

THE WASTE PICKERS OF ISTANBUL: A CASE STUDY

by

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis focuses on the role of waste pickers in the recycling industry. Recycling is a sector that has many actors. Even though waste pickers are the most disadvantaged group of this system, they have a critical position as they are the main actors that make this sector possible. This study examines how the hierarchy in the recycling sector is shaped and thus tries to examine the waste picking as labor in the context of informal sector, migration and urban poverty. My research firstly makes an historical analysis of the conditions that make it into a global phenomenon while focusing on the centralization story of waste, waste collection and recycling sector in Turkey. Then, my research delves into the work of waste picking in İstanbul; the working conditions of the waste pickers and the relationship they have with their labor and with the city. This thesis underlines the sociological importance of recycling, waste and waste picking.

ÖZET

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KÜLTÜREL ÇALIŞMALAR YÜKSEK LİSANS TEZİ, EYLÜL 2019

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Anahtar Kelimeler: geri dönüşüm sektörü, kağıt toplayıcıları, çöp, enformel sektör, kentsel yoksulluk

Bu tez, İstanbul'daki geri dönüşüm endüstrisinin işleyişine ve bu sektörde kağıt toplayıcılarının rolüne odaklanmaktadır. Geri dönüşüm çok sayıda aktörü barındıran bir sektördür. Kağıt toplayıcıları ise, bu sistemin en dezavantajlı grubu olmasına rağmen, bu sektörü mümkün kılan ana aktörler olmaları bakımından kritik bir konuma sahiptirler. Bu çalışma, geri dönüşüm sektöründeki hiyerarşinin nasıl şekillendiğini inceleyerek, enformel sektör, göç ve kentsel yoksulluk bağlamında kağıt toplayıcılığı işini anlamaya çalışmaktadır. Bu tez öncelikle, Türkiye'de atık toplama işinin merkezileştirme hikayesine odaklanarak atık ve geri dönüşüm sektörünü küresel bir olgu haline getiren koşulların tarihsel analizini yapmaktadır. Ardından, İstanbul'da kağıt toplayıcılığı işini, çalışma koşullarını ve kağıt toplayıcılarının kendi işleriyle ve kentle kurdukları ilişkileri incelemektedir. Bu tez, geri dönüşüm, atık ve atık toplama işleminin sosyolojik önemini ortaya koymaktadır.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In his seminal work *Wasted Lives*, Zygmunt Bauman argues: “Stories are like searchlights and spotlights; they brighten up parts of the stage while leaving the rest in darkness. (...) To know is to choose. In the factory of knowledge, the product is separated from waste, and it is the vision of the prospective clients, of their needs or their desires, that decides which is which. The factory of knowledge is incomplete without waste disposal sites.” (Bauman 2004: 17,18) Humans cannot be separated from their waste, since what they generate as waste is what reflects them the best. What is in the garbage reflects the narratives of all of our lives. Where does the material go when it is no longer has value for us? Who is responsible for this waste? There are countless projects to recycle the excessive amount of waste that surrounds us. There are state-funded projects and private institutions contribute to make this a formal sector which invests exorbitant amounts of money to reclaim the waste around us. However, there are also actors who are invisible to us but are constantly working to reclaim the waste. These unnoticed workers are the waste pickers.

My aim with this thesis was to understand an activity that is explicitly and forcibly made invisible. Waste pickers are the people that “pick” the waste, they sort, categorize and sell the waste they have collected from the urban space. Waste pickers mostly live in the waste pick-up route. This special relationship of the waste pickers and the city and the city’s waste enable them to actively participate in the city’s economy and sustainability. At the same, they become part of the production and consumption sector as they are involved with various market relations and exchanges. The recycling sector is a vast sector which has a lot of agents. Even though waste pickers, which are at the bottom of the recycling chain, are able to reintroduce the materials to the production system, they cannot go beyond limits of rudimentary economic gain. The work of the waste picker constitutes the basis of the waste collection system which is at the very center of the discourses that make a city, “city”. Discourses that establish the city are formed by central authority of the state, the institutions

of the local administrations in the recycling sector and the actors responsible for the urban services. As a matter of fact, all these discourses are isolating all the waste pickers that make this recycling process possible and render the labor invisible. Even in waste the matter in question is a material, and concurrently, still a social category, and recycle is a social process. Waste pickers stand in the middle of a value system in which environmental and social value are transformed into industrial value. In other words, in globalized and capitalist cities, waste pickers occupy a critical position in the economic system as workers of a unique kind because they stand in the very middle of the production and consumption sector. In my thesis, I analyzed this particular interaction and relationship between the waste recycling sector and the waste pickers.

