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LOGICS USED TO JUSTIFY URBAN APPROPRIATIONS: AN EXAMINATION OF

WASTE PICKING IN TSHWANE

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LOGICS USED TO JUSTIFY URBAN APPROPRIATIONS: AN EXAMINATION OF

WASTE PICKING IN TSHWANE

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DEDICATION

To those who were there for me during moments of deep despair. When you cry, may God see you and dry your tears. May you receive consolation and recompense.

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ABSTRACT

There is a proliferation of scholarship based upon the experiences of southern cities. This study contributes by developing ideas rooted in the practices and norms of residents of the global south. It utilizes waste picking as a topic through which to investigate urban informal activities. Through qualitative methods, I gathered data over a 6-month period in Tshwane, South Africa where I observed the actors, situations and activities that comprise waste picking. I also explored the various conflicts between waste pickers and different actors, as well as the adjudication processes. While literature portrays informal waste picking as one of the least desirable occupations, I investigate the complex decision making processes, which create pathways into the profession and the decision to remain despite the associated stigma. High and increasing numbers, and other potential informal work opportunities suggest there might be other logics used to rationalize engagement in this work. In this dissertation, I argue that waste pickers are guided by logics beyond simple opportunism to meet their daily needs. In order to make this argument, I utilize an emergent framework, agonistically transgressive appropriations, which I argue may provide new grounds from which to theorize urban appropriations and informality. I found that many waste pickers in fact earn more money in comparison to other informal jobs. Critically, many chose to pick waste because of consistent earnings, despite the poor working conditions. Critically, I found there are codes and norms which govern the waste picking, but these are not agreed upon or universal; I elaborate on these codes and norms in this dissertation. These findings have implications for how we understand waste picking and informal activities. My study demonstrates the manner in which conceptual viewpoints from southern cases can contribute to a better understanding of urban geography.

KEY WORDS: informality, waste picking, codes, norms, justificatory logics, agonistically

transgressive appropriations

ABBREVIATIONS

ARO	African Reclaimers Organization
ATA	Agonistic Transgressive Appropriations
CBD	Central Business District
ECI	Ethics & Compliance Initiative
FICA	Financial Intelligence Centre Act
GPS	The Global Positioning System
KMS	Kilometers
ILO	International Labor Organization
MSWM	Municipal Solid Waste Management
PET	Polyethylene Terephthalate
RTTC	Right to the City
SAWPA	South African Waste Pickers Association
SSA	Sub-Saharan Africa
USD	United States Dollar
ZAR	Zuid-Afrikaanse Rand

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

In South African cities, the presence of waste pickers pushing trolleys is conspicuous. Waste picking activities form an ordinary part of the fabric of cities so much so that television programs feature trolley pushers in background scenes or incorporate them into storylines. Popular music videos do the same. When I initially reviewed literature on waste picking, it was generally described as an occupation entered into solely for survival purposes. The high numbers that could be up to 215 000 in South Africa (Godfrey & Oelofse, 2017), waste picking is often described as emblematic of poverty, an occupation of last resort (Beall, 1997). This is because the poor conditions of labor, including exploitation by those to whom they sell, as well as harassment by residents, authorities and state officials coalesce to create undesirable conditions of labor (Dias & Samson, 2016). And yet, my research shows, there is more to the story. During my search for information, I read a newspaper article (Meet the bin scavengers saving SA R750-million a year by Faber, 2016), and it presented narratives in direct contradiction to the literature to which I was conversant. The individual in the article quit his job to become a waste picker because he enjoyed the autonomy. Additionally, in this era where sustainability is emphasized more, waste pickers provide an important environmental service, yet they are often not defined by this important role. In this introductory chapter, I provide the reasons I am interested in this topic as well as the key themes in this dissertation. This is followed by the research questions. I conclude with an outline of the chapters.

1.1 Informality

For purposes of this study, I focus on only two aspects of scholarship on informality. The first relates to understanding the manifestation of informality even as economies modernize. Researchers are acknowledging the presence of informality in global north economies, and this is a shift from previous analyses that deemed informality a preserve of the less industrialized economies of the global south. Even though it is still much more pervasive in the latter setting, there are now questions about what modernization means given the existence of the informal economy in northern countries given the assumption that informality would cease to exist as economies modernized (Meagher,1995; Chen, 2012; Boudreau & Davis, 2017). The second reason is to better understand the role of the informal sector in poverty reduction and bringing about economic growth (Chen, 2007).

There are widely-varying definitions of the informal (sector), an observation made in 1978 (Bromley, 1978). P. Godfrey (2011: 233) expands upon this definitional challenge, asserting the various 'definitions of the informal sector possess heuristic value but little theoretical legitimation'. What is common in many definitions is that the informal *sector* is typified by services that do not adhere to government regulation, are small in scale, and are unaccounted for in official records and statistics (GëRxhani, 2004; Potts, 2008; de Soto, 1989; P. Godfrey, 2011; Chen, 2012).

The term informal *sector* as it pertains to economic activity was coined in the 1970s by Keith Hart, and remains animated in policy and academic circles alike as categorized by various studies too numerous to mention. (A word search of the term "informal economy" on Google Scholar on 17 June 2020 for the year 2020 yielded 1700 articles. This merely indicates that it is still a topic of scholarly interest). It usually refers to earning a living outside of the formal sector.

In recent years, the broader terminology of informal *economy* has been adopted, and is preferred over the term 'informal sector'. The informal economy considers informal employment whether in the formal or informal sector. This is an important shift because one can be informally employed in a formal enterprise (Chen, 2012).

Related to the informal economy is the concept of urban informality, which has been revived in critical urban studies and is defined by Roy (2005:148) as "an organizing logic, a system of norms that governs the process of urban transformation itself". Studies on global south cities show urban development is taking place informally therefore using an urban informality frame moves analysis away from the silos (example, livelihoods or housing) through which informality is often studied (Roy, 2005; Banks, Lombard & Mitlin, 2020) and (importantly for this project), considers the spatial aspects of the manifestation of informal practices.

1.2 Waste pickers

In this dissertation, I use the term waste picker to describe individuals who recover recyclable and reusable materials from municipal bins, curbside bins or landfills to sell to middlemen and buy-back centers. Waste pickers are divided into two broad groups, based upon where they work. There are those who operate at landfills and those who operate on the street, collecting waste from curbside, office and household bins (the streets). This study involves the latter. In order to do their work, waste pickers take advantage of the recycling gap in waste management. This is a critical point because in some countries, waste pickers are responsible for collection of waste, whereas in my study they engaged exclusively in recycling. Naming waste pickers has been a subject of debate. The derogatory term scavenger has been rejected by waste

pickers and scholars alike (Samson, 2010). They are variously termed reclaimers, street waste pickers, waste salvagers, waste pickers, trolley pushers, and informal collectors (Langenhoven & Dyssel, 2007; Samson, 2010; Benson & Vanqa- Mgijima, 2010; Schenck & Blaauw, 2011; McLean, 2000; Viljoen, Blaauw & Schenck, 2016). A portion of those in the study introduced themselves as recyclers, subsequently describing their work as recycling. The term *zula* or *zula zularing* was used by some respondents but it only captures a portion of what they do. *Zula* means to wander or roam in isiZulu. A few respondents I met did not use a trolley therefore the term trolley pusher was not all encompassing in my research context. The term waste picker is widely used in literature, and is used by the South Africa Waste Picker's Association (SAWPA) (see Manyana, 2019), therefore it is the term I use in this dissertation.

1.2.1 Why waste pickers?

My initial interest emerged from reviewing activist oriented literature which shows that some waste pickers actually want to perform this labor. This contrasts with, international literature that tends to position waste pickers as being pushed into the sector since studies *often* make reference to case studies based off South East Asia or Egypt where for the former, usually the lower castes, occupy the sector (Wilson, Velis & Cheeseman, 2006; Beall, 1997). For the latter, the Zabbaleen (also spelt Zabaleen), one of the most well documented waste picking communities constitute a religious minority. Beall (1997) therefore asserts, waste pickers are usually already marginalized populations therefore their association with waste only exacerbates this marginal societal position. I was interested in understanding South Africa specific pathways into waste picking as this could be of relevance to other parts of the world.

Additionally, through this study, I sought to address the spatial dynamics of informality. Street waste picking specifically, opens a spatial analytical lens through which to understand informality. In studies on housing for instance, there are community leaders and people allocating space to build. Similarly, at landfills, different groups determine who gets to pick specific materials and the time of day to pick (see Samson, 2019). Street waste picking does not operate in a bounded space, given that the streets are open. Further, it is constructed as a low barrier to entry, 'free for all' occupation, yet there are those who pick the same bins regularly. This gives rise to questions about how they ensure they are the only ones who pick there because literature *generally* treats waste pickers as a harmonious group of actors, fighting against the state and corporations. A few exceptions including Samson (2008, 2019) and Thaba (2012), indicate there are different waste picker groups, and tensions between these groups. However, these studies are conducted in landfills therefore adding the perspective of street waste pickers enriches the general body of knowledge on the subject. I sought to find out the various actors from whom waste pickers contest for resources (including within their group), and the negotiations they undertake in order to continue their work.

1.2.2. Waste pickers and waste politics

The hierarchy of waste management is a globally accepted way in which to manage waste. It encompasses three processes, namely reduce, reuse and recycle. The idea of this hierarchy emanates from environmental activism in the 1970s in campaigns to demonstrate the heterogeneous nature of items that constitute waste. It shifted the approach to waste management, showing instead, different materials can be made useful through various processes

including recycling and composting (Schall, 1992). While it is not possible to reuse all materials, it is possible to recycle some of what is discarded, thereby reducing what enters the landfill (Oelofse & Godfrey, 2008). This latter point is critical in understanding waste picking as a livelihood opportunity because street waste pickers reduce what formal collectors take to the landfill. An equally important factor to consider is the regulation governing waste picking. Municipal laws designate waste deposited into municipal receptacles at curbsides or at landfills as the property of the municipality (e.g. City of Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality Waste Management By-Law, 2016). However, waste is better understood as a "common property resource" (Samson, 2008: 1).

1.3 Contribution to knowledge

The overarching ideas presented in this study draw from the call for studies to "blast open theoretical geographies, to produce a new set of concepts in the crucible of a new repertoire of cities" (Roy, 2009a: 820). The contributions of this dissertation are two-fold. The first is a theoretical contribution to southern urban theory. Often, literature making a case for theory from the south presents empirical studies that highlight particular cases; the suggestion here is that this has rendered the body of work largely atheoretical (Scott & Storper, 2015). And while there is a growing body of knowledge which theorizes from the global south, based upon the experiences of the marginalized, such as waste pickers (Thieme, 2017; Samson, 2015, 2019; Fredericks, 2009), this field has not been adequately exploited, therefore, further research is needed. I make a theoretically oriented empirical contribution by adding to the body of knowledge about cities beyond the global north in order to enhance the debate on urban theory. I position my work in

the geographic 'cultural turn', that considers knowledge as situated and partial therefore grand theories are limited in their explanatory capacity. I therefore use a theoretical framework that was developed to capture aspects of informality that are not considered in existing theories of informality. The intention is to generate knowledge that is applicable to my research site, and other locations across the globe. Perhaps crucially, it is important to emphasize at this point that I use the term global south in the context of "an epistemological location rather than a geographical container" (Lawhon, Ernstson & Silver, 2014: 505).

The second contribution is to the broader discussion on spatial practices, specifically urban appropriations, that those "who do not 'have' the city, 'take' it" (Lawhon, Pierce & Makina, 2018: 117). Informal actors operate across the global south, often under precarious circumstances, and utilize various justifications in order to continue their operations. These justifications are often not well understood but need to be in order to assist policy makers.

1.4. Research Questions

The research questions are guided by gaps identified in previous studies. I sought to investigate the empirical reality of waste pickers, and understand the reasons they engage in the profession and actions taken to continue.

To this end, I was guided by the following research question:

'What justificatory logics do informal waste pickers use in order to appropriate waste?'

The research question is deconstructed into four sub-questions as follows:

a. What are the different logics waste pickers use to rationalize their involvement in informal waste work?

b. What are the strategies used by waste pickers to assert claims to waste?

c. In what ways do informal waste pickers navigate and even circumvent the municipal threats to their territory?

d. How are the conflicts between co-claimants to waste adjudicated?

The research question is premised on the assumption that waste pickers are guided by logics beyond meeting their daily needs. Meeting these needs takes place within a social realm and is enabled and shaped by relationships with other actors, including other waste pickers. While the regulatory status of waste deposited into municipal receptacles at curbsides or at landfills is clear, in practice, (property) rights (to waste) are much more ambiguous. In this context, it is apt to interrogate the reasons waste pickers consider it theirs for the taking. In fact, when the State has given the rights to waste to private companies, waste pickers have contested this action, arguing they should be awarded the rights. Beyond the State, individuals who might want to enter waste picking pose a threat to existing waste pickers. In such an instance, I intend to explore the strategies they use to defend or even expand their territory.

1.5 Structure of Dissertation

This dissertation continues to **Chapter Two** with a presentation of the theoretical framework influencing this work. I situate this study in the southern turn in geography, influenced by urban geography. The right to the city and quiet encroachment are discussed for their utility and limitations in framing the ways in which some informal activities are commonly theorized. I then offer an alternative framing: agonistically transgressive appropriations, which I explain.

In **Chapter Three**, I review extant literature relevant to the study. I expound upon concepts introduced in chapter one, namely, informality and urban informality. I enhance the discussion on waste pickers by adding situated (South African) information. Methodology is discussed in **Chapter Four**. I engage with literature on positionality in order to situate myself in the study. The research area and methods are described and justified. In this chapter, I also discuss ethics, and the reason certain decisions were taken. I then introduce the respondents, before discussing the data collection process.

In **Chapter Five**, which is the first of the three findings chapters, I continue from the methodology by introducing the participants and explaining the gendered aspect of the study. I proceed to describe the quality of life experienced by the participants in relation to shelter, health, as well as crime and violence. In this chapter, I explain the manner with which situations beyond their control, such as changes to waste management schedules, impact their work. I conclude by discussing their relationship with middlemen and buyback centers.

Chapter Six explores waste picking as a profession. Instead of discussing it in isolation to the prevailing labor market, waste picking is situated within the informal labor market, demonstrating that it is but one option for those who work informally. This framing sets the stage to present the main reasons for engaging in waste picking, showing that it can be a preferred livelihood opportunity for a variety of reasons.

Chapter Seven follows by describing the conflicts waste pickers navigate in order to continue their appropriations. In addition to presenting a set of codes of conduct that are adhered to, I show the strategies and tactics utilized in order to secure their access to the waste stream, particularly that which is considered lucrative. Waste pickers are not the only individuals who

salvage from the waste stream for resources and in this chapter, I provide information about the contenders before a discussion of the codes and norms that guide waste picking.

Chapter Eight concludes this dissertation. I respond to key questions and present my recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The world has entered an urban age where according to the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2018), as of 2018, 55% of the world's population is living in urban areas. According to the same data, 43% of Africans live in urban areas. This does not negate reasons to study African cities. Instead, given rapid urban growth that is not driven by industrialization, as well as a relative paucity in literature on cities due to the historical urban bias (Parnell & Pieterse, 2016), there is need for more insight into the unique dynamics of urbanization processes on the continent.

In the past four decades, urban theory has undergone significant changes. The Los Angeles School of urban Geography and its predecessor, the Chicago School of urban Sociology have waned in dominance in part because the urban developments taking place in the global south challenge the explanatory power of these models (AlSayyad, 2003). This has resulted in the call for more critical ways in which to understand the city.

Critical urban theory emerged in the late 1960s, influenced by radical Marxist scholarship. Since then, literature in this field has burgeoned. At its core, critical urban scholarship "insists that another, more democratic, socially just and sustainable form of urbanization is possible" (Brenner, 2009: 198). Knowledge is produced with the aim of critiquing exploitation, prejudice and injustice in the city[1].

Critical urban scholarship is diverse, with one group of scholars arguing for totalizing concepts such as agglomeration (see Scott & Storper, 2015; Storper & Scott, 2016) and planetary urbanization (Brenner & Schmid, 2014). These theses argue the north-south differences observed

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[1] While I agree with Brenner on the importance of critical urban theory, his argument for planetary urbanism has been widely critiqued (see Roy, 2016a).

between cities are due to local differences so theoretical implications remain the same (Leitner & Sheppard, 2016). In the second category are those advocating for a southern urban theory premised on the need for new theories that explain the urbanization processes in the global south. This will be discussed in the following section.

2.1 What is southern theory? And why southern urban theory?

Mabin (2014: 23) offers a conceptual analysis of southern theory as follows: "southern theories proceed from the idea that 'the south' can produce different perspectives, concepts, arguments, from those traditional in literatures deeply embedded in western or northern experience". Where I acknowledge that Mabin is skeptical of the utility of a southern urban theory, I agree with the definition[2]. At its core, a southern urban theory challenges universal claims about theory derived from a few select cities in global north, arguing instead that urban theory has been developed from the experiences of the global north, thereby limited in its ability to fully explain the global south (Parnell & Robinson, 2012; Robinson, 2002). This is because as aforementioned, there are experiences that are pervasive to the global south that are not included or given little attention by theories developed in the global north. Northern derived theory is also inattentive to the impact of different histories in impacting theory making and the ability to explain urban processes (Roy, 2016b). Leitner and Sheppard (2016) suggest that different theories are better able to explain contexts where urban processes are unfolding differently to the global north. For instance, diverse critical urban theory has begun reframing the urban narrative

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[2] Part of the reason Mabin is skeptical is because he is unsure what theory derived from the global North is unable to explain about the global South. As Mabin (2014:27) asserts: "It remains, for instance, unclear exactly what city/society relationships in the hyper-diverse 'south' elude ideas formed in the 'west' or 'north'".

of the global south by bringing fresh perspectives on certain phenomena such as informality and land tenure.

2.1.1 Different types of southern theory

Within scholarship calling for a southern urban theory, scholars do not agree on the trajectory. Of the numerous propositions, I discuss those relevant for this study. Provincializing is one such approach. Coined by Chakrabarty (2000) in the context of provincializing European history, more recently, the term is used in relation to urban theory. At its core, it exposes the limitations of universal knowledge, and instead calls for situating knowledge and theory (Sheppard, Leitner & Maringanti, 2013; Lawhon, Ernstson & Silver, 2014). Provincializing urban theory offers an opportunity to reject particular urban encounters as universal by strategically framing these as just one version of the urban process (Sheppard, Leitner & Maringanti, 2013; Lawhon, Ernstson & Silver 2014). Scholars in favor of provincializing, do so based on the acknowledgement that theory from the global north is not universal but rooted in space and time- this is one reason it does not always speak to the situation in the global south (Roy, 2009a; 2016a). In order to provincialize, one needs to take up different questions than those in a northern setting (Derickson, 2015). By asking similar questions to those in a northern setting, researchers run the risk of (uncritically) reinforcing the existing body of urban theory. This is because theory is often presented as universally applicable, not embedded in time, it emanates from observations rooted in place and time periods. Some histories instead, are elevated while others that are ignored (Chakrabarty, 2000), yet, these histories are foundational to how we understand cities and urban processes. The histories of colonial subjugation, the

implementation of different ways of understanding the world and governance systems, coupled with relative poverty as well as different traditions and cultures have coalesced to give rise to particular urban spaces, and different pathways for these cities to develop. Knowledge should be drawn from, and apply to diverse locations (Robinson, 2011) because there are research topics important in the south that feature less dominantly in the north. Examples include marginality, land tenure and economic informality (Parnell & Pieterse, 2016).

For Robinson (2002, 2006), a productive approach to theorizing about cities would be based upon comparison. The comparative approach is more prevalent in urban studies that emanate from a modernization theory approach that posits that the global south will transform (under the 'right' conditions) into the global north. Robinson however, argues that southern cities should be considered on par with their northern counterparts. By arguing against the world-cities hierarchy of cities, Robinson (2002) calls for research to be comparative and based on an 'ordinary cities' thesis (as opposed to global cities). This will open up the ability to understand cities as "diverse, creative, modern and distinctive with the possibility to imagine (within the not inconsiderable constraints of contestations and uneven power relations) their own futures and distinctive forms of city-ness" (pg. 545-546).

A major critique of the world-cities comparative gesture is that cities are measured against a model of modernity, an approach which privileges global north cities which are more industrialized and wealthier. This neatly positions cities in the global south, especially African cities as underdeveloped and backward. Additionally, arranging cities based on stages of development means certain distinct features (such as informality and heterogeneous infrastructures) in southern cities are overlooked in disdain, not worthy of theorization

(Robinson, 2011). By employing the ordinary cities thesis, scholars can discover the diversity of features that constitute modernity.

