent interventions by a bilateral donor have paid greater recognition to the critical role of sweepers in SWM (Ali and Cotton, 1996, 2001). Rather than being

¹³ On the discovery of a dead animal in one of the neighbourhoods, a male resident was heard to call for 'a *Christian* to remove it'. A teashop owner in Faisalabad when asked why he refused to serve Christians replied, 'If I serve *sweepers* I would lose all my Muslim customers'. And in Punjabi the *quom* name *Chuhra* is still the most common appellation for a municipal sanitary worker.

dismissed as dispensable mobile units of labour, they are now addressed as potential micro-entrepreneurs. Just as pickers are seen as a vital element in the recycling chain, so sweepers are being presented as providing an efficient and flexible primary collection service alongside and within the more rigid parameters of official waste collection and are being supported through improved small-scale technology and enterprise support. In part this stems from recognition of the private good elements of residential waste collection in Pakistan and a preparedness to let go of generic notions that waste collection has to be addressed through contracting out to large-scale private operators.

Ultimately, however, support to solid waste management in Faisalabad has not delivered adequate water, sanitation and hygiene regimes and the ordered waste management system envisaged by development organisations intervening in the sector. The more integrated approach, which has sought to work with rather than against the institutional multiplicity identified on the ground, constitutes an important policy advance. However, while clearly challenging some of the conventional social relations around waste, it will take more than micro-enterprise development to disrupt deeply embedded notions of ritual impurity. Indeed, a far greater challenge derives from the spontaneous activities and responses of vulnerable waste workers competing for municipal work as sweepers in the face of neoliberal trends. This is a history written from below and one in which attempts to order 'matter out of place' through urban policy and project design are often stymied by the fact that integrating diverse logics around dirt and dirty work into a symbolically consistent universe is a negotiated process that is far from straightforward.

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