Generating surplus value from the waste of the city and while creating this value benefiting from the needs and skills of the urban poor is due to the growth of the industry in the recycling chain and its profit. In this recycling chain, factories, licensed companies and all manufacturing companies that convert the recycled material into new product accumulate profits and capital, while none of the waste pickers make a profit. It is this appraisal system that exploits the labor of the waste pickers in the industrial production system. In my thesis, I firstly make a historical analysis of the conditions that make the waste and recycling sector global. Combining the findings from my fieldwork, I was able to come to the conclusion that while being the most disadvantaged group of this system, waste pickers are also the main actors that make this vast sector of recycling work. As I have mentioned before, waste pickers stand in the middle of a value system where environmental and social value transform into industrial value. This thesis attempts to assert the sociological importance of recycling, waste, and waste picking.

The main part of my thesis consists of an ethnographic research made about waste pickers. I started out with studying the presumptions about waste pickers and waste picking. While starting my research I also had some preconceived assumptions about the approach of the local governments and policy makers. I believed that because waste picking as an informal work was a disorganized and marginal occupation, it would eventually disappear with the development of technology and “modern” garbage collection systems. I thought that waste picking did not contribute to a sustainable economy and had no place in modern waste management systems. However, as my thesis will prevail in most cases these assumptions are not viable, particularly for the waste pickers in Istanbul.

Who has the right to be a waste picker? I remember one of my participants clearly saying that it was very easy to be a waste picker, all one needed was a cart and they would be set. As this was one of the first interviews I had made, I agreed with him at that moment. It was only when I delved further into my fieldwork that I realized it was actually quite the opposite. Picking waste was meant to be complicated, the waste picker was supposed to be saturated with the work that they had to do. It meant being in a struggle that would not stop, a struggle that made one reevaluate their bodily existence. With the inner conflict, came the outer one. I soon found out that being a waste picker meant struggling with every institution of the society and the city. It meant picking a fight with something much bigger than one's self that acknowledged them in the worst possible way, by exploiting and utilizing their elbow grease work.

While focusing on how the recycling system is organized in Turkey, my thesis concentrates on the fact that established recycling sector system which is supported by regulations and legislations is actually a hypocritical system. I argue that the system does not want to eliminate the waste pickers from the sector, on the contrary, it demands that waste pickers do the actual physical part of the job. I explain that this centralization around waste is a case of increasing capital accumulation which includes seizing the money of the waste pickers and exploiting their labor. The recycling system is the process of re-evaluating the waste of the city as the raw material for industrial production. This process of reassessment is labor, price is determined by the market and the market supported by the state. As it is the case with many countries, in Turkey and in Istanbul in particular this process is initiated by waste pickers. As a global city that has houses a lot of investments, the urban waste of Istanbul is a genre in itself.

What happens if the waste pickers suddenly stopped collecting waste? What if they did not collect it for a week or without even categorizing the material they picked up? What would the municipality do? How would the recycling facilities, factories that produce material according to the waste they procure like paper or pet plastic factories? How much would the cost be? Which mechanism could do the sorting as successfully as human beings? What are the advantages having people sort the waste instead of using technological tools and mechanized systems to classify recycling waste? My thesis comments on the extent of the work the waste pickers do ranging from their mobility to the lengths that they go, in order to find the materials they are collecting. Waste pickers can sort the waste material better than the

mechanized systems. At the same time, it is clear that employing people have the advantage of economic and social development such as contributing to employment rather than using mechanized systems. Or the carbon footprint is much lower when human beings are doing the work. This labor-intensive recycling system is based on informal labor relations. Intermediaries that purchase informally and sell to formal industries or larger intermediaries disrupt the flow of information between industry and waste pickers and tend to prolong this position of the waste pickers in this exploitation system. The relationship between intermediaries and waste pickers is significant when my thesis is concerned because it directly illustrates the process of economic exploitation.