2.1.2 Opposition to southern theory

Southern theory has been met with opposition because there are scholars who argue in favor of universal theories based on the assertion that cities are founded upon the same processes whether in the north or south. Ontological foundations do not shift based on the location of a city or its history, instead, the differences articulated by postcolonial scholars are simply empirical and all cities are empirically different (Scott & Storper, 2015). Brenner and Schmid (2014) similarly oppose (postcolonial) southern scholarship, for two reasons. The first is a focus on micro-level case studies as opposed to general trends such as global capitalism. However, there needs to be an understanding of the daily practices and activities in the southern sites, and such work only be understood through small case studies (Schindler, 2017). Further in many cities across the global south, capitalism is not all encompassing and totalizing (Parnell & Robinson, 2012). Instead, it is perforated which means that certain types of studies would likely overlook the ways in which resources and capital flow. For instance, Schindler (2017) explains that the International Organization for Standardization attempted to create an internationally comparable system of assessment for urban sustainability. However, the data used failed to capture informal waste collection and recycling systems. As a result, for some cities, according to the data, did not have solid waste recycling taking place. The second critique of southern urbanism is the focus on cities rather than the urban. However, research by Lawhon and Makina (2020) indicates that in South Africa at least, the city and urban are understood as distinct categories by those

interviewed. (Which is to say that a place within the city or urban limits might not meet the imagination of a city). Moreover, Roy (2016a) observed that there was no clear demarcation between urban and rural, noting instead that even if the government categorizes a place as urban, scholars might not render all places designated as urban as actually urban.

2.2 Introducing the Conceptual Framework

This dissertation is informed by an emergent conceptual framework termed agonistically transgressive appropriations (ATA). It draws on existing frameworks that are commonly used in the analysis of urban informality, namely Lefebvre's 1968 right to the city (RTTC), and quiet encroachment by Asef Bayat (1997). However, the limits of these existing frameworks paved way for a new way of understanding urban informal activities. This is because there is more to know and understand about informal activities given their pervasiveness, and because of the interest in urban experiences from diverse geographical areas. This makes such work timely.

In this chapter, I outline the key components of the right to the city (RTTC), followed by a discussion on quiet encroachment. I then present ATA as the framework informing this research. I begin by discussing its conceptual foundations, then describe what it does for theory and knowledge on informal activities.

2.2.1 The Right to the City

Scholars and practitioners alike have engaged with the Lefebvrian concept of 'Right to the City' as a useful framework with which to interrogate exclusion and struggles for space within

the city (Huchzermeyer, 2014). Coined by Henri Lefebvre in the 1968 book: *Le Droit á la Ville*, the concept has travelled widely, finding resonance across the globe. The RTTC "is like a cry and a demand… a right to urban life" (Lefebvre, 1996/1968: 158). The city is produced by the everyday activities and labor of city dwellers (Attoh, 2011). Yet many, particularly the poor and marginalized, merely live in the city, they do not have a right to the city (Marcuse, 2012).

Despite the positive utility of the concept, particularly as it is hailed as a slogan for urban change (Mayer, 2012), it remains ambiguous. It is not in fact a set of legal rights and despite the plethora of ways it has been debated, there has been little discussion of what constitutes these rights (Attoh, 2011). Lefebvre offers little guidance. Even so, there have been attempts to conceptualize these rights and the implication for cities (see Brenner, Marcuse & Mayer, 2012 for a more detailed exposition on this topic).

2.2.1.1 What rights? Rights for whom?

Despite that the RTTC was developed in a time period premised on observations in France, it has found resonance in this current period across the globe, often hailed to call attention to the need to renew urban rights (Schmid, 2012). It is of relevance to observe Huchzermeyer's (2014) assertion that at the heart of liberation struggles in many former colonized countries was the literal struggle for rights to access and participate in cities and urban life, and these struggles persist today. In terms of the urban situation across the African continent, the intense poverty of the majority of urbanites as well as widespread informal activity through appropriation and encroachment of space renders frameworks such as the RTTC relevant. Scholars and practitioners use it to analyze the ways in which the urban poor strive towards a just and

equitable urban existence. Many have interrogated the type of rights which should constitute the RTTC as well as asking who should have those rights (Attoh, 2011). In reference to the latter concern, what is clear from Lefebvre on who should have this right, it is those who dwell in the city.

Urban social movements invoking the RTTC do not use it as Lefebvre intended, instead, their application is 'part interpretation, part distortion' (Uitermark, Nicholls & Loopmans, 2012: 2548). Nevertheless, the concept has gained traction and found profound usefulness in the area of fighting urban poverty. The right to the city has been approached in two ways (Vogiazides, 2012). The first way is as a moral tool with which to mobilize for social justice. This radical approach is close to the original Lefebvrian conception. The second approach is by those who have advocated for its institutionalization and recognition as a right within human rights documents. In Latin America, the 2008 constitution of Ecuador and the 2001 City Statute of Brazil are examples of the right to the city in operation (Huchzermeyer, 2018). At a global level, the Right to the City influenced the New Urban Agenda, a guiding document on sustainable urban development which was agreed upon by the United Nations member states in 2016 (Turok & Scheba, 2019).

As a concept, it comprises two dimensions, namely the right to participate in the design and governance of space and the right to appropriate space. It is the right to appropriate space that is the focus of this section and involves allowing urban inhabitants to utilize space in ways that meet their needs. The concept of appropriation creates the space with which to interrogate processes which emerge "outside of, in spite of or under threat of, the spatial prohibitions of the state" (Huchzermeyer, 2014: 82). Lefebvre advocates for the use value of urban space and land to take precedence over exchange value, arguing that the desire to maximize profits has taken

primacy over social needs of the urban inhabitants. This is the reason space in many cities is oriented towards the needs of the wealthy and elite. According to Lefebvre (1996/1968: 154), "only groups, social classes and class fractions capable of revolutionary initiative" can claim the RTTC. This is because the wealthy and elite already 'have the city' in other words, they are able to dictate and direct the use of space towards their needs. The category of people to whom the RTTC framework is applicable (in other words, who should claim or hail a right to the city) critically important because the concept has been utilized by the middle class to gentrify the inner city and expel the poor (Walsh, 2013).

2.2.1.2 Application of the Right to the City

The RTTC is used differently in global north and south. Blokland et al (2015) note that in the global north, movements invoking the concept tend to protect the rights of middle class city dwellers whereas in the south, the discussion is often confined to the rights of the urban poor. Scholars discussing the RTTC in South Africa such as Huchzermeyer (2014), underscore its utility while acknowledging its limits. In the South African context, frameworks that aim to bring about urban change focus on human rights as opposed to socio-economic rights, that is, focus is on first generation at the expense of second and third generation rights. To be explicit, marginalized urbanites rely on the Constitution in which a number of rights are enshrined such as the right to housing and water. However, there are no specific rights in or to the city, instead, the rights of urban inhabitants are the same as those of residents in non-urban parts of the country (Parnell & Pieterse, 2010). This point is crucial because in South Africa, many hail 'human rights' and 'rights talk' but they may not be doing so under the banner of the RTTC. The wide-

varying applications of the concept mean that caution has to be applied when analyzing the activities of actors since not all urban radical activities constitute claiming a right to the city.

2.2.2 Quiet Encroachment

Quiet encroachment is a framework that was developed in the global south and is widely considered suitable for understanding informal activity. It is defined as the 'silent, patient, protracted and pervasive advancement of ordinary people on the propertied and powerful in an effort to survive hardships and better their lives' (Bayat, 1997: 7). It is often used to analyze the ways in which informal urban dwellers in the global south appropriate space as well as essential goods and services such as water and electricity. The objective of these activities is "the redistribution of social goods and opportunities…(land, shelter, piped water, electricity, roads)… The other goal is attaining autonomy both cultural and political" (Bayat, 1997:58). Encroachment is a process of gradually and subtly appropriating space- it describes taking of territory beyond acceptable limits. From a quiet encroachment perspective, the state takes action against these informal actors when their activities reach an intolerable point, or when elites are inconvenienced. In terms of who can be a quiet encroacher, it is 'the ordinary people' or the poor people who encroach upon the properties of the elite, thereby making this framework one with a class narrative. This framework is most applicable in analyzing activities in repressive regimes. A quiet encroachment framework discourages scholars from reading political intention into the survival strategies of the poor; instead, the activities should be considered as a non-movement, a form of agency without intentional political purpose. Ballard (2015: 219) states that when people use space informally, they "rewrite de facto and eventually de jure property rights". In other

words, their practices become associated with specific spaces and this can in some instances afford legal rights to continue with the activities.

The quiet encroachment thesis is not without criticism. Using quiet encroachment as a way in which to understand informal actors in the global south, Johnson (2005) argues that encroachers are not homogenous in the power they wield nor do they espouse shared values. In Jamaica, the research site, so- called community dons or leaders have the most power. There are also different types of encroachments; some are clandestine and criminal such as prostitution and trafficking, while other encroachments are to meet daily needs such as trading and illegally tapping electricity. The former category is guided by different morals in comparison to the latter.

Scholars have offered quiet encroachment as an explanation for select informal activities in South Africa (e.g. Oldfield & Greyling, 2015). Oldfield and Greyling (2015) acknowledge that the contextual differences between the Middle East and South Africa impact the analysis. While quiet encroachment is meant to capture the global south in general, in relation to the South African context in particular, it does not map on neatly in select situations. The political climate in South Africa facilitates and enables certain types of activities because of the strong human rights framework (Lawhon, Pierce & Makina, 2018). As a result, some encroachments are political, not apolitical, with the intention of meeting daily needs. This in turn allows for informal actors to encroach in context specific ways and secure their livelihood gains in a way that might not be possible in other contexts.

2.2.3 Agonistically Transgressive Appropriation as a Distinctive Spatial Practice

Agonistically transgressive appropriations are a recently articulated way in which to understand spatial activity. It is inspired by the concept of appropriation (from Lefebvre) because it captures the essence of informal activities, that "those who do not 'have' the city, 'take' it" (Lawhon, Pierce & Makina, 2018: 117). The other framework that offered inspiration was quiet encroachment because it is particularly useful in conceptualizing informal activities in the global south as ordinary, rather than being characterized as passive or acts of revolution (Lawhon, Pierce & Makina, 2018). Agonistically transgressive appropriations are those takings or activities that are ongoing, always in the making and not consolidative. Such activities are incremental, marginal and regulated informally. The time-frames of the activities are undetermined: at times brief, at times over long periods, halting due to responses by the state or changes in flows of capital or resources. Activities understood as ATA, are not apolitical, rather when such activities are guided by political consciousness, it is not one that is class based with the intention of bringing about revolution.

Utilizing ATA helps to identify what is not captured by the RTTC and quiet encroachment (as preeminent frameworks used in understanding informal activities). As a new concept, it brings to the fore different types of appropriations which would otherwise be overlooked or masked if another framing was used (Lawhon, Pierce & Makina, 2018). The three main characteristics that constitute ATA, and set it apart from existing frameworks are outlined here. First, agonistically transgressive appropriators seek to continue to appropriate, rather than consolidate. The second key feature is that there is no one set of rules that can be used to aid in appropriations; instead, operations are premised on what is possible at present, given the limits of

official regulations. Appropriations are however strategic and not spontaneous. This leads to the third characteristic, that as appropriations unfold, any gaps that emanate from disagreements between actors offer avenues to expand appropriations.

Key for this study is that ATA recognizes that informal activity is not amoral, neither is it unregulated, yet, "regulations and codes of conduct are not always transparent or legible to outsiders, and for many years were not acknowledged or given scant attention" (Lawhon, Pierce & Makina, 2018:121). In the conceptualization phase of this project, I used the language of claims in order to understand the reasons waste pickers believed *they* (and not other people, including other waste pickers) were entitled to the resources in the bins. I do not employ the language of rights, and instead reserve this term for rights as legal authorization. In reference to street traders, Chatterjee (2004) mentioned in Bénit-Gbaffou (2016) notes that using the language of rights to make claims poses a challenge because the activities are informal therefore lacking legal authorization. I considered the vocabulary of rules, as a way in which to understand regulation of waste picking. However, similar limitation to the language of rights arose since there is no formal (or informal) rule making association for street waste pickers[3]. I considered the terminology of guidelines because a guideline is "a general rule, principle, or piece of advice" (Oxford dictionary online). Although one can debate as to whether these are rules, or merely guidelines, the concept of a code of conduct is the most suitable in this context. The purpose of a code of conduct according to the Ethics & Compliance Initiative (ECI) is to clarify the "mission, values and principles, linking them with ***standards of professional conduct***. The code articulates the ***values*** the organization wishes to foster in leaders and employees and, in doing so, ***defines desired behavior"***. (Emphasis mine).

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[3] There are associations such as the African Reclaimers Organization (ARO) based in Johannesburg. I am unsure of its national reach.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I provided the conceptual foundation for this project and I positioned the various theoretical arguments utilized in understanding informality in the global south. By using a recently articulated theoretical framework for this study, I provide a platform for asking different sets of questions, pertaining to deepening understanding of waste picking. This is because in South Africa, waste pickers do not *have to* pick waste; there are many more people desiring these materials than materials available; therefore, understandings of waste pickers should emphasize that those who become pickers are those successful enough to claim materials because there are more people who want these materials than available and accessible. In short, they *get to* do so. This is key in understanding the urban fabric of the cities in which they inhabit as well as the motivation and justification utilized when making livelihood decisions. Using this emerging approach is an opportunity to theorize about the global south from the global south in a manner that can contribute to diversifying urban theory while simultaneously taking a more nuanced stance to understanding informality as a heterogeneous phenomenon. The next chapter provides a review of the relevant literature and expands upon the key concepts identified in the introductory chapter.

CHAPTER 3: INFORMALITY AND WASTE

Scholars have long attempted to understand the inner dynamics of the informal economy. The existence of the informal economy is viewed either as a positive attribute to both the economy and those benefiting from the services or as negative, because informal businesses do not pay taxes, and some informal activities operate counter to modernist desires and aspirations. Yet, the heterogeneous nature of the informal economy allows both viewpoints to exist simultaneously (Davis & Thurlow, 2010). An important point that requires clarification is the commonly held perspective that informal activities are criminal. Most informal activities operate in breach of the law due to operating outside of official regulation, are unregistered and this is illegal, which to some equates to criminal. However, criminal activities such as drug peddling and theft are not categorized as informal. It is therefore important to make a distinction between criminality and informality (Potts, 2007).

3.1 Approaches to the Informal Economy

Urbanization on the African continent is not driven by industrialization, and this means that in many African cities, there is an oversupply of labor without corresponding employment prospects (Geyer, 2015), suggesting high levels of unemployment and high levels of informality due to too few jobs. This is one of the ways that the urbanization process in the global south generally differs from that of the global north. Pertinent to this project is that Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) is the most informalized region globally (ILO, 2018). Potts (2008) observes that while aspects of informality were present even in pre-capitalist urban areas, the pervasiveness of its scale and participation coupled by an absence of rapid industrialization or prospects of formal

employment opportunities makes it different. Informality is a socially constructed phenomenon (Roy, 2009a; Inverardi-Ferri, 2018). This is because the laws, regulations and enforcement practices determining that which is formal and that which is informal are fluid and sometimes inconsistently applied.

The informal economy is positioned as having a low barrier to entry and the assumption therefore is that it is easy to engage in informal income-earning activities. However, it requires searching for opportunities, and negotiating the informal regulatory terrain. Studies show that for the more profitable informal jobs, there are major barriers to entry (Meagher, 1995). Some scholars therefore distinguish informal work, using two categories, namely low-tier or exclusion-driven opportunities and upper-tier or exit driven. The former tend to be categorized as opportunities undertaken by those excluded from the formal sector and considered lower paying in wages. The latter are those engaged in by workers who exit the formal economy for a variety of reasons including better wages, inefficient and unfavorable state regulation (Williams & Bezeredi, 2018).

As aforementioned in the introductory chapter, Hart coined the term informal sector in the 1970s. This terminology created the dual nature (formal/informal) of economic activities as understood today. This position, known as the dualist perspective, is one of three dominant ways of understanding informality. The other approaches are known as the structuralist and legalist views. The structuralist perspective emerged in the 1970s and 1980s and scholars with this view consider the formal and informal sectors as connected, as opposed to diametrically different (Alderslade, Talmage & Freeman, 2006). However, the connection is that the informal sector is subordinated to the formal sector and thrives by supplying cheap labor and goods for the formal sector, that informality is a function of the capitalist economy (Chen, 2012).

The third approach, the legalist perspective which was championed by de Soto in the late 1980s, considers the informal sector as an outcome of stringent government regulation which prevents certain enterprises, particularly those of a smaller size from flourishing (they might not be able to afford the requisite licenses and protocols for operating a business legally). De Soto focused on the positive aspects of the informal sector, positioning it as a capitalist response to state incapacity (de Soto, 1989). The legalist thesis posits that the informal economy can only exist because there is a formal economy meaning that one can be in a well-paid sector but still operate informally (Roy, 2009a). The popularity of the legalist school took place in tandem with the rise of neoliberal economic policies and brought about an understanding that informal activities will not cease as long as state regulation is costly and the business environment hostile (Alderslade, Talmage & Freeman, 2006).

The informal sector can be viewed as people creating a space for themselves in the city since this sector provides housing, schooling, sanitation and transportation services (Meagher, 2013). Given the large numbers engaged in informality across multiple sectors, J. Rogerson et al (2014: s2) affirm: "For the majority of inhabitants of urban Africa the informal city – as mirrored in informal settlements and the primacy of informal sector employment– is the real African city". And yet, there is a paucity in analysis when providing interventions for the informal economy, given that many who work informally also dwell in informal housing (Obeng-Odoom, 2011), therefore informality should be understood as a way to produce space. My project therefore contributes to understanding the manner with which informality intersects with socio-spatial processes in my research site. The interest in urban informality emanates from an analytical gap because the informal sector initially focused on only work and studies did not analyze the spatial aspects or informality as it emerged in urban spaces or that it could constitute a form or urbanism

(AlSayyad & Roy, 2003). Now, things are changing and the theoretical and policy perceptions that developing cities need to eliminate informal activities in order to stay within the modernization paradigm are falling out of favor with some scholars as well (Roy, 2005, 2009b; Potts, 2008; Kamete, 2013). Informality should be viewed instead as deregulated instead of unregulated as commonly postulated (Roy, 2009b). Deregulation suggests informal activities as thoughtfully carried out, purposeful or strategic where the absence of government regulation allows for activities to take place. Further, as research proliferates, it shows that informality is not a preserve of the poor; rather, as Roy (2005: 148) points out, it "might be a differentiated process embodying varying degrees of power and exclusion". This means those who have less power or face more exclusion are likely to engage informally, but the state also engages in informal activities (Roy, 2009b).

3.1.1 Specifics on Informality in South Africa

The informal economy in South Africa has been a topic of research since the 1970s (Rogerson, 2000). Literature spanning four decades has discussed different activities such as kombi/minibus taxis, shebeens and trade (examples Rogerson & Beavon, 1980; Wellings & Sutcliffe, 1984; Simon & Birch, 1992; Rogerson & Hart, 1986; Rogerson, 2000). Within academic circles, informal economy re-emerged at the beginning of the democratic dispensation from 1995 because of the new government's policies that included assisting small enterprises (Rogerson, 2007). In the South African informal economy, two categories exist, namely microenterprises, which are defined as a small enterprise that requires little start-up capital and individual activities undertaken purely for survival, in order to earn a living by those who are

unable to secure jobs (Rogerson, 2000). From the perspective of providing employment, the informal economy is of importance to South Africa where unemployment was at 29.1% in October 2019 (Statistics South Africa, 2019). Where debates in South Africa generally mirror international trends, a key aspect worth emphasizing is that in government economic policy, the informal economy (subsumed under the terminology of 'second economy') is included in programs (Devey, Skinner & Valodia, 2006) and this has facilitated interest in the role of the state with regards to helping workers in the informal economy (Rogerson, 2007).

3.2 Waste Politics

Waste management is a vital, and sometimes mundane aspect of everyday life because waste production is a part of human daily interaction with the world. The disposal process of waste shapes urban spaces in both physical and ecological ways. In this light, waste offers an outlet through which to analyze the nexus between institutional imperatives, socio-economic justice, informality and urban life in South Africa.

