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Re: Feedback on a visit to Johannesburg Workers Museum

This is a reflective report pertaining to a class field trip to Workers Museum taken on the 1st Aug 2018. The tour was facilitated by Mrs Belinda Hlaka as a guide for the day. The museum was one of a number of compounds run by the Johannesburg City Council during the apartheid era. It was built in 1913 with the intention to accommodate plus or minus three hundreds (300) workers. These workers were both local coming from Bantustans and migrants mostly coming from SADC. The process of the recruitment for these workers was facilitated through the chiefs as gatekeepers. The chiefs got into an agreement with city council authorities and workers would be chosen by the chiefs to come work. Trains and trucks would be dispatched to respective Bantustans to collect workers. These workers would not be told where exactly they are going to work. Not knowing where they are going, they would resort to signing in order to calm their nerve and ultimately bring hope to their unknown destination. Famous songs like 'shosholoza' as documented, would be chanted to make the journey short.

There were restrictive rules and regulations designed to control the behaviours of workers in the compound. The intention of rules was to dehumanize and strip-off the dignity of the workers. An induna (caretaker) would be appointed to oversee the whole compound and a worker would be selected to act as a liaison person in order to report back to the induna any wrong doing in the compound. The liaison person would at sometimes involved in the wrong doing as such certain things were not reported as a result. The workers were responsible for cleaning and general maintenance of the compound failure to do so punitive actions would be inflicted against them. They were not allowed to bring alcohol into the compound but through their clandestine ways, they would dig a hole on the ground to hide the alcohol. One these harsh and unhuman rules is indicated as follows:

"When you make noise past the noise hour, it was an offence. If you wake up before time, it was an offence. If you miss work, it was an offence. So was having a fight! But being beaten up by the Compound Manager was a better punishment than losing one's job."

The workers were sleeping in cold rooms which the beds were of a two tier system which the lower part is a concrete shelf and the upper one is a wooden one. The compound didn't provide any mattresses and the quarters did not have lockers which means any one can enter at any time without the reservation of privacy. The showers and toilets were of the open systems thus adults and younger workers were unfortunately having no privacy.

According to the tour guide workers were designated to work in sectors such digging municipal man-hole and collecting sewage from the house holds normally done in the evening, however the compound was later open to accommodate general workers which provide services for the Johannesburg municipality. These workers were using 85% of their hands to conduct their activities as the municipality did not have modern machineries to better their jobs. These jobs were detrimental to their health as there were no legal

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legislations (i.e. Occupational Health and Safety and Injuries and Compensation for Occupational Injuries and Diseases Act) to better regulate workplace and protect them against any workplace hazard. These workers did not have a stable salary or wage, the Induna was responsible to see how much one can get. If a worker was unruly, the induna may decide to award salary or half of it in that period.

In conclusion, the case of Johannesburg Workers Museum is a reflection of how the apartheid regime systems were designed to impede the lives of a non-white person (locals and migrants). The regime was only interested on the capital revenues and overlooking the hardships and the conditions that non-whites were working under. This led to a revolution that advocate for workers' rights in a workplace which Fine (2014) articulate in his/her article that COSATU as labour federation, struggled over time to defend the labour market positions of both the South African workers and the migrants labour rights.

References

Belinda Hlaka, tour guide at Johannesburg Workers Museum 1 August 2018.

Fine, J., (2014), Migration and migrant workers in the post-apartheid era, *Global Labour Journal*, 5(3), 330-346.