It was clear for some companies that, this labor-intensive process signified a nontrivial workforce in a very short amount of time. Especially companies like ITC set up their own transportation and waste picking processes in Ankara and Istanbul; however they gave up because of high costs. Even though the manual collection and separation of wastes is labor-intensive along with many a high risk of health hazards companies has not provided the necessary employment. This has led numerous licensed companies to abandon picking unsorted waste. In the first chapter of this thesis I discuss how in 2006, when ITC and licensed companies came into operation, the Head of Health Affairs Department of Ankara Metropolitan Municipality defined waste pickers as “illegal waste hunters” (Memurlar Haber, 2006). Waste pickers continue to play the critical roles that they have in the informal recycling sector even though they face statements such as this as well as the constant threat of losing their jobs and getting their pay cut. The war on the ownership of the waste in the recycling sector continues amongst the official institutions and private companies and waste pickers are being forced to work under subcontractors and /or municipalities. Dead-end arguments regarding the health conditions of the waste pickers and endless discussions of regulations that are never going to be implemented actually try to hide the main struggle for capital within the sector and the profit made from waste. In a broader perspective with the final legislation that was issued, the fight for the profit continues in full force in favor of companies and municipalities but against favor of the waste pickers.

There are many reports on waste pickers of the world. NGOs around the world work about local and global waste picking communities. Their reports mainly focus on the aspects of health, the affects waste picking has on economy and how secluded waste pickers are in their towns. They not only provide data but they also offer policies and proposals to local

governments. However, there is a vast amount of academic literature surrounding waste and waste picking that is from the perspective of social sciences. I would like to introduce the texts and theories that have shaped and molded my field research in my first chapter. How do social sciences approach waste pickers and their relationship with their surroundings? What are the similarities and differences between different waste picker communities around the world reveal about the waste pickers in Turkey, especially in Istanbul? And, what does the lack of regulations say about waste pickers as ‘citizens’ and waste pickers as ‘workers’?

My research is about the waste pickers in Istanbul. Most of the waste pickers in Istanbul are migrant workers that start waste picking which makes them stand out in a job that was inherently invisible to begin with. My plan was to conduct interviews with different waste pickers in Istanbul, especially with Afghan waste pickers to be able to comparatively look at migration and waste picking. However, I wasn’t able to conduct a lot of interviews with Afghan waste pickers due to the language barrier but I was able to conduct 12 interviews with waste pickers that were in different stages of work like Ali Mendillioğlu who used to be a waste picker but later founded the Waste Paper Workers Association, Afghan migrant waste pickers who recently became waste pickers or waste pickers that have been working on and off as seasonal waste pickers from various cities in Turkey.

I conducted 12 in-depth, semi-structured interviews in total. I was also able to chat with many waste pickers in my own neighborhood and around the city center. I do not claim to be representing all of the waste pickers in Istanbul because my data was limited. There are a lot of professional positions in the recycling sector that I did not prefer to reach out to. For example, I did not include anyone who worked with licensed companies or people who worked in factories in the interviews I made for this research. The reason behind this specific decision was my desire to undertake the challenge of interviewing a highly stigmatized group of “illegal” workers. Before starting this fieldwork, I was told several times that my positionality will work against me; meaning it will make waste pickers refrain from talking to me. Some of my interviews took place in a tea house Taksim’s Mis Street. However, most of my interviews happened on the spot as I was able to get my participants speak as they continue to pick waste or while they were in the warehouse. The reason why I opted for the on the spot interviews was due to the mobile nature of waste picking. Since waste picking requires mobility, I chose to walk with my participants, trying not to keep them from their work. I sometimes chose to talk to random waste pickers I came across to on the street.