Waste is synonymous with trash, rubbish or garbage. It is commonly understood "as a void – the worthless, redundant, rejected and discarded afterwards of how we live our lives" (Evans, 2011: 707). In defining waste, Moore (2011: 134) provokes that: "waste is what is "managed as waste"", in other words, the definition is context dependent. Besides hazardous waste that is distinguished from municipal solid waste, a discarded item (such as clothing) can be landfilled, or recycled. Debates about what constitutes waste can be found in literature on urbanization and environmental justice. Commencing with Mary Douglas' influential book, Purity and Danger (1966), which analyzes waste from different cultural and religious perspectives, there has been a

proliferation of work along these lines. What can be concluded is that the different types of waste, while constituting unwanted goods and by- products, are given new life through recycling and reuse.

3.2.1 Waste Pickers

Municipal solid waste management (MSWM) in many developing countries is a combination of formal municipality services complemented by private companies, non-profit organizations and informal processes that comprise co-operatives, private companies and individuals (Ahmed, & Ali, 2004). In South Africa, municipal solid waste usually ends up in landfills and these are fast reaching full capacity (Godfrey et al, 2017). While there might be other ways for South Africa to reduce landfilling such as through incineration, these processes are not socially sustainable in the short and medium term due to the competition for recyclables by waste pickers.

Waste picking is often categorized as a survivalist occupation, but this is not always the case. Some individuals select this occupation based upon the potential economic benefits that can be obtained (Coletto & Bisschop, 2017). Waste pickers in Mexico for example, earn income above the designated poverty line (Medina, 2007; Marello & Helwege, 2018). However, waste pickers are at risk of serious occupational health risks such as bruising from sharp objects. They are at risk of being killed by compactors, crushers and other vehicles on the landfills (Wilson, Velis & Cheeseman, 2006). Further, literature suggests the attitude to informal waste pickers by the state and public ranges from support, malignant tolerance to outright rejection (Rogerson,

2001; Wilson, Velis & Cheeseman, 2006; Schenck & Blaauw, 2011). They also face social stigma due to their association with waste (Lawhon & Millington, 2019).

3.2.2 Waste Pickers in South Africa

In South Africa waste pickers have been engaging in this work for decades. Literature on landfill picking is from as early as 1986 (de Kock, 1986). In 2014, informal recycling (in weight) constituted between 80-90% of post-consumer packaging (Godfrey & Oelofse, 2017). However, the prevailing idea that a legitimate recycler takes the form of an enterprise, not a waste picker, not only threatens the livelihoods of those who have been expertly doing this work, but disregards their role. This is not to brand waste pickers as environmental activists. Scholars suggest that informal waste pickers may not be driven by environmental and sustainability logics, even though their work reduces what enters landfills and helps to make cities cleaner (Baud, Grafakos, Hordijk & Post, 2001).Instead, it is important to understand their crucial role in providing an environmental service in the form of recycling and reusing items in the waste stream as well as how this labor shapes South African cities., Yet, they operate without the protections of recognized work, and the ability to influence policies to their benefit (although there are efforts to include them).

There exists a growing body of literature on street waste pickers, examples include work in Cape Town by Timm (2015), Peres (2016), Langenhoven & Dyssel (2007), and Benson & Vanqa-Mgijima (2010); in Johannesburg by Sentime (2014), and Simatele, Dlamini & Kubanza (2017); in Durban by McLean (2000) and in Tshwane by Schenck & Blaauw (2011) and countrywide including Viljoen, Blaauw & Schenck (2016); Viljoen, Blaauw & Schenck (2018).

However, the field has not been adequately exploited and there are gaps in literature I sought to address through my research.

Many studies assert waste pickers operate under precarious circumstances (Coletto & Bisschop, 2017). In literature, much of this precarity is framed from the perspective of exploitation by middlemen and earning low incomes (Coletto & Bisschop, 2017; Medina, 2007; Rogerson, 2001; Viljoen, Blaauw & Schenck, 2018). There are other factors that coalesce to make street waste picking precarious such as harassment by authorities, adverse living arrangement, and stigma associated with dirty work.

According to Kalleberg (2009: 2), precarious work refers to "employment that is uncertain, unpredictable, and risky from the point of view of the worker. Resulting distress, obvious in a variety of forms, reminds us daily of such precarity". The concept of precarious labor is well written about in relation to wage labor. From these readings, the dynamics in the waste work industry are no different than those experienced in many other informal occupations.

Conclusion

In this chapter I discussed the major approaches to understanding the informal economy and urban informality, providing the genesis of the concepts and the current manner these topics are investigated generally. In relation to informality in the context of South Africa, I provided a brief summary of literature in order to contextualize the importance of this research, and set the foundation for the discussions in this dissertation. The diverse scholarly approaches expose the various debates in understanding the informal economy and also postulate ways in which it can be either eradicated, or made beneficial to those who operate therein.

The following chapter is an exposition of the methodology and methods.

CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

In the last two decades, urban studies have taken on a 'southern turn'. This is a positive development for those concerned with the marginalization of the global south in the academy. They now have a platform upon which to engage, as voices increase, and more scholars contribute new ideas. Yet challenges exist, and data collection is one such. On the African continent, the lack of big data sets as well as a paucity of reliable, up-to-date information are mentioned as obstacles to obtaining quality information (Parnell & Pieterse, 2016). This can deter researchers because the collection of data can be an onerous process, and one might prefer to conduct research in a different area, or theme where such obstacles do not have to be overcome. Further, certain topics, which are important, such as informal activities present problems of access to respondents, as well as interactions with the same individuals because of the dynamism of operations. Depending on the informal activity selected, respondents might be unwilling to speak to researchers, particularly if the topic is sensitive. The question then is: how do we, in the face of these impediments, use, adapt or develop methods that are suitable for studying informality and other less studied, but widespread phenomena? I asked myself how to provide new insights through mainstream tools and approaches. In this chapter, I discuss the methodology and justification for the methods undertaken and the strategies to overcome any barriers encountered.

The chapter proceeds as follows: I discuss positionality, and situate myself in the context of my research. Access to information is often negotiated through positionality, therefore it is not a neutral factor when conducting fieldwork. The next section provides information about the research area and justification for site selection. I document how I collected the data, and provide information about the respondents.

4.1 Positionality

Post-structural, postcolonial and feminist scholars assert that researchers should be cognizant of their positions and those of their participants as well as power relations between the researcher and the researched (McDowell, 1992; Rose, 1997; Cloke et al, 2000). Positionality is important in the research process as it might pose an impediment to accessing information as well as appreciating the experiences of the researched. Scholars have suggested the importance of awareness of the interplay of gender, national origin, race, language, class, age and other factors and how factors coalesce to shape the research process. "Positionality represents a space in which objectivism and subjectivism meet" (Bourke, 2014: 3) and these factors operate in a dialectic manner and as researchers, we bear subjectivities, but we can strive to be objective (Bourke, 2014).

In terms of definition, positionality is constructed as a series of identity-based markers, resulting in a binary, with insiders being the privileged 'in group' who possess knowledge, while the advantage of outsiders is that they are objective (Visser, 2000; Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). Further, acceptance as a member of a group affords a degree of trust, which might be absent if the researcher is an outsider (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). This binary construction of positionality obscures many other factors in research that serve to either open or close access to data and information. Further, the dichotomy implies that positionalities are static and fixed, yet relationships with respondents change and evolve through space and time, which changes insider and outsider status (Mullings, 1999). One can occupy a 'space between', which is a notion that serves to bridge the dichotomy created by the duality of insider-outsider by acknowledging that positionality operates as a dialectic (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). Prior to engaging in fieldwork, I presumed that I would either be an outsider or insider depending on whom I was interacting.

Further, the degree of insider/outsider status would oscillate, depending on the individual I encountered.

Moser (2008:383) was familiar with "literature on positionality and situated knowledge, issues relating to research conducted by 'First World' researchers in the 'Third World', and techniques of reflexivity" prior to fieldwork. I too was familiar with these literatures, the majority written for northern audiences travelling south. There was little on the complexities of southern researchers working in a global south context and the challenges thereof, or, of those who are not privileged northern researchers travelling south because they (southern researchers) are considered insiders when conducting research in the global south. There might be numerous commonalities but there will be obvious, substantive differences including race, gender, class, ethnicity, language, religion and country of national origin, and each of these will open a specific 'gate', and close another.

There are few examples of northern-based scholars from the global south who have documented their experiences of conducting research in their home country (examples include Sultana, 2007; Nagar, 2014). These expositions were useful in demonstrating the layers and nuances of positionality by showing how different dimensions of identity shapes the ability to access information. It brings to bear the idea that while researchers can blend in with their research subjects, there are distances between the researcher and researched that are not always about race and national identity, that identity even as a southern scholar, operating in a familiar context can be complex. Similarly, the complexities of African identity, and the manner with which this manifests in research is not usually mentioned, yet this is important in shaping projects. Visser, (2000), writing about his experiences conducting research in South Africa, states how his similarities with his respondents was in fact not beneficial as they were suspicious

of his intentions, primarily because he chose to study abroad instead of locally. In yet another example L. Bourke et al (2009) provide a profile of different researchers and the challenges they faced as they navigated their various positions while conducting research in African contexts. For one researcher, the ability to demonstrate knowledge of one of the national languages in the research area facilitated access to a participant. However, for another researcher who selected his neighborhood as the site for the research, pursuing education outside of his home country, coupled with relative education levels, created barriers which proved challenging to navigate. These researchers leveraged different aspects of their identities to reduce distance with respondents in order to create rapport and trust. Reflecting from fieldwork, I believe that certain aspects of my identity facilitated specific types of access to respondents. It is therefore worth considering "whether situated in your 'home' country, or in a place one was not born in, our position as researchers automatically calls into question our authentic and personal knowledge of place" (L. Bourke et al, 2009:99). I certainly did not believe I would blend in with the respondents, and while I knew I would share with them *some* or *all* of the following: gender, language, national origin and race, I was aware that a definite barrier would be class and education levels. While my assumptions were largely accurate, when I entered the field, I realized just how much I stood out. I ended up working with mostly male waste pickers and thus gender constituted a factor that consistently set me apart from the respondents.

In the geographic research literature, I reviewed, power relations are often spoken of from the perspective of the global north versus the south, as well as through the lens of gender. I am aware of the complexities of African identity, and the impacts on access to participants. In a context where physical appearance is tied to identity and belonging (ethnic and national ties), my features are often a source of question to many I encounter. Many believe I am not of the

Southern Africa region, despite heritage from neighboring Zimbabwe. One's appearance opens and closes gates, determines what people say to you and even perceptions about your motives. Where literature tends to write about physical appearance based upon race in relation to gatekeeping, I add that ethnic appearance too plays a role. For instance, a waste picker to whom I was introduced assumed I was from West Africa and he was of the impression I wanted to offer him a job as a buyback center manager. A few weeks later, I was informed that nationals of Nigeria, Cameroon and Malawi own many of the small-scale buyback centers, and sometimes enter into partnerships with local waste pickers for various reasons, including access to other waste pickers.

The significance of understanding one's own positionality is to mitigate as much as possible a situation whereby a socially desired response is provided. And this is compounded by social distance (in terms of class, age, ethnicity etc.) between interviewer and interviewee. Strategies to overcome this include manners, approach, dress, and interaction (Barriball & While, 1994). In my case, I dressed casually, usually in loose jeans, a t-shirt, and sweater (in winter), while in the spring and summer; I swapped the sweater for a light cardigan. Likewise, I wore closed simple shoes (either sneakers, ballet flats or sandals) for comfort. Another way of building relationships is to shift the engagements from extraction, to mutual understanding and one way to do so, is to provide information about yourself. I found this particularly useful.

I established through literature and interviews that the majority of waste pickers were from South Africa, Zimbabwe and Lesotho. I did not interview any Basotho waste pickers. I believe this would have added value in terms of understanding how they view waste picking, especially since waste pickers from other countries singled them out as operating using a different set of norms rules than them. As has been reported by other female researchers, I experienced

unwelcome sexual advances. My familiarity with the social norms and cultural expectations helped me to negotiate and navigate this terrain with relative ease. While the waste pickers sometimes enquired as to the reasons I did not have my own family, they were much more concerned as to why I was not financially successful. They often asked if I owned a vehicle. Aside from not owning a vehicle, the fact that I lived in the neighborhood provided an indication of my class background.

In conclusion, as with Moser (2008), prior to entering the field, I read the relevant literature on positionality and was familiar with the debates. I was aware of what to expect, but I found there was a learning curve. I found the debates about insider/outsider useful in engaging with participants. Therefore, where necessary, I used my insider status with the different groups, in order to open engagement, and my outsider status as an opportunity to be taught and to learn.

4.2 The Research Area & Associated Complications

My research is part of a larger project 'Turning Livelihoods into Rubbish'. The expanse, diversity and ordinariness of informal activities make South Africa a suitable research site to investigate waste picking and informal processes. The fieldwork was conducted in Tshwane, South Africa. The City of Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality was formed through the amalgamation of councils and municipalities in Pretoria and surrounding areas (City of Tshwane, n.d). The central business district still retains the name Pretoria (in the vernacular) and many people still use Pretoria when making reference to Tshwane. My research was located in a specific part of the city demarcated as Pretoria East.

Pretoria East is the southeastern part of Tshwane. It is a relatively high socioeconomic residential area and commercial hub (Badenhorst, 2002) and comprises many suburbs. In terms of categorization, and providing international comparisons, the area comprises wealthy residential golf estates and mansions, in addition to stand-alone houses, and gated security complexes (which are commonplace in South Africa). This might not be the same elsewhere.

The study site was selected for two reasons. The first is familiarity, given that my family has lived in the area for over two decades therefore ease of access contributed to the decision. Familiarity fosters personal safety as well due to knowledge of the area. The second is that it is a *relatively* wealthy residential area so there would likely be a variety of items in the waste stream. Research was conducted in the two suburbs (termed Area 1 and Area 2 in this document) I was most familiar. Strategically, the suburbs were within walking distance from each other (4,9 kms or 3 miles) or a short trip using public transport.

Nevertheless, working in the neighborhood was complex. First, it was a challenge establishing distance. Because the research site was close to my place of residence, I often encountered the participants while on errands (for example, walking to nearby shops). I eventually established mental protocols on how to manage the unplanned meetings that could yield information therefore I was able to be flexible which proved fruitful. I was able to separate official interviews from daily interactions but I would remind them I was working on a project. The second concern is personal. I realized that I was under surveillance by the 'observers' in the research areas, and many did not understand my association with waste pickers. I found research activities drew attention from those who worked in the area. I had at least one incident when a man approached me for casual conversation and knew me as 'the girl who is always talking to the guys for the bins (sic)'. Further, I experienced an increase in unwanted advances; the

rejection was not understood as those who approached me perceived their social status higher than that of waste pickers. Likewise, I reduced my frequent visits to the local convenience store because the owner sometimes encountered problems with specific waste pickers. I noticed his disapproving stares each time I spoke to respondents in the store. During the 6 months, I met waste pickers (and others who worked in the areas) whom I had never spoken to (or recognized), but they knew of me- and would recount the respondents with whom I associated. It was evident that those with whom I interacted became accustomed to my presence, but I occasionally encountered individuals who did not understand my intentions, perhaps due to unfamiliarity with the research process. For example, the first time I met Musa, I was walking with Tshepang. They exchanged pleasantries and Musa asked: 'ubani lo sisi?' (who is this sister?), and noted that he had seen me walking in the area. Tshepang explained I was conducting research and emphasized I was not asking about the earnings and wages of waste pickers.

4.3 Methodology

Previous studies on waste picking have employed both quantitative and qualitative methods (e.g. Schenck & Blaauw, 2011). Despite the positive attributes of qualitative methods, the prevailing critique levied at these methods pertains to their idiographic nature and the non-generalizability. However, in-depth understanding of a few examples or case studies assists in providing a more complete picture and better understanding of a phenomenon. The strength of qualitative methods is their suitability for studying social processes and as well as exploring behavior and the significance of experience (Darlington & Scott, 2002). Qualitative methods are most useful in understanding subjective issues because the process produces thick descriptions,

which are not standardized. Qualitative methods further aim to interpret and understand the beliefs, rationales and logics behind the social decisions of their subjects (Lewis & Ritchie 2003). Qualitative research approaches consider social life as a dynamic process, not a fixed, static phenomenon (Lewis & Ritchie 2003). This is crucial for my research which aims to understand underlying logics of voluntary involvement with waste picking noting that the logics may change over time.

Qualitative research, particularly ethnography is not a forthright process because it is composed of (and influenced by) what we observe and the information participants tell us (Brayboy & Deyhle, 2000). I used qualitative methods since I intended to understand the perceptions and opinions of the interviewees. A qualitative study is a process of understanding social and human problems by collecting detailed information from respondents (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Qualitative methods seek to interpret and understand the beliefs, rationales and logics behind the decisions and actions taken by research respondents. Qualitative research approaches consider social life as a process that is dynamic, and not fixed in time (Lewis & Ritchie, 2003). This is crucial for my study, which aimed to understand underlying logics of involvement with waste work, noting that the logics may change over time. In order to understand why they do waste work, I asked a series of questions. These questions often paved the way for life stories to be shared. I asked each question in order to respond to different aspects of waste picking and to look for contradictions or confirmation of assumptions as well as to add richness and nuance to the responses.

I used three methods to collect data. I anticipated that in-depth, semi-structured interviews would be the main source of data supported by participant observation and documents (literature,

news articles). However participant observation played a much larger role in the research process, as discussed further.

4.3.1 In- depth, Semi-Structured Interviews

The purpose of in-depth interviews is to understand the respondents' perspectives on the topic of investigation. It considers the interviewee the 'expert of their own experience' (Darlington & Scott, 2002: 48). A semi-structured interview allows for the examination of complex and even sensitive topics as well as further questioning as the approach is flexible and iterative. Likewise, it facilitates the ability to change direction if the interview requires (for instance, an interviewee remembers an important, attention-grabbing or novel point). Equally important, contradictions can be clarified and examined. Interviews are shaped by *both* the informants and researcher, not by the researcher alone (Brayboy & Deyhle, 2000). Another consideration is that respondents might comprise a diverse group of individuals, therefore standardized, one-size-fits all questionnaires would prevent useful insights (Barriball & While, 1994). Standardization is premised upon the assumption that all participants will use the same words and vocabulary, and will use these words in the same way, to convey the same meaning. In a context where multiple languages and dialects are spoken, this is not the case, as words might not have the same meaning to everyone. Semi-structured interviews allow for the changes in language and words, without compromising the meaning of the question. In terms of analysis, then, validity and veracity is premised "upon conveying equivalence of meaning" (Barriball & While, 1994:330). For example, in South Africa, the constitution recognizes 11 official languages. Additionally, there are other unofficial languages as well as widely spoken regional

vernaculars that comprise a mixture of different languages. This sometimes means words convey different meanings to individuals. Context too can change the meaning of a word. For instance, I found that sometimes respondents used the term *zula* or *zulazula* to describe their work. Some respondents used the term loosely to mean to wander around in search of bins, while others used it explicitly to mean picking waste.

4.3.2. Participant Observation

Participant observation formed a vital part of the research. One limitation of interviews is that they capture what people say, and not their actions (Darlington & Scott, 2002). Participant observation was therefore selected as a suitable method with which to observe actually existing practices of waste picking. Watching them while they worked provided critical insight as well as improved my understanding of the topic. As an observer, I was able to ask appropriate questions as well. It was important to ask questions about my observations because respondents and researchers sometimes analyze and interpret situations and actions differently (Brayboy & Deyhle, 2000). By asking, and discussing, I was able to better bridge my assumptions and understand their viewpoints.

4.3.3 Walking as Method

Walking can constitute an important way in which a researcher understands the urban environment. I employed walking as a method because it exposes spatial practices as well as the manner with which inhabitants conceptualize space through their everyday activities. The

researcher is better able to understand how people use and inhabit space, as well as the changes arising from appropriations, imaginations and adaptations of the spaces (Emmel & Clark, 2009). As with an increasing number of researchers who use walking as a method (Evans & Jones, 2011), I too found walking with participants to be useful for collecting data. Walking was the main way in which street waste pickers (vs. landfill pickers or waste buyers) moved around, therefore an important part of understanding the participants and their work. Despite the debates about the replicability of walking, as well as the differences between male and female experiences with mobility in urban space (Pierce & Lawhon, 2015), I found it useful for contextualizing the manner in which information is gathered. In fact, in an article about transport in research methods, Wegerif, (2019) points out the process of travelling with respondents allows for gathering information and making sense of context. Walking further allows the researcher to trace changes in spaces and places (Emmel & Clark, 2009).

