The changing world of work as challenging and changing workers' solidarity

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Feelings of injustice

- 'I can't do my job properly, it is unhygienic', 'It is not clean and then the customers complain about me', 'I thought Denmark would be better', 'I have a no-life life', 'They don't listen to me', 'One of the women collapsed yesterday and had to be brought to the hospital' 'How can we ever have children if we are so tired'

Solidarity & political identification

- Workers' solidarity is produced in dynamic relations between societal dynamics, political identification, collectivism, trade unions
- Focus: political identification as the subjective dimension of solidarity
- Interest: the processes leading to political identification, dimensions of, direction, permanent, absence
- From class conscience to critical reflexivity; from identity to identification; from 'given' to constructed; from single to intersectional

Political identification, Bradley (1996)

- Politicized identities include a constant self-identification and form a more permanent basis for action. Politicized identities develop from political action and provide the basis for collective organization

- Arises from lived social relations (Bradley), meanings ascribed to 'the we' (Frello), and conflicting social dynamics (Moore)

The research

- Part of FSE funded project 'Workers' solidarity/ies – between crisis & renewal' (2013-2015)
- *Focus on cleaners in hotels & hospitals and their communities and the trade union, 3F; covered by agreements, most organized in 3F*
- *Cleaning:*
  - *Low status*
  - *Women, migrants & ethnic minorities*
  - *Done on your own, often in small work places*
  - *Outsourcing & privatization = rising work speed, many levels of employers/managers, not the same employer as other workers in workplace = outside workplace community & representation*

- *Data production on-going*
- *First analysis*
- 25 qualitative interviews + (1 double, 3 twice)
  - hereof 14 TU-leaders (9 women, 2 minority), 8 cleaners (7 women, 8 minorities, 3 employee reps), 1 national network leader (man)
- Participant observation at meetings, organizing activities, general assemblies, network activities, May 1st
- 1 memory workshop with senior women trade union leaders
- 1 research circle with trade union leaders, officers, activists (men & women, majority & minority)
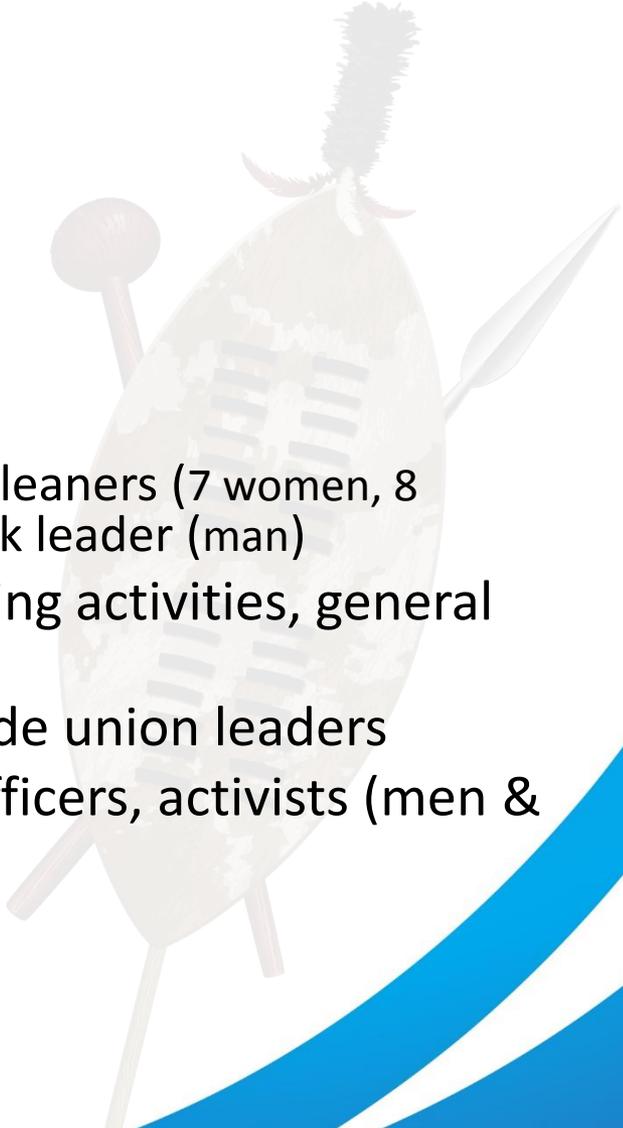
Conclusions

- Processes leading to PI
  - Feelings of injustice leading to critical reflectivity, voice & respects
  - Empathy, care, ideology, passion, longing to belong
  - Told to (family, network/friends, employee representative)
  - Wishing to connect, building bridges
  - TU action
- Dimensions
  - TU identification is strong, but for some more passive than active; TU is a traversal collective identity i.e. room for complex identities and many identifications; few competing identifications

- Direction
  - Work = being a cleaner/housekeeper is in the centre
  - TU
- Permanency
  - Lasting TU activism depends on *friendship, success, traditions, proudness*
  - The TU 'we' is constructed around fulltime secure employment around white heterosexual male culture = barriers to involvement, constant struggle

- Absent
  - Gender & ethnicity are complicated identifications
  - Class is absent
  - No interest
- The context has changed: society conflictual and politically less supportive; wp-collectivism challenged; TU yet strong but struggles = challenges PI

Injustice as the road to political identification

- Hotel maids – new cleaning system = more rooms, superficial cleaning, carry cleaning remedies around; moreover many with precarious contracts

- Strong feelings of injustice 'classic' road to political identification, but not economic = *voice and respect* re working conditions and work proudness; also hospital cleaners

- The forming of a collective: memoirs of better times from experienced employee representatives; reaching out for each other across work-place and national groups; angry with employers

- Trade union offering room & support, alternative narratives, expertise to handle the complex agreement & conflict system; difficult to get them self-organize actions/activities

- Long road to victory/half victory = many has left the jobs, others are discouraged, new maids don't know the story, others little gain

Political identification with TU

- Membership: was told to by family, network or colleagues

- Long to belong, looking for new communities, see union as safe space

- Trade union identification traversing class, gender, ethnicity, religion – broad collective

- Loyal to TU – employers are the problem

- Very little TU agency outside wp; resourceful women see TU leadership as meaningful way out of cleaning; getting access to training & knowledge

- TU wants to be diverse & urge cleaners to be active and stand for leaders, but the 'we' is constructed around white male workers in secure organized work = few position possibilities, closed union culture

- Language and cultural misunderstandings

Identification & des-identification

- Being a cleaner prime identification; class absent but critical awareness about lack of power & resources as a cleaner

- Mixed national identification; complicated identification with women as a group [not available/respectable identifications?

- The invisible Muslim women: Identifying with the management? No interest in change & just want to live? Identifying with Muslim community?

- Forced identification?: 'They only treat us like this because we are foreigners'

Senior leaders on identification

- Permanent political identification needs friendships, success, proudness, traditions
- Empathy, passion & ideology also way to critical reflexivity & permanent PI
- Shifting identification within TU identification: with colleagues, with workplace, with ethnic minority members, with women
- Class, gender & ethnicity are complicated/ambiguous identifications

Reflections

- Bradley speaks about passive, active, political identification, but what is TU-membership when mainly passive? 'Sleeping PI'? And what does it mean to workers' solidarity if you don't take part in collective action/TU activities?

- Des-identification in the literature - should we also talk about competing identifications outside wp? Forced? Complicated?

- And what about processes that weakens PI and/or leads to resignation & withdrawal e.g. hostility from managers, being worn-out, absence of workplace collective?

- PI is shifting in time & space, but what does it mean to workers' solidarity in WP & TU when workers are changing space, too?