Therefore, I did not prepare a questionnaire because I wanted my participants to lead our interviews in order to minimize the effect of the bias against them. I wanted to go on from their experiences and what they wanted to express about their lives as waste pickers in Istanbul. I thought it was only fitting that such freedom and fluidity would follow suit for a field work which is concerned about a job that is both free and fluid but also confined and rigid at the same time. I was able to find out about their demographic information, stories concerning migration, their workdays, their daily work routines and routes, as well as their anecdotes and memories. They were able to tell me how they started waste picking, who in their networks enabled them to get into waste picking, whether they were married. I also asked about how much they sold the waste they picked and to whom, where they lived and what their thoughts were on unionization and the city.

My first chapter briefly delves into the history of waste and how is it not ‘garbage’. I look at how power relations came to exist surrounding waste, and were molded into practices and organizations firstly in the world and later in Turkey. In 2005 the regulation on the Control of Packaging Wastes regulations were introduced for municipalities and it was established within the framework of the European Union adjustment laws. This regulation has been altered seven times up until 2010 and ended up being canceled in the seventh only to be reinstated once again in 2011. My chapter tries to look at how ineffective these regulations were and how hypocrite the promises the municipalities make. This chapter underlines the fact that what these laws and regulations are trying to do is unemploy waste pickers from their jobs under the pretense ideal of modernization and progressive thinking to promote ecological awareness. It is clear that for the capital waste is actually the raw material. Waste is a line of income that brings profit and value to the capital, regardless of the method used in solid waste management.

The second chapter of this research is dedicated to an extensive analysis of literature on waste picking and waste pickers. How does the unique experiences of waste pickers around the world reveal about the precarious and vulnerable lives of the migrant waste pickers in Istanbul? Even though I focus on the studies in Turkey and Turkey’s waste pickers, I will try to diversify and thus expound the state of waste picking in Turkey. As I point out the explicit shift from mainly Kurdish waste pickers to Afghan and Syrian waste pickers in Istanbul, I will use these various and rich ethnographies to establish a comparative analysis and diverse perspective. In the second chapter I delve into the concepts of migration and new urban

poverty to contextualize informal waste picking sector. This allowed me to define what working in waste picking actually entailed. In this chapter, I used the networks that the waste pickers have built, or became a part of, and the migration stories that they shared to shape my definition of waste picking.

My third and last chapter points at the hierarchy in the informal waste picking sector and pinpoints to the position of the waste picker pushed to the bottom of the recycling chain. I was able to regard both sides of this situation; on the one hand I looked at the attempts of unionization of waste pickers and on the other hand the conflicts waste pickers had with the municipalities and waste control regulations. I explain how the situations were worse for Afghans who are neither ‘citizens’ nor ‘refugees’. My interviews show how waste pickers in Istanbul come to face with the burdens of migration, poverty, displacement and social exclusion. Along with their inner conflicts they also struggle with restrictions and regulations that prevent them from doing their jobs. I come to the conclusion that no matter who or what they fight against, one thing is certain: waste pickers are continuously and tirelessly struggling.

2. THE STORY OF THE COMMODIFICATION OF WASTE

“The planet’s witnessing the appearance of a new creature now, ones that have already conquered all continents and almost every ecological niche. They travel in packs and are anemophilous, covering large distances without difficulty. Now I see them from the window of the bus, these airborne anemones, whole packs of them, roaming the desert. Individual specimens cling on tight to brittle little desert plants, fluttering noisily- perhaps this is the way - they communicate. The experts say these plastic bags open up a whole new chapter of earthly existence, breaking nature’s age-old habits. They’re made up of their surfaces exclusively, empty on the inside, and this historic forgoing of all content unexpectedly affords them great evolutionary benefits...”

(Olga Tokarczuk in Flights)

Olga Tokarczuk is an activist Polish writer who won the Man Booker Prize in 2018 with her novel *Flights*. The novel was highly regarded by a lot of critics (Wood, 2018). In the novel there is an unnamed writer who travels to a conference and presents a paper called: “The Preservation of Pathology Specimens Through Silicone Plastication”. The novel is interesting not only in the sense that it portrays the relationship this urbanite has with waste around him but also a play on genre and narrating which Tokarczuk achieves metaphorically with the relationship she forms with garbage and waste. The relationship between us, the garbage and the ‘waste’ is compellingly fascinating. In this chapter I will trace the history of waste, dig into the garbage of the world in a way, to enunciate the relationship between the humans and their waste through-out the years.