4.4 Ethics

4.4.1 Consent

The study and purpose were explained verbally, and participation was taken as consent. The respondents had the right to withdraw from the study at any point and I established this through constant reminders that I was working on a project since I wanted to ensure they knew I would use the information provided. At the end of the fieldwork, I reviewed the data again and consulted those respondents whom I had prolonged contact with for their consent. However, I had sought permission before interviewing. Confirming at the conclusion of fieldwork served as

part of the process of concluding fieldwork and informing the participants as to the reason I was leaving the research site.

4.4.2 Confidentiality

In order to preserve the confidentiality of the respondents, their names have been changed. I use pseudonyms that are either a translation (loose or precise) of their names into another language or names that describe their activities or personalities (such as the Loner, of whom I provide a more detailed account below). Further, I do not include street names and suburbs, and I use different days of waste collection. So if waste is collected on Fridays, in this document, I have assigned a different day.

Perhaps interestingly, I did not know the legal names of many (perhaps any) of the waste pickers as they were called by or used nicknames. For instance, one respondent introduced himself as Nick[4] (also known as the Loner in this document), but waste pickers referred to him as Mokoena. In conversation, while recalling a situation, he referred to himself as Tafara. Still, another, whose name I asked, told me he had no name. Upon investigation, three individuals told me "we call him Khumbula"; "I don't know his name, but he calls himself Khumbula"; and "they call him Khumbula". This is not to say they do not know one another's names, or they deliberately obscured their names from me, rather, through my interactions with them, I realized that if they provided this information to each other, the parameters of conducting research prevented me from finding out. In my view, this does not compromise the data; rather, it serves

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[4] This is also a pseudonym.

to demonstrate the extent to which they prefer to remain anonymous, even to those whom they intimately interact.

4.4.3 Photographs

I decided not to take any photographs of the waste pickers who participated in this study. Instead, taking pictures of their materials and places of relevance to the study. I took this decision at the inception of the study in order to foster trust, however, I was duly informed during the fieldwork period that missionaries sometimes requested pictures of waste pickers in order to show how the poor in Africa live. Such requests (from missionaries) were declined citing privacy- the waste pickers did not want their families to find out their living conditions. Perhaps they were unsure how the pictures would be used, or perhaps they had a suspicion their images would be used in brochures. However, in contrast to this, towards the end of my project, when I requested pictures of high value items (such as iPhones, Tablets, jewelry), they were willing and even suggested I take pictures of them. In response to the concern about privacy, they were not worried anybody they knew would see the images. Still, I chose not to take pictures of them because of the previous conversation. I wanted to ensure they were comfortable, even after fieldwork was completed.

4.4.4 Compensation and Incentives

I did not offer formal or financial compensation for participating in the study. I considered that I would probably have more participants interested because I was offering money; I was

concerned about the quality of relationships and the data I would obtain if I offered a monetary incentive. Some researchers justify paying because the knowledge and time of the participants is valuable (Darlington & Scott, 2002). I agree with these scholars, that their time was valuable and deserved compensation therefore I considered the various ways in which I could demonstrate my appreciation. I intended to purchase snacks to share and considered purchasing blankets for the core respondents. However, upon entry into the field, I found that many would purchase or cook food, be given by passersby, or directed by shop attendants to where food was to be thrown out. In addition, many did not snack while they worked or relaxed so my proposed idea of bringing snacks to share would not work. I opted to periodically buy and share lunch or beverages such as sodas or water as situations arose. After concluding the fieldwork, I made a meal for the respondents whom I had not bought beverages or food. I abandoned the blanket idea because I finished research in the summer so the respondents had no use for them.

4.5 Reflexive, Iterative Processes

The contrast between the proposed approach to the study and how it unfolded is noteworthy from the perspective of conducting research with informal actors. I begin this section with an excerpt from my proposal. The intention is to demonstrate my thought process prior to entering the field, and contrast this with the actual experience:

"the challenges I will encounter relate to the dynamism of informal operations. Since informal operations are flexible, dynamic and often in flux, one needs to know the days of the week and time period during which to find the participants. The flexibility of their occupation might pose a limitation if I want to embark on a reiterative process. However, I intend to build

relationships and trust in order to obtain telephone numbers for ease of communication because I want to conduct multiple interviews. I will approach the interviews as a conversation in order to foster meaningful interaction".

Despite awareness of the dynamism of the informal sector, I did not grasp the extent to which my plan was for a formal sector approach. In my proposal, I intended to observe waste picking for three weeks in order to ascertain a pattern. In other words, I was searching for order and predictability and given that waste is collected weekly, at a probable time meant this was not unrealistic. I intended to introduce myself and request two walking/working interviews and their phone numbers in order to set up appointments. The process did not unfold as planned because waste pickers who granted interviews generally wanted the interviews conducted immediately (as opposed to an appointed time). The request for waste pickers to be interviewed immediately after meeting demonstrates the challenges to the formal interview process I had envisioned. For those who did agree to appointments, these were usually scheduled while they worked but I found my presence distracting as it slowed them down considerably.

I interviewed participants while they worked, sometimes, during their break time. This was usually after they had finished working in the morning, while waiting for bins to be brought out to the curbside in the afternoon. During this period, some would sort their items or have lunch. Researchers have found the location of an interview impacts the discussion (Elwood & Martin, 2000). As a result, conducting interviews in different locations, while the participants engaged in different types of activities added nuance to this study. I was able to obtain a more holistic account of their occupation and lifestyles given that I observed a variety of activities that constituted waste picking.

4.6 The Respondents

In order to access respondents, a variety of sampling approaches were considered. Sampling is a process of selecting participants from a defined population group (O.C Robinson, 2014). I already knew the sample population I was looking for, therefore, upon arriving in South Africa, I woke up early on trash collection days to observe the frequency of waste picking activities. I employed this observation strategy throughout the first few weeks prior to embarking upon research, in order to familiarize myself with my surroundings, in relation to waste picking. Even though I was familiar with the area, I was not familiar with the *dynamics* of street waste picking.

In my study, as with many qualitative projects, there was a component of convenience sampling (Marshall, 1996). The decision to conduct research in the area was not wholly because of convenience or opportunity. I initially intended to interview in a nearby suburb or the Central Business District (CBD) because I wanted to create spatial distance between the research site and myself. However, after I started my fieldwork, I realized there is a likelihood I would not have created the distance I intended because I found that the same waste pickers, whom I interviewed on Wednesday and Thursday in one neighborhood, worked in the other neighborhood I researched on Fridays. Further, waste pickers from the CBD sometimes picked waste in the research area.

4.6.1 Gender

I did not seek to interview male waste pickers only, even though I knew they would probably form the majority of the respondents. Literature shows the majority of street waste pickers in South Africa are male. Female waste pickers are concentrated at landfills reportedly because of safety concerns. Another reason is the trolleys are heavy to pull (Chvatal, 2010; Schenck & Blaauw, 2011). During my research, I did in fact identify a few female waste pickers and even a few trolley pushers- in the findings chapters, I discuss my quest to interview them. I conducted one interview with them but I include them in the respondents count. However, unless specified in this document, the findings refer to male waste pickers.

4.6.3 How I met the Waste Pickers

Tapuwa was the first waste picker with whom I interacted. During our interview, a waste picker began to pick alongside him at the same set of bins, and he introduced himself as Tshepang. I requested an interview and we agreed to meet at his work site at the neighboring complex the next day. He honored the appointment and afterwards showed me 'his house', the place he resided during the week. This served as an introduction to the waste picking activities behind a mound of dirt and was useful because those who lived there became familiar with me, so when I did eventually see them at different places and asked to interview, some obliged. The next week, I met Takalani, and at the conclusion of our interview, a waste picker approached him and they conversed briefly. On my return home, I saw Tshepang who introduced me to the picker whom Takalani had briefly encountered and suggested I conduct the interview immediately, and

I obliged. This was Chengetai and he subsequently invited me to visit at the place where the waste pickers 'relax'. There I met others whom I was able to interview at a later stage because they were familiar with me. Interviewing while they relaxed posed a few challenges as well even though I was often welcome during this time (I was invited multiple times).

The challenges were as follows:

1. Often, they did not relax alone so caution was applied in order not to extract information from those whom I was not interviewing because I had not formally obtained consent from them. I did ensure that all those present were aware that I was doing research. Sometimes, those around would volunteer information pertaining to waste picking since they knew that I was conducting research.

2. Some members of the group would be consuming alcohol. This meant either, I could not conduct the interviews, or I was uncomfortable. The main strategy I used to overcome such circumstances was to stop research if alcohol consumption began. I want to emphasize here that **not all** waste pickers consumed alcohol and I did not interview anyone who was consuming alcohol.

4.7 Data Collection

I conducted 59 semi-structured interviews with 23 waste pickers over a period of 6 months. The interviews were between 20 minutes and 2 hours long, often with individuals, although sometimes as a small group (2-4 people). There were encounters with other waste pickers, but these conversations were not sufficient to comprise full interviews. I made notes after the

interviews, although on a few occasions, I utilized my mobile phone to take poignant points such as key quotes. The core informants (those with whom I had more than three interviews), were eight, and those with whom I had consistent interactions but only one or two interviews were 11. I additionally conducted about 65 hours of participant observation.

I approached waste pickers on trash collection day, as per my proposal. With respect to the initial three interviews, I greeted them, introduced myself and explained my intentions (that I am doing research for school and I would like to know about their profession). I asked biographical questions, followed by questions about the industry. I always had key questions in mind- and a well-rehearsed script, but in some instances, additional information emanated from conversation. I would fill in the responses, and analyze, in case of gaps. I was careful not to ask 'taboo' questions such as those pertaining to money. As I became familiar with some of the respondents, they freely provided this information.

I did not approach respondents with a notebook for initial meetings. The reason was not lack of preparedness; rather, in addition to having to change my approach due to the informal settings, I was hesitant because I lived in the area. I was aware of potential suspicion by observers, some whom I was unaware, therefore the need to not draw attention to myself. Once I established rapport with some of the respondents, I brought a notebook to use for interviews, however, during an interview with a key informant, I observed his unease, and he periodically checked to see what I was writing. This is unsurprising if one takes into consideration the observation by Freilich in 1977 (Brayboy & Deyhle, 2000), who, in relation to anthropologists working in Indigenous communities, found the use of notebooks challenging even *after* rapport had been established, because of distrust of researchers (Brayboy & Deyhle, 2000). The next set of interviews with the notebook was no easier. In this group setting, I was the subject of teasing by

one respondent for "finally buying one". He snatched it, likewise commented on my handwriting, read the notes and laughed. Others in the group did so as well and unfortunately, I was not able to record any notes or conduct an interview under those circumstances.

I found that using my phone to occasionally take notes, quotations or refer to points of discussion was not as intrusive as the notebook. While my mobile phone was more up-to-date than what the waste pickers carried, it was not top-of-the-line in price or brand. I attribute this to my transparency with the technology due to two similar occasions in the field during the first few weeks, of which one is documented here. During my first visit to the major buyback center patronized by the respondents, I took out my phone to record the distance I had walked (using the maps/GPS). A waste picker expressed discomfort and hoped I was not taking pictures. In response, I immediately showed my mobile phone and explained what I was doing. I decided to be transparent with my mobile phone when I was with the waste pickers in order to minimize suspicion at all times. Additionally, I believe the lack of discomfort is because of the technological era in which we are, where people often text and talk simultaneously. Another possibility is that phones are more familiar than notebooks, therefore less conspicuous because many people carry and use them. Further, because trust was established, respondents knew they had access to what I was doing at all times if I ever asked to make a note on my mobile device.

4.7.1 Phases of Data Collection

I collected data in two phases. The first involved conducting preliminary interviews with waste pickers. However, when I reached the point of data saturation, I only had partial explanations in relation to the research questions. In order to bridge this gap in analysis, I turned

to observation, rather than conversation, making note of key practices, and seeking responses accordingly. Observation provided insight into actually existing practices, which could then be further investigated.

This new approach led to the second phase involving observation and interaction with the two groups of waste pickers on a regular basis. Some of the men from these groups comprised waste pickers with whom I had interacted in the first phase. The difference is, I was not asking biographic questions, posing scenarios, or trying to understand the sector. I was instead observing and asking questions, as well as reviewing findings and responding to gaps. The initial interviews, particularly with those who were not part of these groups are useful in setting the stage for deeper engagement with the topic, as well as contributing to waste picking in literature. I could not include all in the second phase for two reasons. Firstly, I did not see some of them again and secondly, in two instances, the waste pickers picked intermittently- I saw them again after they moved to other occupations and followed up where relevant.

While some of the participants had exposure to researchers, and even research processes, most I interviewed did not. During my time in the field, a respondent reported another researcher conducting a study. Another told me about a previous researcher with whom he had worked and assisted, thereby demonstrating familiarity with the research process, and perhaps his ability to assist.

4.7.2 Language

Because of my outward appearance, coupled with my name, many automatically spoke in English, or chiShona as a result, the interviews were conducted in English and waste pickers

would use their native language (mostly chiShona, isiZulu and Northern isiNdebele languages) or vernacular for phrases, or situations and group conversations. Given interviews were conducted on-site or during relaxing, non-verbal cues and hand gestures helped. This facilitated in-depth understanding and probing, especially if they needed to express themselves. An example pertains to the conversation between Leeto and a waste picker, Chiko, whom I had recently met:

Chiko: Uyamazi lo sisi? (do you know this sister?)

Leeto: ja, wena awumazi? (yes, don't you know her?)

Chiko: ay, ca! ubani? (ay, no, who is she?)

Leeto: awumazi? usisi kaTakura. (you don't know, she's Takura's sister)

Tarisaishe and old man Tsepho agree

Chiko: sis' kaTakura? Kanjani? Takura akanayo usisi! (Takura's sister? How? Takura does not have a sister!)

Me: yebo, Takura ubhuti wam' (Yes, Takura is my brother)

Chiko: ubani igama lakho? (What is your name?)

Me: nguAnesu (It's Anesu)

Chiko: namuhla *ifirst time* (ngiyaqala) ukumbona. (Today is my first time seeing her)

Leeto: kanjani? Thina siyamazi. (How? we know her)

Chiko: so sister, Oa bua? uyakhuluma? (so sister, do you speak (Sesotho)? Do you speak (Zulu)?)

Me: ke bua hanyane, ngiya khuluma kancane. (I speak a little Sesotho and speak a little Zulu)

Chiko: so you mix vele, why?

Leeto: ukhuluma isingisi *fela* (sic) (She speaks English only) (fela is Sesotho not isiZulu)

Me: it is true; I only speak English!

Chiko: serious, gents, ubani lo sisi? (who is this sister?)

4.7.3 Requesting Phone Numbers

My intention was to request the phone numbers of the respondents, and I did so, but the process did not unfold as expected. I requested phone numbers from the first interviewee and he declined, saying "sister, people on the streets don't have phones". I believed him but later I realized that many did in fact have phones. The second and third respondents requested my phone number and provided theirs, as the process unfolded; those with whom I have repeated interaction provided theirs. My conclusion from this process is that the difficulty or ease of obtaining a phone number depended on the individual. Another important point in relation to mobile phones is that sometimes, the batteries ran flat, so it was not always easy to contact them. While having these details was not essential because many worked the same territory weekly, so I was able to find them, on two occasions, when I needed to contact respondents, their phones were not available but I did see them at a later stage.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I provided a discussion and description of the manner in which data was generated for this project as well as the research questions. The approach to data collection was consistent with the goal of the project which was to provide in-depth information on informality,

as the phenomena at hand and contribute to understanding the dynamics of street waste picking. Using multiple methods including walking, participant observation and semi-structured interviews across different settings contributed to the robustness of the data. The process of data collection and justification was provided. This chapter provides a platform for readers to contextualize the findings, as well as understand the reasons I undertook certain decisions. My positionality, and the impact of appearance contributed to the respondents with whom I was able to interact and well as the interactions. Foregrounding my assumptions prior to fieldwork in this chapter is intended to demonstrate the limitations I encountered, as well as explain the successes. The dissertation proceeds to the chapters which discuss the findings.

CHAPTER 5: SETTING THE STAGE

This is the first of three chapters that provides an analysis of the primary data. It is important in setting the stage for chapters six and seven, where I show the various co-claimants waste pickers encounter as well as the norms waste pickers follow in order to minimize conflict and maximize their access to the waste stream. This chapter consists of empirical and descriptive sections, discussing the processes of waste picking, as well as challenges and opportunities the occupation presents. The intention is to cover the various aspects of waste pickers' lives as I observed, and as presented to me through interviews. I describe actors, situations, activities that comprise waste picking through thick descriptions. I address various themes relating to the quotidian experiences of waste pickers –it is important to understand the background of the waste pickers in order to contextualize their decision-making in relation to selecting waste picking as a livelihood and the decision to remain. Specifically, this chapter discusses the quality of life of the respondents during the workweek in the Areas 1 and 2. In terms of responding to the research question, this chapter provides in depth information about the experiences of waste pickers when they work in order to provide a platform upon which to contextualize the findings in chapters six and seven.

This chapter proceeds with providing a context of waste picking, then I introduce the research participants, including those in Area 3 before focusing on the quality of life and concluding.

5.1 Understanding Waste Picking

What we term waste in the literature is actually a highly contested resource and what is collected by waste pickers is either for personal use or to sell. What is discarded can be in working condition, such as laptops, mobile phones or tablets. Even what is deemed unusable at household scale such as plastic bottles, specific types of aluminum cans, broken jewelry, and white paper have value when sold to waste buyers.

In order to structure the findings, I begin by discussing reasons given by waste pickers for their engagement in this occupation. Non-profit organizations (such as groundWork), and activists often advocate for the inclusion of waste pickers based upon their role in the environment, yet, do waste pickers describe themselves as environmentalists? If so, does this role of cleaning up the environment motivate them? Although this was beyond the scope of my research, some waste pickers introduced themselves as recyclers, or described their jobs as recycling. Nkosi for example explained that 'we are helping the landfills' and the councilors recognize what we do'. He was the only one who was explicit about his role in the environment. For those who introduced themselves as recyclers, I would have been interested to explore the manner they understood recycling, and their role. That someone understands their job as recycling as opposed to waste picking, adds to the discussion of the politics of naming because they acknowledge working with resources, not rubbish. However, this might not mean they are environmental activists, or at least consider themselves as such. This discussion is important in situating their work, how they understand it, and what motivates them in the face of the challenges.

Given the research project, and my location as a resident of the area, I walked certain routes almost daily, up to thrice daily, even on non-interview days, at different times of the day, depending on my needs. Additionally, walking with the participants opened the opportunity to contextualize the information I had received. In some instances, I better understood challenges after undergoing a process and having specific experiences. I observed that some spaces changed depending on the time of the day and on certain days. For instance, waste pickers slept under trees or bridges on certain days of the week, many only going to these places during the late afternoon or early evening. Waste pickers with whom I interacted slept and sorted waste behind a mound of dirt (there was construction taking place), and they were otherwise carefully concealed unless you walked that route. However, many went away during weekends therefore spaces that were otherwise busy became deserted. (see Figure 1 for an example of an item stored in a tree for safekeeping. This was only visible from under the tree if one walked the route during the day).
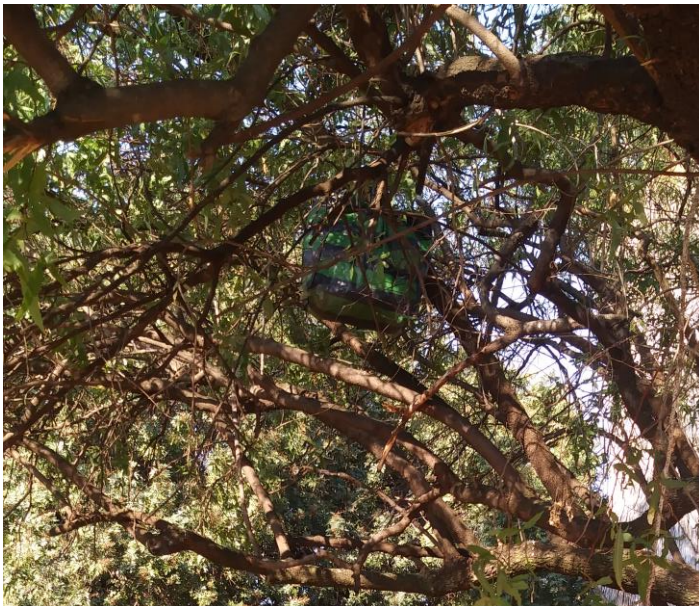
Figure 1: Items stored in the branches for safekeeping.

Though the street was the abode of waste pickers, either permanently or temporarily, irrespective of the weather, when the rainy season arrived, they were adversely affected, and sometimes their goods would be damaged. At the start of the rainy season, waste pickers could retreat to shaded spaces such as under bridges, post offices, bus stops and the filling stations (gas stations). These options were not always available for all because, as reported by the Loner, covered places (such as a local post office) already had residents who did not welcome newcomers or visitors avoiding the rain. Those who slept at their regular locations would use heavy plastic to cover themselves while they slept and cover their trolleys in order to try to protect their wares.

