

**Ercüment Çelik**

**Street Traders. A Bridge between Trade unions and Social Movements in contemporary South Africa, Nomos Universitätsschriften, Freiburg i. Br., 2010, 294 pp., ISBN-13: 978-3-8329-5721-6**

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The post apartheid South African society has been going through many transformations and the integration process of the marginalised segment within the society through economic activities is changing our view about conventional methods of integration. In his book, Ercüment Celik has identified the street traders as a bridge between the trade unions and the social movements to explain the emerging development of relationship between the democratic street traders' organisations in Durban with COSATU<sup>1</sup> and the shack dwellers' movement and the alliance of these three with the other constituencies of the marginalised people in the "World Class Cities For All" Campaign on the way to the 2010 FIFA World Cup. It's readers get an in depth clarification of the role and challenges for trade unions in organising informal workers in relation to both the labour movements and emerging social movements in contemporary South Africa; and how the post apartheid social movements, especially the shack dwellers' movement, motivates those people to engage themselves in informal economic activities and finally how the alliance between the street traders' organisations, trade unions and social movements is influenced by the 2010 FIFA World Cup in South Africa.

The book begins with the construction of different groups of theories in order to conceptualise the informal economic activities adopted by the marginalised labour force and reconstructing the theories of social movement unionism in contemporary South Africa. The informalisation which has evolved since 1970s, has a systemic and historical process of defining informal workers as 'workers' and their existence side by side within the capitalistic economy which generated, utilised and thrived on the *shadowy gray world* of informal economies or sectors. But in the systemic crisis of capitalism, the revival of informal activities and *recasualisation* of labour ensures the production cost cuts and increase productivity to renew capital accumulation and the transformation that takes place among working people implicitly repositions the relation between the formality and informality. With a growing number of

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<sup>1</sup> COSATU stands for Congress of South African Trade Unions

workers being *marginalised* due to either completely excluded from the capitalist labour market or broke away from non-waged relations, they could not find a place in social structure and ultimately left them to differentiate and establish themselves within the economy.

The next chapter gives an overview of trade union movements, social movements and informal economy with a particular focus on street trading from apartheid to post apartheid South Africa where trade unions began approaching issues outside the workplace and engaging with or distancing themselves from the community struggles in the apartheid time and their changing role from a force of struggle into a force of construction and governance in post apartheid period. The transitional process has weakened the autonomy of the labour movement from the party and the state, as it can be concluded that “with the transition to democracy and processes of elite formation in post colonial South Africa, social movement unionism has undergone erosion, as solidarity has fractured along new and old lines” (Von Holdt, 2002).

While the apartheid regulations resulted in a formal economy dominated by Whites, the non-agricultural informal economy fulfilled the urban consumer demand by resulting in informal transportation industry, hawkers and street traders. And in the decade of transition, the percentage of informal employment boomed and forced the central government to acknowledge the role of informal economy in providing incomes and employment and street traders as business people. However, the approach of trade unions to informal workers hasn't led into the transformation of work and organisation formation, which is being reflected in the view of COSATU as a social movement.

In the following chapters, the author explained over the emergence and development of new democratic organisations of street traders in Durban and discussed the phases of their reorganising and mobilising activities. By highlighting the struggle of the street traders for inclusion within the mainstream of trade union, it also develops the necessary ground for alliance. The StreetNet and the South African Communist Party with their organisational efforts provided platform to the emergence and development of new democratic organisations of street traders in Durban so that the street traders can mobilise various resources for building their organisations and movement which coincides with the activities of political parties, trade unions and international institutions. The shack dwellers' movement *Abahlali baseMjondolo* enabled us to understand how much the transition from apartheid to post-apartheid has changed the lives of the 'truly disadvantaged' in South Africa. It indicates the shift from 'quite encroachment' of shack dwellers into a self-engineered collective action that goes beyond the political opportunities which are framed by the institutions of the post-apartheid regime and also for the trade unions

cooperation in the struggles of the marginalised. The more concrete alliance of these three forces in the case of the WCCA Campaign forms a platform to work together as one of the reasons to host the 2010 FIFA World Cup in South Africa is

“to renew their image, to restructure and reposition themselves as centres of capital and labour, production, and exchange in the national and global economy and generally to ‘modernise’” (Roche, 1994: 1-2).

And the by product of mega events came with slum clearance and eviction of street traders which is directly connected with the livelihoods of the urban poor as they live in slums or low-cost housing and engage in street trading and home based work. The World Cup has pumped up R 21.3 billion into South Africa’s economy, generating 159,000 new jobs and R 12.7 billion in direct spending; in where there is no sign of small businesses like street traders and informal workers in general. So the WCCA campaign aimed to force authorities to recognise the necessity of creating ‘World Class Cities’ to adopt an inclusionary approach rather than an elitist notion, so that the poor populations and people who work in public spaces can work together against the elimination of poor when it comes to the preparation for the 2010 FIFA World Cup. This campaign had a strong focus on women and other vulnerable street traders who were initially affected by losing their livelihoods and then being excluded from the preparation plans for such events.

The author tried to establish a link between the significant role of street traders to bridge the gap between trade unions and social movements in post-apartheid South Africa through rethinking of work place and community, and this role can be translated into furthering working class politics. The reinvention of social movement activities by the marginalised got recognition from the authorities although the local authorities failed to equalise the representation of street traders’ organisations in its decision making and controlling the platforms under their own management. On the other hand, the empirical findings contradict with the general impression about street trading by the local and governments by illustrating their long years of economic activity and remaining in their current activities while defining themselves as workers, but not as entrepreneurs. So the leadership of the street traders’ organisations and their new alliance see their struggle within the broad struggles of working class and committed to construct link with the labour movement though COSATU’s attitude towards it gives the impression of seeing this movement as purely issues based movement like many other post-apartheid social movements. To summarise, the need of trade unions’ direct involvement in organising informal workers is an aspect of trade unions’ crisis of representation in contemporary South Africa.

## **References**

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