2.1. A Brief History

With the transition to settled life (which was roughly around 9000 BC), waste became and extremely health-threatening issue and many died due to epidemics and diseases caused by garbage. At the early stages of settled life, waste was dumped in remote areas to protect the inhabitants of the settlements from the bad smell of litter, epidemic diseases and predators. In

Athens, around 500 BC, the first municipal waste was discharged 1 mile from the city center. Piles of rubbish and debris accumulated around the city which caused diseases, especially plague (Mumford 1961, 169) It is agreed upon that the first regulations made about solid waste management was by the Minoan civilization (Pichtel 2005, 22). In Knossos, the capital of the Minoan civilization on the island of Crete, solid wastes were dumped in pits that were dug intermittently and covered again with soil (Wilson 1976, 123). The need for cleaning the polluted urban area is rooted in the ideology which gave birth to the *cloaca maxima* of the Roman Empire. *Cloaca Maxima* was built between the Capitoline and Palatine Heights by Lucius Tarquinius Superbus, the king of the Roman Empire in the sixth century BC and is one of the oldest sewer systems in the world. Prisoners were made responsible for the maintenance of this system in exchange for a sum of money. Barles underlines that the money paid to prisoners constituted the basis of the *cloacarium* tax (201).

In medieval Europe, people living in the city dumped their waste right outside their residences with the idea that free roaming animals of the city like cats, dogs, sheep or cattle would devour it (Isen 2005, 139). Wastes, including human feces, were dumped onto the streets instead of sewers. Diseases such as plague, cholera, typhoid, typhus, and even rabies were transmitted to humans through interactions with waste-fed animals, pests and scattered microbes (Isen 2005, 140). The predominantly rural lifestyle with the pre-industrial agriculture, organic household wastes were often considered provender or fertilizer. Due to the lack of convenient materials such as paper, cans and iron, the waste in the Middle Ages was mainly composed of organic waste that decomposed into and spoiled the land (Mumford 1961, 360). In medieval Europe it was hard for the waste to find a place in nature for itself, to be dissolved or to be reused since the free and wide green areas were left outside the city walls that were eradicated for safety purposes. In medieval Europe, since free and green spaces were left beyond the walls erected for defense purposes, it was difficult to find a place in nature, to be lost or reused.

As the cities developed and grew in size the practice of dumping waste right outside the city walls or the alley ways where animals roamed was no longer an option. Apart from the animals that were appropriated for transportation purposes the few that were left in the city were pushed to the outer limits of the city circle (Isen 2005, 141). As of the 17th century in Europe, organic waste was being used as fertilizer in agriculture to satisfy the increasing needs of the ever-expanding city.

In the contemporary context, we denominate ‘garbage’ due to the increase in urban waste; which accumulated as a result of an accelerated urbanization due to industrialization and the concentration of the population in cities. The garbage that cities wanted to get rid of was actually something that the agricultural production needed. While talking about the radical changes in production and the capitalist mode of production, Marx is astonished by the introduction of animal fertilizers as commodities:

“In Flanders” (in the Belgian areas) “dung and hay are in these parts imported from Holland” (for flax-growing, etc. In turn they export flax, linseed, etc.).” The refuse of the towns has therefore become[a] a matter of trade, and is regularly sold at high prices to Belgium... At about twenty miles from Antwerp, up the Schelde, the reservoirs may be seen for the manure that is brought from Holland. The trade is managed by a company of capitalists and the[b] Dutch boats” etc...” (Marx 1969, 19)

Both industrialization and urbanization highlighted the issues of raw material and food resources necessary for industrial use. Demographic growth, the increase in the number of inhabitants in the city required a simultaneous increase in agricultural production. Fertilization of agricultural land was considered a factor that would accelerate this increase. Towards the end of the 18th century, the famine of the farm manure revealed that animal and food residues could also be used as fertilizer. The fact that food and animal wastes were mostly available in the cities led to the collection of organic waste from the streets (Barles 2014, 204). Two important raw material requirements of the growing industry were met by the cities. These raw materials were: bones obtained from animals slaughtered in the city which were needed in order to make glue and machine oil, and rags, a raw vegetable-fiber based material that made room for the paper machine to be invented in the 18th century to mass produce paper (Barles 2014, 205).