5.2 Meet the Participants Again

In the methodology chapter, I made note that in phase two of the project, I interacted with two groups of waste pickers. Additionally, I interacted with a traveler and a Loner. The traveler (also referred to as Leeto) and the Loner were affiliated with the two groups. The groups were diverse and fluid. While I was aware of other waste picker groups in the neighborhood, I did not interview them.

Group one, whom I call *Majita* comprised Shona speaking Zimbabweans. With the exception of one, all were in their 20s. This group congregated and generally slept behind a mound of dirt (to which they referred as the Durawall[5]). They were therefore concealed from road users. (Although when it was dark, one could see a fire, thus indicating the presence of

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[5] This is a common vernacular term I encountered with the *Majita* group. It is a common Zimbabwean vernacular term to describe an outside wall. From a technical point of view, builder-questions (https://www.builder-questions.com/construction-glossary/Durawall/) defines a Durawall as: "A product that is comprised of steel wire, connected in a fashion that provides a strong bond between masonry block".

people). It is behind this mound of dirt that most of the waste pickers whom I interviewed *used* to reside until fights and subsequently divisions took place. The Loner was affiliated with this group and used to sleep with them at the Durawall, but stopped, electing to sleep close by, alone. Newcomers and friends from the CBD would be hosted at the Durawall. These dynamics made it difficult to estimate how many individuals stayed there on any given day, likely between 10 and 15. There were significantly more people who slept there before fights broke out between the individuals at the beginning of fieldwork. I did not interview all who lived there, rather, a select few whom I would meet during their work time.

When I started the project, there was a steel and metals buyer stationed at the Durawall, however, he left after a few weeks, citing slow business. There were rumors he cheated a client, hence the move. However, the waste pickers indicated interacting with him at his new location so I was unclear about the veracity of the rumor since he could easily be located. I did not pursue the matter further since he was a waste buyer, not a picker. In terms of operations, this buyer did not own a vehicle instead, a friend would provide transport at the end of the day for a fee. After he left, a team comprising two waste buyers took over his site, and they purchased all materials. Their presence changed the spatial dynamics of that area, as it was converted from a place where people lived, to a hub where sorting of waste materials took place, in addition to housing. Some of the waste pickers who lived there assisted with sorting and packing the waste as well as loading it into the vehicle. They also sold their recyclables to this duo, as did others who worked in the area.

The other group, whom I call *Motswako*, comprised South Africans and Zimbabweans (both Shona and Ndebele). Their interactions form a pertinent part of the narrative of safety, trust, as well as my curiosity about the social dynamics of these groups. The members of this group were

all in their 30s and some who interacted with them, in their 50s. This group did not have a fixed abode, and changed the area they slept depending on waste collection day. The members of *Motswako* used to sleep by the Durawall until fights broke out. At the beginning of fieldwork, the group was bigger and more diverse, including members from Mozambique but they found new places to sleep, and one moved to the CBD towards the end of the project. *Motswako* members usually sold their recyclables to buy back centers but took smaller or less lucrative materials to the itinerant waste buyers. Many had homes to which they returned on Friday and usually met in the different neighborhoods for work purposes. This group, though liminal, still socialized, slept and sometimes ate together and defended one another as needed to, separate from (or in fights with) *Majita*. I spent more time with those in the group, sometimes sharing food with them, and believe I had a stronger rapport with them than *Majita*.

5.2.1 In Search of Female Trolley Pushers

In order to avoid a male only perspective of waste pickers, I wanted to include female respondents. A family friend offered to introduce me to a group of female recyclers who worked outside her complex. She sought permission for me to speak with them and set an appointment. Her neighborhood, though located in Pretoria East, was 8, 2 km (5 miles) from my place of residence and difficult to access by public transport. I refer to this location as Area 3. Of the four recyclers (they introduced themselves as recyclers), three were willing and forthcoming with information, while one, a trolley pusher appeared hesitant. I therefore opted not to interview her, instead communicating with her for purposes of being cordial. Had I continued working there, I would have excluded her from the process. Of the three interviewees, two were women; one had a 6-month old baby. They collected household products such as utensils as well as clothes and items for personal use. The other, a man, was a trolley pusher who collected all recyclables and

had a cordial relationship with the women. From this complex, we proceeded to a park, which served as a hub for waste pickers in that area to trade and sell materials as well as to sort their recyclables for waste buyers.

While there, a young woman with a baby asked who I was and my purpose at the park. I introduced myself, the research and asked to interview her, to which she obliged. During the interview, another woman asked the same questions and my response was the same as before. After these two interviews, the young man introduced me to others. I believe many were suspicious of my intentions because I received plenty of stares. I obtained two more interviews with male respondents. The information provided was in line with what I had found in my area, even with more informed questions. I chose to return home and consider a strategy to employ if I were to return. I did not return because of the unease I experienced.

The information I found showed a different dimension to waste picking. The women traded in clothes and other usable items and I wanted to interview female trolley pushers to understand gendered aspects, given the dynamics of that specific type of waste picking (e.g. heavy trolley, likely not to travel home daily). If I were to include the women in the second phase, I would have had to change the strategy, perhaps interviewing them where they sold their goods, or conducting a focus group.

5.3 Quality of Life

In order to understand the quality of life in the context of my research, I will focus on the activities of the waste pickers during their work time. The findings, though specific to my

research, provide insight into waste picking generally, and might shed light into questions pertaining to labor relations.

5.3.1 Routines

Waste pickers had specific routines. Tshepang for instance, lived in Pretoria's CBD and traveled 12,1- 18 kms (7,51-11,18 miles based on Google maps) to the Eastern suburbs on Tuesdays depending on the part of the study area he worked. (Nkosi, Tsika and Livhuwani lived approximately 50 kms or 31 miles away). Thereafter, he sleeps close by (700 meters away) for two nights. He travels about 9,6 kms to the buyback center with a full load of recyclables, where he sorts and sells the resources. He returns to the Eastern suburbs, sleeps in Area 1, then travels about 3,3 kms to Area 2 in order to pick waste there, then travels back to the buyback center to sell his wares, then proceeds back to the CBD. Travelling home daily is not feasible under these conditions. He could have sold his recyclables to the waste-buying duo at the Durawall, which was 700 meters from where he slept in Area 1. The main reason according to all respondents is that the rates were abysmally low. According to him, the waste buyer would sell the recyclables to the same buyback center waste pickers patronized or they would store the materials then travel to Johannesburg where the prices were even higher. Tshepang's routine is depicted in Figure 2.

Another waste picker, Tsika's routine involved taking a train from a township where he resided, picking up his trolley from a buyback center he used to patronize near the CBD, and then walking to Pretoria East. On Fridays, he would walk to the buyback center in the East with a full trolley, then walk to the buyback center near the CBD, shower, leave his trolley, then take the train home.
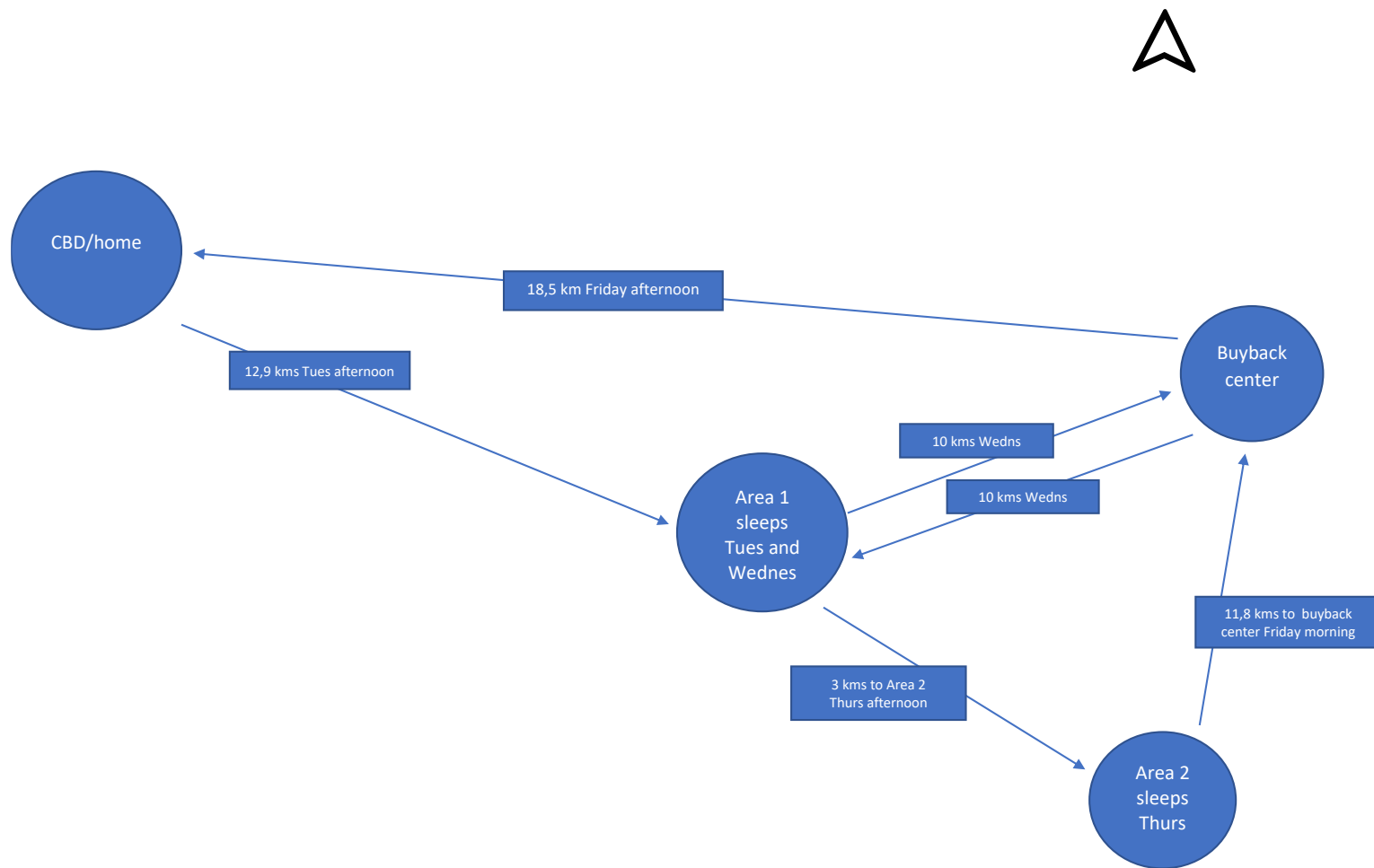
Figure 2: Tshepang's routine

I proposed an alternative routine, which would have reduced his walking time. My proposal is depicted in Figure 3 where on Fridays, Tsika would walk to the buyback center near the CBD with a full load, sell his recyclables, leave his trolley and return home. This would eliminate the trip to the buyback center in the East. To Tsika, the current routine was beneficial, perhaps because he earned more selling to the buyback center in the East or, the walk to the buyback center in the East was less treacherous with a full trolley compared to walking to the CBD.

Other waste pickers' routines were based on perceived benefits from routines which to an observer might be less understood. Leeto for instance preferred to sell his recyclables to a buyback center near the CBD, and walked the distance with a full trolley.
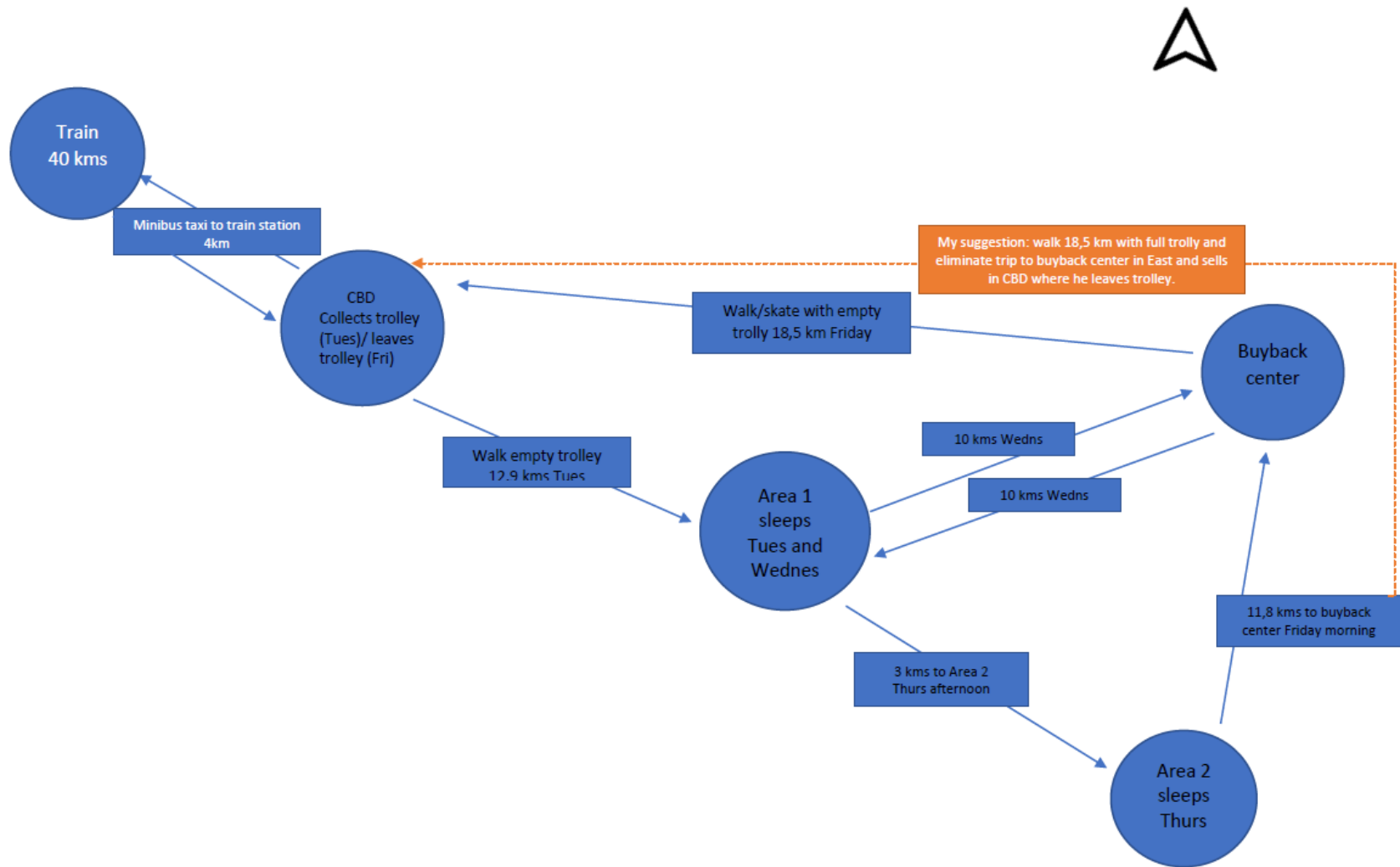
Figure 3: Tsika's routine- the orange shows the suggested modification

5.3.2 Nationality

Many waste pickers in Gauteng province are foreign- born as shown not only in my study but by others including Sentime (2014), Samson (2019) and Thaba (2012). At landfills in Gauteng and other parts of the country, there are tensions between waste picker groups, premised upon national origin (Thaba, 2012; Samson, 2019). I did not have to ask about nationality and its impacts on their jobs directly as many offered their opinions without prompting. According to respondents, there were many waste pickers from Zimbabwe, Mozambique, and Lesotho therefore this did not play a role in one's ability to pick waste. Social discrimination was the issue as their friends told them to return to their home countries. However, and critically in the context of this chapter, this did not prevent them from appropriating waste.

A noteworthy observation is that the South African waste pickers usually carried their national identity documents or intended to obtain one if it was lost. One explanation from a respondent named Khotso was that it was handy when he was searching for jobs, and Tapuwa implied the same. Other implications beyond being able to show the police (if asked) pertained to storage of money. By staying on the streets, waste pickers were generally excluded from the banking sector because one needs to show proof of residence to a financial institution to obtain a bank account as per the Financial Intelligence Centre Act, 38 of 2001 (FICA). One respondent's bank card had expired and he needed to show proof of residence in order to obtain a new one. Given he lived on the streets, obtaining this documentation was not possible. The broader implication of exclusion from banking was the inability to accrue money, which in turn impacted

their ability to exit the profession. Keeping money on one's person increased the likelihood of spending and of being robbed or cheated by others.

5.3.3 Shelter

A few of the respondents were unhoused and slept on the streets on a permanent basis, while others did so exclusively during the week. Those who had accommodation commonly rented shacks, paying rent of between ZAR200 and ZAR600 (USD13.5 and USD40.5). One stayed in a hostel. Another was not explicit about the type of housing he had but mentioned that he used to experience police harassment when he lived near an up-market train station in the CBD, eventually relocating to another area. From conversations, I concluded that he lived in a structure (as opposed to the street) because he mentioned having a kitchen, storage space, and three housemates.

From a water and sanitation viewpoint, many obtained water from taps outside business premises. These taps were usually used for landscaping. Sometimes security guards would chase them away. The question of sanitation proved to be contentious to ask, however, on occasion, this information was volunteered and I obtained answers from some waste pickers or asked clarifying questions. I thought they bathed in nearby streams. However, when a conversation about bathing took place, I was duly informed that these bodies of water were extremely polluted, that some people acquired skin rashes. The Loner, who lived on the streets on a permanent basis mentioned that he bathed in public, while those who lived by the Durawall were not exposed when they bathed during the day. Of those who shifted between the neighborhoods during the workweek, one told me he did not take a full bath during the week while others bathed

in concealed places at the side of the road during the daytime. Clothes were washed and hung on trees or on rocks to dry.

I did not seek to enquire about their health, but the topic emerged periodically either in relation to themselves, or others. They sought medical advice from pharmacies and reported going to the hospital, and ambulances were called in the event of death. Only Tsika and Tshepang wore gloves when working, and they did so periodically. Obtaining cuts and bruises was not a concern, although the Loner kept bandages in case of injuries.

5.3.4 Effects of Changes in the Waste Management Landscape

Waste pickers are impacted by changes in programs and policies. At least twice, Tshepang expressed concern that "this business" would end and he would not have any way in which to earn a living, sentiments that were shared by others. Respondents could not explain the genesis of the occupation nor the reasons perceived for the occupation to be under threat despite my probing. Perhaps they received this information from newspapers they read. Respondents discussed at least one initiative, and expressed ambivalence about taking part if given a choice. (This link provides details about the initiative https://mg.co.za/article/2018-06-01-00-kariki-carts-finally-reach-the-people/). Given they were excluded from policy changes; their concerns were valid. Programs designed towards more sustainable cities as well as models that make waste collection efficient had an impact on their ability to appropriate. To Chengetai, who had been picking for almost a decade, I posed the question about the potential for loss of income because households would soon be obligated to sort at source and the materials would be given to recycling companies. This had already taken place in Johannesburg, and was likely to be

introduced in Tshwane. To him, this intervention would make his job (and life) less demanding and easier. Sorting at source he perceived, was a mechanism "meant to make citizens responsible". However, he did not believe it would take away from the livelihood of waste pickers, despite evidence from Johannesburg.

Actually existing changes in the waste management landscape have had adverse impacts on waste pickers, forcing them to adjust accordingly. One such change Chengetai believes is responsible for increased competition, and subsequently conflict is that pertaining to the day of bin collection. Bins were collected on the same day in various neighborhoods in Pretoria East (in 2010/2011 in both Area 1 and 2, it was Thursday). This meant that many people would disperse over a large area, therefore limiting competition for the same territory. Now that bin collection takes place on different days, many waste pickers will compete for a smaller number of bins on different days of the week, compounded with increasing numbers of people, there is stiffer competition. From my own observations, on the street I resided, the bins from two complexes were placed on Wednesday for early morning collection on Thursday, while the bins from two other complexes were placed outside on Thursday for mid-morning collection. This meant the same waste pickers would compete on Wednesday afternoon and on Thursday morning for limited resources. In Area 2, bins are now collected on Friday, and some of the bins brought out on Thursday afternoon and Friday morning.

Beyond official changes in waste collection, disruptions in municipal services impacted them. In July there was such a disruption caused by protesters who threatened the lives of garbage collectors in addition to preventing garbage trucks from entering landfills (Moatshe, 2018). Many waste pickers in the research area did not work during that period, citing insufficient volume to motivate working. The assumption was that some households and

complex bins would not be brought out because residents would assume there would be no collection.

5.3.5 Impact of Transportation Infrastructure

When considering traditional road users, waste pickers are not included, yet this exclusion impacts adversely upon their ability to labor productively. In order to sell their recyclables, they have to travel with their full trolleys and utilize the road. However, this puts both waste pickers and drivers at risk of accidents (Mvuyane, 2018) because the trolley can take-up half of a car lane. Waste pickers negotiated this challenge by travelling during off-peak hours, either early morning (before 7 am), mid-morning (from about 10 am). I sometimes observed them travelling in the evenings (after 7 pm). Reasons for utilizing the road are two-fold, the first being that pavements are sometimes too narrow for a trolley.

Figure 4: Trolley on the road. It takes up half of a car lane.

The second is that pavements are not sufficiently level (or flush) nor smooth (sometimes due to design) such that a trolley will not tip over.

Figure 5: Pavement surface

5.3.6 Crime and Violence

Waste pickers are often victims of crimes perpetrated by their peers (Schenck, Blaauw & Viljoen, 2016). The types of crime range from theft of resources to physical assault and even murder. Throughout the research process, waste pickers routinely fought each other, sometimes under the influence of alcohol. Three participants experienced violent crimes during the six months I was in the field. In two of the cases, those whom they lived with committed the crimes. Within the *Motswako* group, Takura was hit on the head with a brick while he was sleeping, an ambulance was called and he went to the hospital. Although the crime was revenge for 'stealing' a trolley from a member of the *Majita* group, from the two accounts I received, Takura and his assailants had a contentious relationship. Within the *Majita* group, a waste picker stabbed his

friend with a sharp object on the head while they slept. The assailant disappeared, returning a few days later to collect his items. His group members did not know why he did so. The third crime was committed against the Loner. He explained that he was socializing with a fellow waste picker who had a reputation for being troublesome and a fight ensued. None of these crimes were reported to law enforcement. The main justification is that the requirements to report a case involve supplying one's address. Given the victims lived on the street, they were disqualified from this process.

Mistrust amongst waste pickers was rife. The Loner for instance slept alone because he did not trust others. I often saw him socializing with *Majita* including the day before Christmas and was therefore an allied member of their group. I observed incidences that showed lack of trust, and sometimes these sentiments were explicitly expressed (to me). Njabulo of the *Motswako* group had his valuables stolen by someone in his group and he suspected his 'best friend'. Another instance involving *Motswako* is as follows: Takura asked Tshepang for an item that was located in Tshepang's trolley across the street (road). Tshepang paused our conversation to monitor Takura, and "make sure he only takes what he asked for". Stealing from rival groups (including between the *Majita* and *Motswako*) was not unusual, and I was told this took place frequently as did fights.

5.3.7 Alcohol Use

Alcohol consumption rendered waste pickers vulnerable to crime. For example, Takura and a friend's trolleys were stolen while they were drunk one weekend. One afternoon, at a bus stop, when Takura was selling his recyclables, he commented on Chengetai who was drunk, that his

trolley would likely be stolen. The statement demonstrates the limits of trust because the waste pickers who sold items at the bus stop knew one another; therefore, they would know any thieves. Those who did not consume alcohol complained about the challenges with these social arrangements such as fights, noise, and arguments. In order to avoid this, some would occasionally sleep alone, or with different groups.

5.3.8 Mistaken Identity

On the basis of appearance, waste pickers resemble vagrants, and they often experience harassment from police, security and residents who consider them criminals (Peres, 2016; Simatele, Dlamini & Kubanza, 2017). I found harassment by private security companies featured frequently as a complaint. In fact, when I asked who posed a threat to their livelihoods, many immediately mentioned private security companies. During participant observation, a private security guard cautioned waste pickers about harassing residents, citing a waste picker begging for food and money. He then threatened to ban waste pickers from working in the area. The waste pickers whom I was observing were familiar with him, that he was 'very serious about his job', implying he made life difficult for waste pickers. Not only did they distance themselves from the mentioned situation, they did not take his threats seriously and continued working. I did observe a private security car at that same location a few weeks later, but it clearly did not truncate the activities of the waste pickers. Where waste pickers did comment on harassment by law enforcement, it was through accusations of stealing items such as mobile phones that they actually found in the trash.

Waste pickers distanced themselves from criminals and drug users, sometimes complaining that Nyaope[6] boys would steal from them, a situation that results in conflict. The appearance of waste pickers contributed to how they are perceived, yet they selected the manner in which they dressed. One waste picker used to wear overalls for work. To me, this demonstrates a separation between work and leisure. Two others dressed smartly, wearing fashionable sneakers and t-shirts, while one stressed deliberately wearing torn clothes in order to obtain tips. This justification is questionable but waste pickers regularly find (new and used) clothes in the trash; are given clothes or can buy from others who have found (or been given clothes). This makes his assertion believable, that he deliberately elected to wear torn, stained clothes based upon his own reasoning.

5.3.9 Relationship with Buyback Centers and Middlemen

There is a growing body of literature and empirical data about the relationship between buyback centers and waste pickers (Viljoen, Blaauw & Schenck, 2012). I found the relationship between waste pickers and buyback centers depends upon the individual. It could be symbiotic, where buyback centers would allow waste pickers to store their trolleys and sacks on their premises, other buyback centers provided new sacks, (as opposed to selling them). At one center, staff would socialize with the waste pickers while other staff members operated as banks, keeping money for those who required the service. However, on the matter of banking, for Chengetai, this was not the best option because a person with whom he stored his money stole a

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[6] Nyaope is a relatively new heroin-based cocktail drug unique to South Africa. It is often mixed with cannabis and occasionally laced with anti-retroviral drugs, which make it even more addictive. Users often turn to criminal activities to support this drug habit (Mthembi, Mwenesongole & Cole, 2018). Sometimes, users pick waste to support their habit.

portion of his earnings. I was reluctant to probe questions about money and banking, beyond the information volunteered to me. Asking of earnings and wages is not socially appropriate, and depends on the relationship between the parties.

A portion of the respondents complained that buyback centers 'robbed' them by buying at low rates. A specific point was that at a particular buyback center, the weight of items would be rounded down and paid accordingly. Since waste pickers weighed their goods two or three times a week, the rounded down amounts added up and many simply went elsewhere but returned after the situation was rectified.

With regards to middlemen, as aforementioned, there were travelling waste buyers nearby and their rates were particularly low. When asked why waste pickers patronized them, many said it was easier than walking 10 kms (6.2 miles) to the closest buy back center. Livhuwani for example, would only support the travelling buyer when he had less pricey items. In terms of strategy, he would sell copper to the buyback center and cardboard to the travelling buyer. I observed that selling nearby also helped him to work expediently because he would sort and sell items he found in the morning, since waste buyers were close by and he did not have to walk 10 kms to the buyback center. On Wednesdays and Thursdays, he was able to salvage bins brought out in the morning and those brought out in the afternoon whereas Tshepang would usually sell at the buyback center on Wednesdays and return to the location he slept in the evening thereby only working in the morning.

Nkosi, who was about 40 years old, patronized the travelling buyer because pulling a trolley had taken a toll on his body; he did not believe he could remain in this occupation much longer- he had done so for less than five years. Despite the relatively low prices, the service was actually beneficial. On a day likely-to-rain in November, the waste buyers did not operate from the

Durawall and Leeto, who usually sold his recyclables near the CBD would have preferred to sell to them on that day then return home with an empty trolley. Travelling with a full trolley in the rain was inconvenient as the recyclables would likely become wet. Further, because roads would be slippery, he risked his trolley tipping over. His reason for selling near the CBD was 'they keep my money'. He travelled to the East on Mondays and Thursdays with an empty trolley and carted it back full. He could sell the recyclables in the Eastern suburbs and even skate back home. From my observation, and examining the data, I conclude that loyalty, relationships and distance are the reasons waste pickers select to whom to sell. This, because a few would patronize buyback centers in the CBD and surrounds because "they are used to the place" (Tsika in reference to others), or "they keep my money" (Leeto). This possibly explains some of the decisions they took pertaining to routine, that these would appear arduous to an observer.

In relation to relationships with waste buyers, one waste picker, The Loner, maintained that middlemen took advantage of them, and did not think highly of waste pickers because it was their (waste pickers) labor which created the resources. Part of this argument explained the reason he (and others) declined formal recycling jobs. In one instance, they were offered ZAR2000 per month (about USD138), but they know the value of the resources as well as the labor and toll on their bodies so they declined. If they worked hard, they were able to make double the amount offered. He said waste pickers 'used their strength to do this job'. To demonstrate the labor intense nature of waste picking, in addition to scouring through bins, and hauling a trolley for several (or a few) kilometers, waste pickers have to sort materials before selling them since the items were weighed separately. There are items that need to be taken apart such as wheelbarrows or items that contain metals or copper such as ceiling fans. Still, waste

pickers have to burn the plastic off cables in order to extract copper, thereby inhaling fumes that might be noxious.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I discussed the quality of life of waste pickers with the intention to deepen the conservation about their working conditions and shed light on their living arrangements. I introduced the participants, providing information about their interactions with each other as well as my interactions with them. I explained the reason for focusing on male waste pickers, and the attempts made to include female waste pickers. Waste pickers have to navigate sector-specific challenges in order to meet their livelihoods, many in the public do not know. By discussing various aspects such as health and sanitation, crime and violence, I set the stage for interrogating conflict, contestation and negotiation over access to waste.

CHAPTER 6: WHY THEY ENGAGE IN WASTE PICKING

This chapter follows from chapter five and delves into waste picking as an occupation, with the intention to understand the decision-making process in relation to selecting waste picking as opposed to other occupations. I also discuss the dynamics pertaining to selecting materials; how the respondents maximize their earnings. The first section of the chapter situates waste picking in the context of the informal labor market where I discuss previous occupations the respondents engaged, in order to explain the reasons they chose waste picking. Because it is dirty work, waste picking is perceived as a less preferred mode of earning a living, with the previous chapter revealing that it is not easy work. In this chapter, I interrogate the reasons they engage in this profession and respond to subsidiary question a) which is: what are the different logics waste pickers use to rationalize their involvement in informal waste work? Additionally, I explain why the work in the research area, Pretoria East.

6.1 The informal labor market

In the previous chapter, I discussed the concept of quality of life, explaining the various ways in which waste pickers' livelihoods and lifestyles are vulnerable, and their conditions of labor unfavorable. Despite this, many still engage in this profession thereby showing contradicting common perception, that it is undesirable work does not mean it is not preferred work. I met people who explicitly refused to pick waste, even though they struggled to find stable work. An example is a man who advertised tree-felling skills, who admitted going days without work. Even though he knew that waste picking was financially lucrative, it was dirty work. His work was seasonal and in the colder

months, demand was relatively low. Tapuwa mentioned friends who preferred to beg for food and money at traffic lights than be seen "with their heads in a bin". Still, when Nkosi began waste picking, he lived with a group of other men who would mock him for engaging in dirty work yet, he consistently had food, while they did not. They preferred piece jobs[7] even though they sometimes failed to find work.

6.1.1 Experience in other occupations

The majority of waste pickers had been in the sector for less than three years. One respondent had been in the sector for about nine years, and three had been doing the work for about five years. Further, some picked waste intermittently, while others had picked waste, moved on to other occupations, then returned to waste picking (such as Khotso). Those who picked waste intermittently did so because they viewed waste as a way in which to survive.

As with studies of informality generally, studies on labor have positioned informal and formal labor as diametrically opposed to each other but the boundaries between formal and informal categories in the labor market are not distinct. Of those who held jobs prior to waste picking, three held jobs that were categorized as formal; one had a certification in fitting and turning, worked in the mechanical engineering sector. There were others who worked in the formal sector and received meager wages, and it was unlikely the jobs provided a formal contract or benefits. To Tshepang for instance, waste "was better than working for someone, at the shop, I got ZAR300 per week, waste is ZAR500 per week and less hours".

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[7] In my research context, a piece job is not to be misunderstood as piece work. Piece work is defined as a job where payment is structured upon the number of pieces of the item or work completed (R.Hart, n.d). A piece job is understood as day labor, whereby one is hired on a day by day basis. In this document, the terms piece job and day labor will be used interchangeably.

There are waste pickers who have work experience therefore one cannot assume waste work is their only option. There were those who did not possess skills and a few who had served prison time, and while I initially believed this contributed to their decision to pick waste, that they could not find other work, as I continued to investigate, I found that many were still able to obtain other low tier informal work.

I did not seek to ask about education levels but a few respondents, namely Chengetai, Njabulo, Nkosi and Tapuwa revealed that they had "gone to school". In fact, when introducing my research, Njabulo queried that I was in fact a student of town and rural planning, not geography. Chengetai dropped out of university and would occasionally give me tips on how to enhance my research. One such recommendation was to widen the scope of my research, by including waste buyers since I would likely reach saturation. Nkosi would engage in discussions pertaining to urban design. According to him, those with whom he lived knew nothing about settlement planning.

6.1.2 Exploring other informal occupations

Literature notes that waste work is one of the least desirable occupations therefore interviewees were asked why they picked waste as opposed to engaging in day labor or piece jobs. The prevailing reason given for selecting waste picking over day labor is the latter is inconsistent and work was not guaranteed. Notably however, there was a trend of exploitation of workers. The Loner remarked "you see my sister, I don't want to say this, but it is your brothers (in reference to Zimbabweans)". He explained that contractors and workers would agree on a rate, but after the work was complete, a lower amount would be offered. Migrant workers would

accept the lower wage, which would aggrieve their local counterparts. This is one of the reasons he perceived waste picking a better option because of the ability to control one's labor. Day laborers, particularly in the construction industry are recruited by a middleman (or subcontractor), as opposed to the company. I was informed that middlemen would sometimes not pay the day laborers, instead, disappear with the wages. Additionally, I often heard stories about migrant workers having the police called when it was time for payment (after completion of a job).

Perhaps more interesting is the contradiction and tension between piece jobs and 'indignity' of waste work. Takura observed that piece jobs can be difficult to come by, but he is actively searching because – "this work makes you crazy" he said. However, the stability of waste work means that one can pay rent on a consistent basis. Chengetai would occasionally engage in piece jobs. Tsika and Nkosi specified that when they used to do day labor work, they could "sleep hungry" because the jobs were sometimes hard to find and for those who engaged in street trading such as Khotso, there were days when he failed to sell anything. Through waste picking, Tsika could now pay rent, but before, he used to sleep "in the wilderness". Tapuwa and Khotso only picked waste when they failed to obtain day labor jobs. I met them picking waste and they both transitioned to other informal jobs, as a casual laborer and to washing minibus taxis. Nkosi held a landscaping job once a week, and was enrolled in a course, hoping to one day obtain a degree. He mentioned that employers were known to be abusive and even "point a gun at you".

Figure 6: Advertisement for day labor

I found that many had been in the informal economy prior to waste picking therefore it should be considered one of a few livelihood opportunities. Tapuwa was unable to obtain formal work because he lost his identity document. He was now trapped in lower tier informal work, and he subsequently resorted to washing taxis, an occupation he perceived more lucrative than waste picking. He would pick waste when he did not secure work, since competition was rife as there were six or seven other taxi washers. To Njabulo, waste picking was not the only available work and he had an identity document (which I saw). He turned down an informal job during the fieldwork period. Still, Takura was adamant he could no longer accept manual labor jobs, that if he were to work in the construction industry, he could not be a *'daka boy[8]'*, those days were long behind him.

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[8] In the construction industry in South Africa, a daka boy is a colloquial term to describe a person who mixes cement.

6.1.3 It pays better

A prevailing reason given for engaging in waste picking is that it pays better than many other occupations, even day labor. While recyclables did not pay particularly well, it was the high value items and tips which improve their income. One could find high value items in the trash, and these could be sold or sent home. Sifiso, previously a vegetable trader was able to better support himself with waste, even though he sometimes encountered worms and diapers filled with poop. There were stories of waste pickers finding Apple iPhones in the waste stream. During my time in the field, a *Majita* member found a Samsung tablet while Leeto's friend was given a television and Livhuwani a refrigerator. Finding electronics in the waste stream was not uncommon, even in Area 3, where I spent just one day, the respondents reported finding laptops and iPhones. These items were either sent home to family or sold to waste buyers. Respondents assumed that some electronics entered the waste stream by mistake, but declined to explain the reason for this assumption. They did believe that some electronics were thrown into the waste stream because iPhones for instance could be locked via iCloud and other smart mobile phones usually had a lost phone finder application therefore be tracked. Usually, the electronics they found were older models (for instance, the refrigerator and television were old models), but these could be fixed, refurbished or taken apart in order to salvage the recyclable parts of the item (for instance, copper could be extracted from some electronics).

6.1.4 On perception and Reality

A key finding pertains to earnings. I found waste pickers earned more than those in other low-tier informal occupations. However, the association with dirt was occasionally mentioned as a draw back. Chengetai noted: "I can make good money Anesu, but I am always dirty". On another occasion, he opined: "you can earn more than a formal worker, but you look dirty and even in shops, people look at you suspect (sic)". I recognized this tension as a reason waste work was less attractive for some, because monetary earnings cannot compensate for social stigma. Chengetai sometimes spoke about how he would wear clean clothes and go to the mall and nobody would recognize him, or know he was a waste picker. In a similar manner, The Loner would wear his nicest clothes when going to visit family, and nobody would know his circumstances. Waste pickers, though content with their occupation did not want their families to know their occupation. Nkosi, who considers himself an intellectual, reported that some *Majita* members would read the books found in trash (instead of immediately recycling or selling them). Chengetai reported having a Facebook profile because he needed to be in the information age.

6.1.5 Autonomy of Labor

I found that many enjoy the flexibility of managing their own time. Picking waste was "better than working for someone"; and "you don't have a boss walking behind you telling you what to do". Tshepang could "wake up when the sun was up". (Given that these comments were

made during winter; he was saying that his job allowed him to sleep in, and avoid the early morning cold).

Chengetai and Njabulo actually found (and turned down) jobs due to unfavorable terms. They would have had to stay on site and pay rent of half their salary and this would compromise Njabulo's leisure activities. The salary offered was ZAR4000 (USD276) per month tiling in construction. About three months later, Chengetai found yet another job at which he stayed for approximately a week. While I was not in a position to ascertain why he left, according to his colleagues, the job was not stimulating. However, it is key to note the tension between waste picking and employment, that they could actively accept or decline jobs. In the *Majita* group, one found a job but subsequently left, I saw him washing minibus taxis a few weeks later, thereby demonstrating mobility within low tier informal work.

Despite the positive aspects of waste picking, some wanted to leave the occupation for other informal opportunities. Chengetai wanted to start a business or (informally) selling handbags, while Tshepang was hesitant to tell me his exit strategy until it came into fruition but he had a plan. He expressed concern that waste picking, as an industry would end.

In relation to autonomy and labor, it is important to distinguish between landfill pickers and trolley pushers. It takes a specific type of personality to pick waste on the street as opposed to the landfill. In response to why they picked on the street as opposed to the landfill, those who had considered it, preferred the street because competition was lower. According to Livhuwani, at landfills, when the truck comes, groups of people take turns; it is a more orderly and regulated process, and there are plenty of people, including women and children. This concurs with literature on how landfills are organized, as well as the gender make-up. Working on the streets demonstrates a preference to work independently and autonomously. Takura explicitly expressed

that landfills are dirty and unsanitary. Having been to a landfill when he worked at a previous job, he promised himself that he would never work there. This shows the ability of waste pickers to make decisions about their lives and thereby demonstrating agency. Although waste pickers have limited resources and opportunities in comparison to wealthier, more educated people, nevertheless, based upon the relatively limited options they have, they still make decisions.

Waste pickers controlled their time, and (in theory), could work where they want, when they want. They have the ability to take time-off to their choosing, and still 'find their jobs there'. Tsika took two weeks off, resting and visiting a relative, Leeto took two months off and Khumbula would habitually stop working in the research area in favor of other places. Some in the *Majita* group would visit friends in the CBD at a time of their choosing, returning when they want. I believe the confluence of autonomy and higher pay prevented waste pickers from entering into jobs *constructed* as more dignified.

6.1.6 Other Reasons for Picking Waste

Nkosi and The Loner noted it was better than doing crime. I was not surprised that such a sentiment arose given that respondents tend to provide answers that shine them in a positive light, or those they expect researchers want to hear. Therefore, given the high levels of crime in South Africa, this response was not unexpected, especially since these two particular waste pickers would receive tips from people, who then commended them for not committing crime. Nkosi once remarked: "at least we are not doing crime- we are creating jobs, if we didn't do this, the government would not be able to contain the unemployment". From this I understood a justificatory logic, that they were actually helping the government, therefore entitled to engage in

this self-help endeavor. For The Loner waste picking afforded an opportunity to earn an honest living.