The use of rags that are obtained from urban waste has increased production and encouraged competition. As England and North America became the frontiers of this competition, they could not keep up with the speedy demands of production because their resources were limited and they started to import rags from countries that cannot produce paper but had rags available. According to Barles, North America imported 50,000 tons of rags in 1850 and more than 60,000 tons of rags were imported as of 1875.

Creating raw materials from waste for the industrial production was not limited to the options stated above. It is known that waste that was buried under the houses in England, which became enriched with nitrate as it composted, was harvested to make gunpowder in the 17th century (Wilson 1967, 1997). Garbage was sold to Russia, as Russia was dealing with the aftermath of Napoleonic invasion in 1815, as raw material for making bricks. (Pichtel, 26) It is not surprising that it was first in England, the forerunner of the industrial revolution, that the method of reducing the volume of waste by burning garbage stacks with garbage ovens was used. Most of the waste separated in these furnaces was burned and disposed of. By burning the wastes in an industrial furnace not only methane explosions could be prevented but also energy could be generated. It is important to note however, that the waste of the 19th century was not as inorganic as the 21st century waste and thus is less likely to emit poisonous gas.

Towards the end of the 19th century the prices arose due to the lack of supply and corporations had to look for new natural sources and raw materials because they were not able to find adequate raw material. In many ways the end of the 19th century can be considered a time period in which significant developments took place in many ways. As rags failed to meet the needs of the paper industry in time, manufacturers began to use vegetable-based substitutes. With the introduction of rag pulp to the industry the production of paper led to a tenfold increase between 1850 and 1890 (Barles 2014, 209).

Another important development similar to the use of rag pulp is the replacement of animal bones used in sugar refineries, as their market opportunities reduced, with plastic. Plastic material started to be produced from the by-products of coal and petroleum industry (Barles 2014, 209)

The decrease in the demand for animal bones has caused the meat and bone industry to emerge by causing animal slaughterhouses to move away from the city, especially to the places where animals were being raised. Around the same is the discovery of the role of phosphorus in agriculture which drastically changed the techniques related to fertilization. According to Barles, the industry's quest for fossil phosphate around the world has resulted in the discovery of large deposits in North Africa and the expansion of mines in the United States, in early 20th century. (Barles 2014, 210)

The first strategy regarding the handling of waste was to search for distant lands around the city. According to Barles, the inhabitants of the city of Marseille, whose population was half-million at the end of the 19th century, the cholera epidemic spread and the city was not able to send their garbage to the outskirts of the city. To make matters worse the waste was piled up two spots that which escalated everything for the worse pretty quickly. Discharging the waste into the sea and disposing the waste on the outer skirts of the city walls caused the cost of transportation to be beyond defrayable after a while (Barles 2014, 212).

As the industry gradually expanded and the connection between urban life and agriculture is loosened as a result; by the end of the 19th century, organic waste led to an increase in industrial production which caused industrial wastes to emerge. Although the amount of garbage had increased dramatically; the increasing deterioration of the organic nature of wastes, due to the increase in packaged products, has been cited as one of the main reasons for the use of solid waste in generation. Accordingly, the transportation of solid wastes by fuel-consuming vehicles had also increased the costs. And this made the increase of industrial wastes and the entrance of waste management on recycling into the local government's service area *tout de suit* occurrences. In addition to all these developments, the increasing household consumption, the increasing amount of waste generated by the people living in the city and the emergence of new types of waste led to an early start in recycling in the early 20th century, even in cities where it was not an option. As Isen puts it: "The notion of hygiene, the transformation of the usage of space, population etc. are all factors that made it compulsory to recognize, define, examine and analyze waste as a 'problem' of the city. Waste made a paradigmatic leap in the context of modernity..." (Isen 2005, 141).¹