It is important to understand pathways into this occupation in order to inform literature and research. In other words, understanding who has to pick waste as opposed to who gets to pick waste. All the respondents saw others picking waste and followed suit. They might have received help from friends to understand the sector, for instance, how to sort materials, or information on which materials are lucrative; however, many seemed to be somewhat familiar with waste picking prior to embarking on it themselves. Njabulo began by recycling paper, and through the assistance from friends, he expanded to picking all recyclables. Similarly, Chengetai initially picked foam rubber in order to repurpose it. However, it became hard to find, and friends suggested he engage in recycling paper instead and he expanded to other materials when paper became less available.

The responses are not a complete representation of all waste pickers' reasons for choosing this job. However, this does provide insight into the dynamics that make waste picking a viable occupation.

6.1.7 Why do Waste Pickers Operate in the Eastern Suburbs?

Related to why they pick waste is why they work in the study area as opposed to any of the other suburbs in Tshwane, or even other cities where the price of recyclables are higher. When asked why they chose to work in Pretoria East, though the responses varied, the majority pertained to the relative profitability in comparison to the township and the CBD. This is because there were fewer waste pickers, combined with better waste (despite increasing numbers of waste pickers). Pertaining to relative profitability, the rest who responded, were enticed by the 'nice stuff', emphasizing that such were usually found in *"ama one one"* (individual household bins).

Chengetai recalled a time he was given six or seven old mobile phones, which he sold for ZAR700 (USD50) which was "more than the load in my sack". The second category was similar to the first, but the responses were in comparison to other areas as follows: "those who pick in the township are Nyaope boys because there is no money". "it is better than the township"; "it is more profitable this side, near my place (an informal settlement), the money is less"; and "it is better than town (CBD)". The rest were deliberately avoiding the CBD because there were too many Nyaope boys, others elaborating that Nyaope boys steal. Tshepang and Njabulo were in Pretoria as opposed to Johannesburg for purposes of anonymity and escaping stigma. Where Njabulo noted that "too many people know me in Jo'burg", Tshepang did not want to risk his neighbors seeing him picking waste. Lastly, although it was only one person, he picked in the area because it was on his way 'home'. He only picked intermittently, when he failed to sell his wares or secure a piece job.

6.2 Materials Picked

In addition to understanding why specific work sites were selected, it is important to understand the reasons they select the materials they pick. Most said they picked "what they could carry", and others only picked aluminum cans because other materials were relatively unprofitable. Cardboard was the least desirable material, with waste pickers even leaving it behind or strategizing how to carry it. This is because it fetched the lowest price and was heavy and bulky. While it is not as profitable as other materials, a few mentioned that a large volume would make it worthwhile. Chengetai would place the cardboard under his sack, while Tshepang and Tsika obtained trolleys exclusively for cardboard. Others would collect it to be used as a mattress, either for themselves, or others. On two occasions, I observed waste pickers discarding

cardboard they had been given. From a price point perspective, scrap metal and copper were the most lucrative materials, yet these were not in high supply. Aluminum cans were equally lucrative, and were widely available. White paper was another popular resource. The selling price was not very high, but it was heavy (but not bulky), therefore one could capitalize on the relative weight and the ability to carry a lot of it.

Waste pickers would collect different materials at different stages of their occupation. Two started by picking white paper, then expanded to other materials. When I began fieldwork, Takura used to pick all materials but towards the end of research, a period of 6-months, he was only searching for high value items to sell at a nearby bus stop. I was informed of others who only picked high value items to sell. This was a risky strategy as they could fail to find items for two reasons. First, occasionally, there are no high value items. The second is high value items might be at the bottom of the bin and those who tended to look for these valuables usually did not search thoroughly.

None of those whom I interviewed collected glass. A plausible explanation is the lack of a market, since the buyback center in the East did not accept glass. Further, according to one part- time recycler I encountered, glass needs to be crushed, making the process labor intensive, and it is heavy, therefore not easy to transport if you do not own a vehicle.

The main tool of trade for street waste pushers is their trolley yet there are no official trolleys therefore those in the industry have to resort to innovation by creating their own. Their trolleys are not those used at supermarkets but some found utility with these shopping carts. Instead, they used a plastic dolly as a base, then placed a heavy duty sack on top. The ideal handle is the metal leg of an ironing board, and people threw ironing boards out regularly so waste pickers would collect the legs for themselves or to sell for ZAR10 (USD0.69).

Conclusion

Chapter six delved into the justificatory logics used in order to engage in their profession. Waste picking is not essentially a survivalist occupation, and those with an economic motive are driven by the higher earning potential compared to other low-tier informal opportunities. Further, waste pickers have other employment opportunities, however, they make strategic decisions to pick waste due to flexibility and autonomy over their time and labor. This chapter demonstrated waste pickers' agency which they can exercise in a variety of ways- through picking more valuable materials and working when they please. The main intention of this chapter was to locate waste picking in the informal labor market in order to demonstrate that waste picking is just but one option against a variety of income generating opportunities in the informal economy.

The following chapter will continue to discuss findings, demonstrating that waste is actually contested. I will show the ways in which waste pickers protect their occupation and try to increase their finances. I discuss the various individuals contesting for waste and various unwritten codes to which waste pickers can adhere in order to continue plying their trade.

CHAPTER 7: NORMS AND CODES OF CONDUCT IN WASTE PICKING

7.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I established the reasons waste pickers engage in this particular livelihood occupation. This chapter discusses the other individuals (and sometimes entities) that routinely contest for items in the waste stream. These contestations demonstrate that discarded items are desirable. When these other actors make claims to what waste pickers consider theirs, how do they protect their livelihoods? This is a question to which I respond. In instances where specific waste pickers have continuous access to set waste streams, how do they ensure this exclusive access? These are questions I address in this chapter. I pick-up from a point raised in the introduction, that the streets are not enclosed spaces, neither are there leaders who determine access to waste streams therefore these questions are important in understanding the manner waste pickers negotiate access to resources and secure their livelihoods.

In this chapter, I document the strategies waste pickers utilize in order to secure waste and I discuss their competitors, those who pose a threat to them accessing resources from the waste stream. I begin by introducing the importance of the codes of informal waste picking in the research area. I then discuss the actors posing a threat to waste pickers and the codes of conduct that govern street waste picking before concluding with a discussion. This chapter responds to the three remaining subsidiary questions (b, c, and d) which are:

   b. What are the strategies used by waste pickers to assert claims to waste?

   c. In what ways do informal waste pickers navigate and even circumvent the municipal threats to their territory?

   d. How are the conflicts between co-claimants to waste adjudicated?

7.1.1 Contextualizing Rules and Regulations in Waste Picking

Street waste picking is not well understood in relation to the guidelines, codes and norms. Given the informal nature of the occupation, a situation where there are no official, documented rules and guidelines that dictate how the sector works, a question arises, namely: are there rules or commonly held norms? According to my findings, yes! Many studies of informality show that there are internal logics in place to create order, however, these are unwritten, and typically not agreed upon by all nor evident to an outsider. Further, given that waste picking operates in breach of the law, there are prevailing conditions that determine their ability to appropriate waste. Such conditions include the ability to successfully ward off competition from others.

From the literature, one can reasonably make two assumptions. First, that waste pickers can freely appropriate from waste receptacles because the items are discarded, therefore for the taking. Secondly, that the job is dreadful, and pays badly that few are interested, however, the high levels of unemployment would suggest otherwise. Certainly according to Chengetai, "you see a new face every day" because "there are no jobs"[9]. However, through my research, I regularly saw and heard of waste pickers negotiating and contesting for waste. Waste pickers do not have legal rights to waste, therefore they make claims to materials through the labor they perform, by identifying the bins and extracting the materials. There exist norms and guidelines that govern the manner waste pickers ply their trade and access materials. I sought to understand this claim-making process as well as the strategies used to negotiate waste.

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[9] This was perhaps ironic given he had turned down two jobs.

7.1.2 Of Rights, Rules, Guidelines and Codes of Conduct

While much has been written about landfill workers, and the ways in which they have sought legal protection in order to safeguard access to their resources, there is little on street waste pickers. Samson (2015) documents a case, which subsequently granted legal authorization to landfill pickers to continue to pick waste. In my research, waste pickers did not have the legal right to waste therefore had to resort to informal routes in order to enforce their claims to appropriated resources. In this section, I will explain the steps waste pickers take in order to make claims to waste in the absence of widely recognized formal rights. I will outline and discuss the types of claims they make, and the ways they make these claims. These questions are important in constructing the narrative of waste work and more broadly provide insight into the manner with which informal actors maintain that which they have appropriated.

I argue that in relation to street waste picking, there is in fact desired behavior expected of others, as well as standards of professional conduct and desired values. Where a code of conduct is intended to prevent conflict from arising, the fluid nature of expected conduct means that conflict does arise. Further, the code of conduct is contingent on numerous factors which will be discussed in the course of this chapter.

7.2 The Codes of Conduct

In this section, the actors posing competition to street waste pickers will be discussed. I was aware of some actors, prior to embarking on fieldwork, and discovered others through interviews and observation. The actors are as follows:

a. Gardeners, grounds-men, domestic workers, and janitors.

b. Recycling companies.

c. Other waste pickers.

d. The municipality or state-sanctioned waste removal companies.

The following sections will discuss each of these actors in the context of their interaction with waste pickers, then present the code of conduct applicable to each interaction.

7.2.1 Gardeners, Grounds-men, Domestic Workers, and Janitors

Gated complexes are a prevalent feature in South African cities. At complexes in the neighborhoods I have lived, 240-liter trash bins (wheelie bins) are provided for each household or for a set of households. An employee of the complex usually places these outside the gate on the day of collection or the evening/afternoon before. Waste pickers remarked that landscapers/general hands and sometimes even domestic workers would take some of the valuable resources; particularly items placed into the bin last (and therefore on top). Residents sometimes placed reusable items (such as clothes, laptops) inside the bin after it was full in order to prevent the items from being contaminated or mixed with waste; they were clearly aware that these objects were likely to be removed from the bins. For situations where bins were already searched, waste pickers used the term 'rigged bins'. Gardeners and grounds-men however, did not search

thoroughly. Occasionally, instead of discarding reusable items, residents gave these to gardeners who would either use or give to waste pickers. Waste pickers would assist in taking out bins for the advantage for picking first. This was a common strategy, especially given that waste is highly contested; proactive strategies could be employed as a way of maximizing access to resources.

Receptacles at offices and office parks are subject to similar processes. Those who work in office parks, such as janitors would take recyclables before (or as soon as) these were thrown out. Two weeks into the research, I encountered an elderly woman at an office park collecting cans. She explained that she takes these for extra money. This observation clarified my understanding because I realized that the insider knowledge she possesses meant she could claim valuable resources before these are thrown out. She would have knowledge of office parties so if cans were thrown out, she would know about it. Another observation took place immediately after encountering this woman. I saw a sack of cans and plastic bottles at a carwash and asked one of the attendants (whom I knew) about it. He claimed ownership of the recyclables. Cans and bottles in the vehicles were not discarded but collected and sold to a buyback center. These encounters showed that many are involved in recycling activities, thereby posing competition for waste pickers. Given that many office parks are gated, and security guards man these gates, waste pickers would sometimes see lucrative resources, yet lack the ability to access. The Loner knew of a former trolley pusher who now offers recycling services to office parks. She now owned a vehicle, which gave her legitimacy as a recycler.

The encounters in the previous section demonstrate that many are involved in recycling, thereby posing competition for waste pickers. In my data, waste pickers did not contest this, but accepted that they do not have exclusive access to materials. In the context of this section, I conclude that **a code of conduct is: not all waste for the taking is accessible to waste pickers!**

7.2.2 Recycling Companies

Those I interviewed mentioned that waste recycling companies pose a threat to their livelihoods. Recycling companies provided households with clear bags in which to place then recyclables to be collected. Almost a decade ago, Chengetai used to collect white paper, but the offices from which he used to collect now recycle in-house and have hired a company to do the collection. The man to whom he used to sell paper now collects it directly from office parks. Chengetai further emphasized when he started picking waste, there were no recycling companies, just a few other waste pickers. Given that Chengetai had been picking waste for almost a decade, and one particular recycling company that operated in the area had been doing so for about four years, this does accord with his assertion.

Waste pickers did claim (in breach) recyclables meant for recycling companies, even though they were not supposed to. As a general norm, when recyclables were placed for collection on trash collection day, waste pickers perceived the recyclables for the company as a bonus. However, they said the collection day for recyclables changed in order to prevent this. On rare occasions, the recyclables would be placed for collection on trash collection day, and waste pickers would take them, a situation I observed on two occasions as long as they were not caught, waste pickers would take these items since being caught would result in a beating from security guards. It is key to note that security guards, who were not affiliated with these companies, were defending the interests of the private recycling companies[10].

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[10] In South Africa, the gates of office parks and some gated communities/complexes are manned by private security guards hired by the office park or community/complex. In other instances, neighborhoods hire private security firms to patrol the streets.

Waste pickers only took these presorted items if it was expedient to do so. From these accounts, a code of conduct is: **you can take what is sorted for a recycling company, as long as you do not get caught!**

Figure 7: Recyclables for a company

7.2.3 Other Waste Pickers

The first observation on my first day of fieldwork was a waste picker collecting aluminum cans (Tapuwa) and shortly after, another picker (Tshepang) began to sort the same set of bins, but he collected all sorts of materials (plastic bottles of various types mostly). The response I received from both when I asked about multiple people salvaging simultaneously was one person, one set of bins, on a first come, first search basis. *This was in direct contrast with what I was observing.* I probed this contradiction and was told, since they were collecting different materials, they could pick alongside each other. At a set of bins Tshepang worked, an elderly

man emerged, had a conversation with a grounds-man then began sorting one set of bins. He was given access because he only looks for clothes, so in exchange for clothes in both sets, he will sort one set of bins. This allows for expedient sorting. Tshepang even paid him ZAR20 (USD1.50). A few weeks later, I found a different waste picker, named Livhuwani yet the elderly man was still assisting with the sorting. In this arrangement, the elderly man looks for aluminum cans and other items such as clothes. However, Livhuwani was supposed to give him *all* the cans from the bins but he only gave some, and did not pay. Such arrangements were not unusual: Leeto for instance had 'ownership' of a large set of bins and mediated who could pick there alongside himself and the materials to be taken. I observed his willingness to give up cardboard boxes to others, sometimes other materials. One afternoon, I met him looking for a particular waste picker. The purpose was for him to collect cardboard. When probed about this, Leeto asserted that he periodically allowed people access to material he does not want.

This introduces another code of conduct, namely: **One person per bin unless you are willing to share!**

The previous code only applies to some waste pickers- others were *unwilling* to share in order to maintain exclusive access to all the materials in the bins. Select waste pickers were willing to physically fight in order to protect their set of bins. From my investigation, a particular waste picker was notorious for fighting for his territory. On a particular Wednesday, he woke up late and was further delayed from his usual site by the opportunity to salvage a set of bins which had not been searched the previous day as usual. As a result, his regular set of bins was already taken, and I quote "those guys can see I am not there, so someone has already taken my place...the people know me and know that if I am picking, (they must) go elsewhere". This was crucial information because I was informed that on Wednesdays, he had access to lucrative bins,

which others were barred from. Through this encounter, I realized the waste picker himself created the barrier. This situation was not unusual. On numerous occasions I observed waste pickers taking advantage of opportunities created by pickers who were away. Leeto who went on vacation for two months said a friend was supposed to work in his place, but this did not happen, and others took over. He too, took to fighting. He also had territory in two parts of town and in one of these areas, there were contenders who wanted to displace him. He was willing to fight and *Motswako* members were willing to assist. A variation to the previous code is: **There are established access patterns, but these only hold if one regularly maintains access, including arriving first.**

These particular encounters are straightforward, hence the codes of conduct outlined. The nature of agonistic processes is that the rules are in flux, not always agreed upon by all parties. What is key in the definition of the notion of code of conduct is the reference to desirable behavior across all actors. For instance, if someone 'owns' a particular set of bins, the expectation is that even if someone else picks first, when the 'owner' arrives, the encroacher will have to leave as articulated in the foregoing. This is desirable behavior yet, because the codes are contested, not everyone adheres to this. There is a second code that some abide by: **if someone arrives first, then they should be permitted to pick undisturbed.** After all, according to one respondent, 'no one owns a bin, except the resident'. This means the notion of ownership is not agreed upon across the sector.

One afternoon, I observed Musa and a friend sleeping next to a set of bins. Another waste picker took advantage of this situation and salvaged materials. When they awoke, they were not willing to pick alongside the one who was already working, even though he was clearly not taking all materials. Asked if he would have done the same, Tshepang who was with me

explained that he would have also salvaged the bin, even though there were waste pickers sleeping next to the bin. I regularly saw Musa working at that set of bins, but his inability to search first made that set for the taking since I had seen Tshepang, Chengetai and an unfamiliar face there as well

On another afternoon, Chengetai was working at a different set of bins than usual. We both saw another waste picker looking in our direction from a distance. There were clearly tensions between the two because Chengetai remarked having made his rival suffer, justified because "this business is about competition". (unknown to me at that time, *Motswako* had fought with that picker and he had suffered severe injuries). At that same set, I observed Tshepang one day, who said he knew no one had searched because he saw the bins being brought out so he searched anyway.

An additional dimension to this situation is if a waste particular picker claims a territory as their own, if someone arrives first, the expectation is that they will leave in favor of the 'owner'. At two different sets of bins, I saw a change in waste pickers. The 'original' owners returned after a brief absence to reclaim their territory. Both times, a physical fight ensued. The 'owners' acquired their territory back. Of these two situations, one of the displaced, Tshepang found a set of bins nearby, which seemed to not have a regular claimant. I never saw the other appropriators again. **Code amendment: Come first to pick first, unless the 'rightful' owner establishes their claim!**

There are complex situations I observed, especially when pickers applied the first come, first search rule, and sometimes alternative methods were applied such as allocating bins according to turn, as I observed at the complex with the female waste pickers in Area 3. Each one searched a specific bin, and they unequivocally said, if they fight, they will all be chased

away so it was better to cooperate. The two of the women and male trolley pusher co-operated, giving access to one another's bins and waste, the female trolley pusher worked alone. They were not explicit about who worked at the bins first, nor how they all came to work there but trolley pushers, according to the women, are very aggressive. I speculate that they came first, and the trolley pushers encroached and they could not fight them off.

In relation to justification, Tshepang was working on two sets of bins and there were visitors from the CBD working at one of these sets. He admitted that they had arrived first, but since he assisted the gardener in bringing out one of these sets, he was justified in working there too. Given that I had seen him encroaching on another's set, I can assume he did not have a problem working alongside others.

Additional complexity pertaining to claiming ownership of bins relates to freedom of movement. Waste pickers have autonomy over their time, and can take leave of absence for the amount of time they choose. This poses complexity when distinguishing 'rightful' owners. For example, Leeto was away for almost two months, which could be read as abandonment of a lucrative spot for eight weeks! His set comprised at least 10 bins at a complex. It is unsurprising that someone else took over since people leave all the time.

A situation that creates increased competition pertains to another key point which is that bins are not brought out at a set time. While Chengetai was waiting on a bin to be brought out, we observed a waste picker with an empty trolley passing-by. He emerged twice over from different streets with his trolley still empty. At least two more waste pickers emerged from the same streets with empty trolleys and Chengetai concluded that he would not work that afternoon because it was evident that there was no waste. Still, on a different day, Livhuwani wanted to go to individual houses in Area 1 since his regular bins had not yielded sufficient recyclables but he

saw his friend coming from that direction and concluded the targeted bins had already been searched. Bins are brought out the afternoon before, while others at night or early on trash collection day. It would be easier to wake up early to search a neighborhood since all the bins will be out for collection but there are more waste pickers, and a few bins will have been searched the day before (since waste pickers will work the afternoon and evening before). According to Tshepang: "the wealthy people up there (gesturing towards the mountain) bring out bins the whole night, even at 2 am".

A poignant point relates to the suspension of regular codes during low consumption cycles. During the year-end holiday period, known as festive season that usually begins on the 16th of December, migrant laborers return home, while others go on vacation. As a result, there are fewer materials in the waste stream. Waste pickers also often go home or take vacation time during this season. The Loner did not work in order to avoid conflict. With fewer bins, waste pickers would likely fight over bins, even over items because those who do not search thoroughly would contend for items found by those who searched thoroughly. And since there were fewer available, the likelihood of waste pickers attempting to salvage in already searched bins was very high.

7.2.4 The Municipality and State Contracted Waste Collectors

State contracted waste collectors sometimes served as direct competition. I observed contracted waste workers sorting, separating and storing recyclables during collection. Waste pickers presorted bins, and if they did not quickly place items in their trolley, the waste workers would take the recyclables away during collection.

To elaborate: in order to work quickly, waste pickers would remove recyclables from the bin and leave them on the ground, then after searching all the bins, they would fill their trolleys. This was a time saving strategy respected by other waste pickers; other waste pickers would not take someone's sorted materials. But this practice was not respected by formal waste workers: it is these recyclables the waste workers would take. Three waste pickers reported disrupting traffic when contracted waste workers took their waste. By emptying their trolleys on the road, traffic would be disrupted, prompting motorists and others to intervene. Given that contracted waste collectors are not supposed to be salvaging for waste, this action was unfavorable to them and could adversely impact their jobs. When recalling their relationship with other state workers, the participants reported municipal workers in charge of landscaping would seize or burn their possessions during cleanup operations. The Durawall was cleaned up once during fieldwork. The *Majita* group had recently relocated to the Durawall from a previous close by location which had been subsequently fenced off and they had no intention of moving. The mound was eventually leveled, and this changed their living arrangements.

In the context of waste workers, waste pickers would first try to secure their items as explained above, before engaging in alternative strategies. A code of conduct from this section therefore is: I**f you have sorted your goods, they are yours!** Agonistic measures might be necessary to enforce this code with non-waste pickers, but pickers would work together to convince contracted workers to adhere to this code of conduct.

7.2.5 Discussion of Codes

What is curious about informality generally and street waste picking in particular is that while it appears to an outsider to be an open, free access profession, where anyone can identify a set of bins, and begin to sort, it is in fact a more complex process. Many consider access to discarded items a simple linear process. However, as this chapter showed, it is fraught with conflict and tension because claims are not formal. This does not mean claims are illegitimate, I make this assertion because waste, when not allocated to a recycling company is understood as a common property resource. The conflicts have implications for understanding waste picking in terms of the ways in which informal processes are governed internally. From this chapter, it is evident that waste picking is not a forthright process. If waste picking were as per Figure 8, this would likely speak of a process that is organized by waste pickers or an external organization, and if waste pickers search bins to which they are not allocated, there are penalties. Such an arrangement would protect those who have bins allocated to them. Waste picking is more complex, as per Figure 9, therefore it is important to then understand how waste pickers safeguard access to recyclables without formal status and authorization.

Figure 8: How the waste picking process is generally considered

I will discuss each of the codes in order to provide lessons and insight for theory as well as a deeper understanding of waste picking and informality generally.

Code one: Not all waste for the taking is accessible to waste pickers!

Code one might be read as a paradoxical statement, that if it is for the taking, then it should be accessible to waste pickers. However, waste picking is premised upon accessibility of waste as understood by the waste pickers: another can take a discarded item. However, there are situations where claimants, as well as barriers prevent waste pickers from accessing recyclables. In some situations, recyclables might be for taking by others (such as recycling companies), while in other situations physical barriers such as walls, fences and boom gates in the case of bins inside gated estates prevent access. Some waste pickers might be able to navigate access due to special circumstances such as recyclables meant for a company being placed outside on the wrong day, but this is not always the case. As a result, there was no one method to use in order to gain access to waste. One could therefore consider code one as follows: **Not all waste is for the taking because of restricted access for waste pickers.**

Code two: You can take what is presorted for a recycling company, as long as you do not get caught!

The code above is relatively new with regards to street waste picking, because recycling companies were not always operating in this field according to Chengetai. Nevertheless, it is important because of changing policies that are pushing for recycling, particularly sorting at source.

Code three: One person per bin unless you are willing to share!

This code demonstrates contradiction, and emphasizes the importance of observation for clarifying what happens in practice. The collection of different materials sometimes permitted waste pickers to work alongside each other. The reason this did not happen pertains to power, and justification. The situation I described with the women shows this well. While I was unable to ascertain who claimed the set of bins first, cooperation was only because it was beneficial to do so since fighting would displace all of them. The two women did comment about the aggression of trolley pushers, which demonstrates lack of power to enforce a claim. Even at the park, the women whom I interviewed had similar accounts about fending off others. They said if one found a high value item such as a laptop, they had to hide the item and leave the bins as quickly as possible because they would be robbed by other waste pickers- two waste pickers were particularly notorious for this.

Code four: It is your bin alone, as long as you arrive first!

Given that the claims are informal, and not enforceable legally, the only way such claims can be staked is through arriving first. Usually, if one arrived at a set of bins first, then they could reasonably stake this claim.

Code five: It is your bin, as long as you arrive first and search first!

This is a variation of code four and I noted that simply waiting by a set of bins but not doing anything can invalidate your claim.

Code six: Even if you come first, the 'rightful' owner can establish their claim!

This code is in relation to bins that have 'owners' and claimants. When this particular code comes into effect, codes four and five are suspended. Further, rightful owners sometimes staked claims, usually through violence. For instance, that both Leeto and Livhuwani physically fought for their territory after a long absence is indicative of complex informal regulations to which everyone does not adhere. In both the situations, newcomers could rightfully assume they were the new 'owners' because they searched uncontested for a relatively long period of time. In the case of Leeto, he was absent for approximately two months, while Livhuwani re-emerged after approximately one month. This code also demonstrates the flexible nature of street waste picking as well as the instability of the job, specifically as it pertains to lucrative territory since they can be displaced at any time.

Code seven: If you have sorted your goods, they are yours!

Waste pickers regularly accused contracted waste workers of posing a threat to their livelihood. They employed a few strategies in order to protect their territory which had to be employed constantly, not once off. For instance, they always had to secure their recyclables before the truck arrived because of the competition posed by the waste workers. On one occasion, when the truck came, Nkosi picked up a bag which belonged to the waste worker who subsequently chastised him, and claimed his recyclables. This situation did not escalate into a fight, but demonstrates the ongoing agonistic nature of claims.
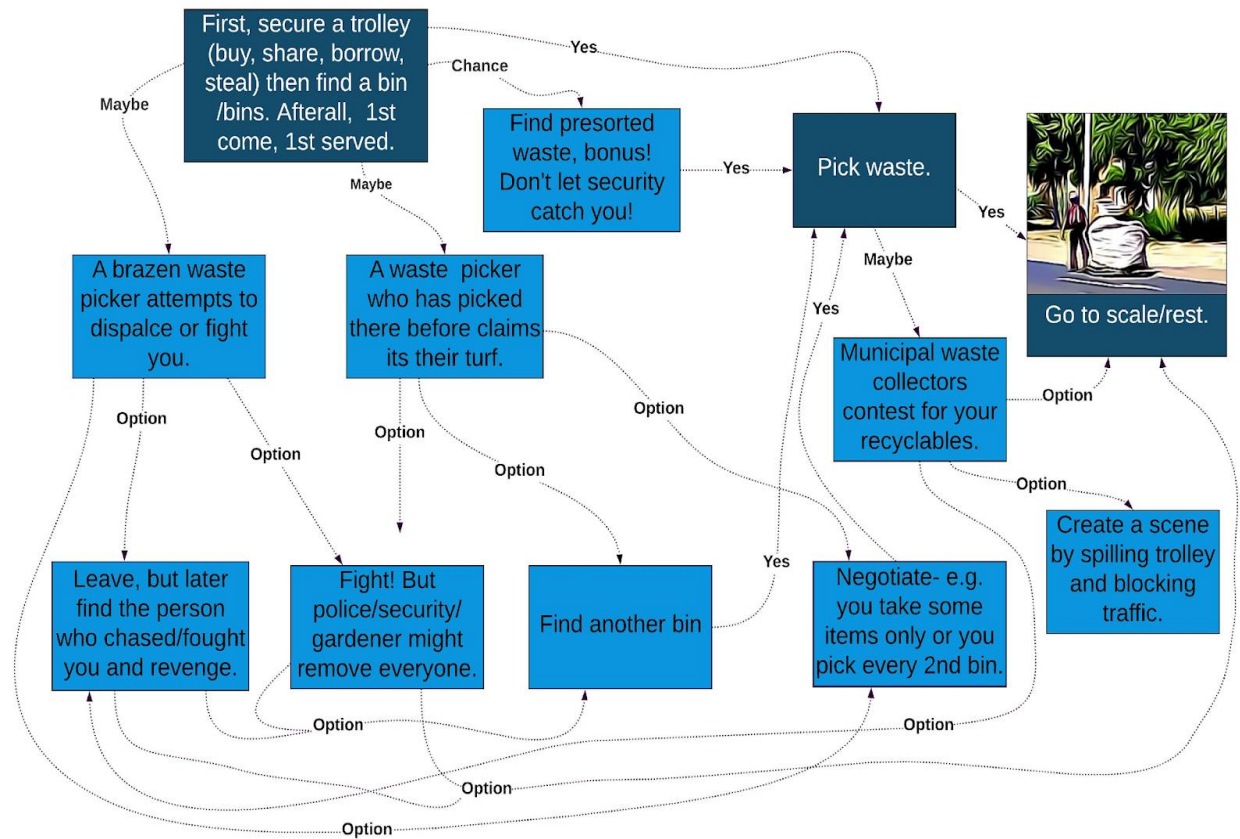
Figure 9: The dynamic process of waste picking

Figure 9 shows the various options waste pickers have in respect to waste picking. Merely having a trolley, finding a bin, then picking waste is not always possible. Occasionally, they face contestation either from other waste pickers or waste workers. Security, grounds-men and gardeners and might chase them away if there are complaints by residents, or violence and arguing.

7.2.6 Theoretical Implications of the Empirics

This work contributes to understanding phenomena and forms of urbanism that are important and relevant to southern cities. This work makes a contribution by studying informality in order to understand the inner dynamics and norms that guide and regulate such activity. The intention is to increase the body of work that supports the call for a southern theory.

It was important to conduct the study in the global south in order to understand these cities, rather than rely on metrics that will produce results that are inaccurate or less meaningful for policy makers because the premise of the study was based upon northern archetypes which overlook certain phenomena relevant to and prevalent in the global south.

For this study, I investigated informality, starting with an empirical case about waste picking. I did not use established theory and I focused on the quotidian in order to understand the ways waste pickers in South African cities contribute to waste management. From a theoretical perspective, the findings accord with ATA, in that gains are tentative, always ongoing (Lawhon, Pierce & Makina, 2018) but not necessarily consolidative. This contrasts with the way in which the RTTC is applied, towards institutionalized rights.

I found the rules (codes) of the game are not universally agreed upon- as understood through an ATA framework (Lawhon, Pierce & Makina, 2018). There were various actors who were contestants for the same resources as shown in this chapter. Although this study pertains solely to waste picking, it is important to understand these logics, as this might allow others to consider how other informal sector activities are organized in terms of contestation.

These empirics have ramifications for theory, and I discuss this below.

For Understanding Urban Appropriations:

From a terminology point of view, to appropriate means to take over, or use without the required permissions (Merriam-Webster, online), whereas encroachment means to extend one's boundary into another's boundary or beyond what is permissible (Merriam-Webster, online). In order to encroach, you should already be in the territory. There is a subtle difference which I observed. Waste pickers would either take over (appropriate) a set of bins, or pick alongside

(encroach upon) another's set. Each of these actions brought about different reactions and were managed differently. There were instances where encroachers were accommodated, either because it is beneficial or because to fight them off would result in loss of the ability to operate. Nevertheless, the term appropriation is still apt to describe the manner waste pickers take over bins in order to salvage for recyclables and useful items.

For informal actors, the ability to continue their activities is important since their livelihoods are precarious, policy changes can take place which prevent them from continuing their activities. For instance, literature on informal street trade shows that sometimes governments implement clean-up operations or ban such activities. Reflecting on ways which continuation is understood, common terms are incremental, large, small, and consolidative. This is important because the absence of legal authorization makes informal livelihoods in particular uncertain, since informal gains can be truncated or banned. Sometimes the ability to continue their livelihood is consolidative, where they are granted legal permissions, other times, not. In reference to waste picking specifically, displacement (either because of policies or by other waste pickers) made them move to another area or set of bins. The activities neither stopped nor the waste pickers deterred.

For Understanding Justificatory Logics of Appropriation:

Generally, they provided a myriad of reasons, depending on the individual. While the groups were not large enough to make broad generalizations, one could consider the themes that emerged in order delve deeper into justifications. For example, the potential to earn above average minimum wages coupled with flexibility and autonomy contributed to picking waste. From a broader perspective, adherence to some of these codes was a justificatory logic in itself-

that one has searched a bin entitles them, not another to these resources. The stability offered by the occupation in relation to other informal opportunities too was a factor. Logics are not static, and can change over time. Those I interviewed had worked in other occupations, and occasionally exited waste picking for other opportunities, only to return. An ATA framework considers that contexts and situations such as political transitions can cause these changes.

For Conflict and Adjudication:

The main contribution of the empirics pertains to deepening understanding of conflicts those who operate informally encounter, and the adjudication process. Through waste picking, this study showed that there are a variety of actors whom waste pickers come into conflict, in addition to state authorities. In my study, waste was largely a common property resource, since only a portion of the recyclables were designated for recycling companies therefore, conflict arose between waste pickers and other contenders who did not have a legal right to the waste. As demonstrated by the codes, the conflict resolution took place informally, either through strategies and tactics such as arriving first or the use of violence to enforce a claim. Not only does this demonstrate that being a successful waste picker requires one to be able to enforce claims to items in the waste stream, but also find alternatives to continue to appropriate if unable to enforce particular claims. An example is that of waste pickers who choose to find other bins instead of fighting for bins. The informal economy operates through different norms and logics in order to maintain the system that we see. This is important with regards to any proposed interventions which will ultimately disrupt a system that is functioning by inserting new actors and even gatekeepers with whom existing waste pickers (in this case) will have to contend. An example is that of recycling companies who obtain legal rights to some recyclables but if

possible, waste pickers still find ways to stake their claim to some of what belongs to these companies.

For Understanding Reception of Appropriations:

The state and elite actors are not the only actors interested in urban appropriations (waste in this case). Instead, anyone else competing for the same space or resources is antagonized. These other actors might not have the power or rights to legally challenge waste pickers therefore they also engage in appropriating as well. Similarly, waste pickers challenge these contenders through informal channels. Other waste pickers, and waste workers are examples of this category of actors. Further, the rules (in the case of the study, codes) are not universally agreed upon- this is an additional cause of conflict and contention between actors. This is a key point because waste pickers from different suburbs operate using rules.

In order to do their work, waste pickers have to transgress, but the question is: what is transgressed? Is it formal laws or social norms? In the context of my findings, formal laws were often transgressed, yet, it was not very clear if social norms were transgressed, or the universal acceptance of social norms. Waste picking as per the respondents was perceived as a legitimate occupation. According to waste pickers, some respondents were supportive of waste picking, but I did not interview residents therefore I cannot ascertain the extent to which this applicable across the research site.

For Understanding Long-Term Outlook:

The actions are strategic, but do not necessarily seek to consolidate what is appropriated. Instead, the actions are opportunistic with strategic intent. Opportunism involves exploiting a loophole in order to meet one's needs or desires, therefore not strategic from the perspective of long-term outlook or implications. However, not all loopholes present strategic opportunities and appropriators might be selective about which opportunities to take. The end-goal however is continuation appropriations. Waste pickers want to continue their activities without contestation from recycling companies, waste workers and other waste pickers. Waste picking might not be profitable for all or in all seasons. With respect to the latter point, low consumption cycles serve as an example.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I discussed the codes and rules I observed. In addition to demonstrating the ways in which their profession is fraught with conflict, I show that there are codes of conduct which, if adhered to, make waste picking safer and more lucrative for many regular participants. At the same time, these codes exclude others, particularly those unable to hold territory through violence. However, as shown, following codes is not easy because there is no consensus over what always applies, when and to whom. What is logical to one waste picker, might not be to another, for example, picking alongside one who is taking different materials than you. The next chapter is the conclusion, where I discuss how these ideas might be taken further.

CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION

My study of waste picking in South Africa contributes to a deeper of understanding informality. As a form of situated knowledge, it shows context specific challenges facing waste pickers. Importantly, it reveals that this profession is fraught with tension. This concluding ties the different aspects of the study together.

The study investigated the justificatory logics used by waste pickers in order for them to continue to earn a living. The research question was divided into subsidiary questions, each capturing a dimension of the study. The first pertained to understanding the different logics waste pickers used to rationalize their involvement in waste picking as was inspired by the construction of waste work as least desirable, despite the numbers engaged in this work. Given that they (waste pickers) knew the societal biases against their profession, I wanted to find out how they justified it. The second subsidiary question sought to investigate the strategies waste pickers used to assert rights-claims to waste. In this context, even though codes of conduct governed waste picking, these codes were not agreed upon and this was a source of conflict. The codes are not universal either. In addition to responding to the question, I found there are multiple actors interested in waste materials.

The third question related to the municipality or formal, state-sanctioned waste workers and their conflicts with waste pickers. Initially, when I conceived of these questions, I was unaware that waste workers engaged in informal recycling. Instead, my interest was in the ways in which the decisions at municipal level threatened the livelihoods of waste pickers. The final subsidiary question relates to conflict, in particular, the adjudication process. Given the common resource aspect of waste, conflicts were adjudicated informally, sometimes through violence. On

occasion, if waste pickers collected different materials, agreements were entered into, and this mitigated potential conflict.

I conducted this particular study because I wanted to interview those who actually engaged in waste picking, given that much is written about them, but not as much giving voice to them. I was inspired by emerging research approaches that co-write with participants. And while I did not do that, I wanted their voices amplified. The project employed qualitative research, with the intention of gathering in-depth information about the research respondents' experiences. Interviews and observations were the main methods used to gather data, which was used to interpret the experiences of the waste pickers. Walking with respondents served as a useful way in which to gather data and interact with respondents. Because walking was their main form of transportation during their work period, a different approach would have alienated them and likely changed the data. The data was enriched by having relatively prolonged contact, coupled with interactions at various times of the day and consumption cycles. The main limitation I identified pertained to gender. The research population was largely men. Conducting research with women would have required a different study. As a female, I faced limitations as well. For safety reasons, I had to confine my interactions to daytime even though observing and interviewing at night would have enriched the data and elicited novel insights.

This research makes theoretical and empirical contributions. Theoretically, I was able to consider aspects of informality that are sometimes overlooked, or taken for granted truths, particularly in this instance, that discarded items are waste materials that nobody wants. Investigating waste from the perspective of agonistic transgressions helped to consider multiple angles through which waste pickers justified their appropriations. Perhaps key was the importance of interpretation- during the presentation of my proposal, committee members asked

how I would be able to distinguish between a right to the city, quiet encroachment and agonistic transgressions approach. These questions were key in assisting me to understand the multifaceted reasons for urban appropriations. The aspect of conflict, and subsequent adjudication was also considered a contribution of this work. Informal actors have contentious relations with the state and authorities and with each other. These are important dynamics to consider because it provides an analytical ability to understand why specific actors might not elect to work in a particular informal industry.

Given the urban developments taking place in the global south, more theoretical frameworks are important in order to provide explanations for the existing urban dynamics we are currently observing. Theory from the south is important in providing situated knowledge, and also information about practices that are pervasive in the global south (which might be present in the global north, albeit limited). Empirically, the study contributes to the corpus on the global south, particularly engagement with marginalized populations. I documented the flexible approach I had to undertake in order to engage with actors who operate informally, and deviate from the formal approach I had envisaged at the inception of the study.

One of the discussions in this project was the flexibility that waste pickers had because of their jobs. Sometimes they picked waste consistently, in the same area, and other times oscillated between waste picking and other informal occupations. In this instance, research over a longer period of time would show the movements and patterns on waste pickers and offer in-depth understanding of informal livelihood opportunities. This would enable researchers and policy makers to understand the constraints and opportunities facing marginalized populations in regards to decision-making about their livelihoods. Another dynamic that a longer time frame would allow for relates to changes in space. During fieldwork in 2018, construction was taking

place in the places pickers used to sleep and sort their materials. When I returned home a year later, construction was complete- part of the area the Loner resided was paved and the rock upon which he relaxed had been removed. The patch of grass where group *Motswako* slept in Area 2 had been landscaped using stones and rocks, which meant they could no longer sleep there. These changes in space render changes in the movements of waste pickers. Research that tracks this would be interesting, particularly from a geography perspective, given that spatial interactions are often absent from studies pertaining to informal livelihoods such as street trading. Another avenue for further study could consider the codes adhered to by waste pickers in different areas and compare what is common and the different.

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