Another alternative the 20th century brought about was to industrialize collecting waste; certain garbage separation sites were created to separate garbage in a more 'rational' and 'efficient' way. The advancement in technologies enabled a sorting plantation to be established in Nice in 1923 and during the World War I, recycling systems began to develop and rapidly spread across Europe (Barles 2014, 213). Although sanitary landfilling, like incineration, was used in the UK, it had not been preferred method in any other country because it required large areas close to the city despite the cheap cost and the short amount of time it required. Especially after the Second World War, there has been a significant increase

¹ All translations, including transcriptions, are mine unless stated otherwise.

in the production of waste. In 2004, industrial waste and household waste totaled 16.4 kg per person in 27 European countries. In the USA, household waste, which was 1.2 kg per person in 1960, became an average of 2.1 kg in 1990 (Barles 2014, 218).

Today, various methods of waste disposal are in effect. The methods of getting rid of garbage or waste, which is the responsibility of local governments, can be listed as follows; waste is either discharged into seas or rivers, sent to designated storage areas on the outer walls of cities, either buried or incinerated and/or recycled in recycling facilities. Recycling is not the only area where waste is valued as a commodity, but also the development of systems that generate energy during the incineration of waste value waste as a commodity. Today's waste is seen as an area of income that brings profit and value to the capital, regardless of the method used in the solid waste management. Although which method is more profitable in terms of capital varies from country to country, it is possible to say that energy recovery systems and recycling facilities require more intensive capital investments compared to other methods of burial. It is also more costly and dangerous for industrial waste to be incinerated due to the toxic gases and chemicals that the process causes the release of. Similarly, the high cost of incineration and recycling systems is reflected in the recycling rates of countries.

With the 1970s came the crisis of waste. This crisis was triggered by the increase in the number of accidents caused by what could be described as the 'toxicity' of waste. In the 1970s, for example, a significant increase in cancer rates was observed near Niagara Falls, where 21,000 ton of toxic waste was discarded (Barles 2014, 218). The inefficient quality of the soil in the landfills, the pathologies observed in the products obtained from the soil, the ingestion of people by the ingestion of fruits and vegetables containing toxic substances are all causes that triggered the crisis and caused the public stakeholders to unite and search solutions for solid waste management. At this point, waste management has become the agenda of management circles, policy practitioners and executives. In 1965, the Solid Waste Disposal Act was introduced in the United States, and its counterpart was introduced in Europe in 1975. The main purpose of these acts actually revealed the views on reducing waste generation at source. The acts underlined the necessity of obtaining energy in the process of reducing and recycling waste. However, this situation continued to be a 'crisis' that could not be solved until 1990s despite all the attention it got at the time. Until the 1990s, the amount of waste did not decrease and recycling was limited to certain amounts specific to certain topographies. This was due to the fact that recycling is associated not just with the

establishment of waste facilities but also the efficiency of collection services that work with these establishments. The waste could not be recycled unless it is separated at its source. Until the 1960s, the problem of waste, which was mainly a problem of the developed countries, caught up to the rest of the world. With chronic poverty, inefficient government structures and weak regulations lurking in the background the proliferation of garbage in ‘developing countries’ has made waste a sanitary, social, environmental and economic problem.

Nowadays the problem of waste has become one of the most significant problems of urban life. The fact that it has become this ‘tangible’ has led the informal sector to play a major role in collection, storage and reclaiming of waste. This is how the process that led informal sector workers to play a prominent role in waste management. Workers are the biggest contributors of solid waste management. The history of the garbage actually reflects the history of societies that ‘generate’ it; they contribute to it with the relationships they have with the environment they live in and the resources they ‘use’ in the process. While waste was defined as a material that its owners plan to dispose of, its contemporary connotations include becoming a commodity that expresses value for capital through recycling. In other words, the waste that has been processed, first by industry and then consumed by the citizens, have become a value for the production processes to be put back into consumption. With the emergence of climate change, environmental crises and sustainable development concepts the issue of waste has become part of a larger discourse.

2.2. Solid Waste Management in the World

Piles and piles of waste are inherent to what can be described as ‘excessive consumption’. Nowadays, waste is actually the raw material for capital. From 2000 to 2010 even “...the largest export, from the world’s biggest economy (the United States) to the next biggest economy (China) was scrap” says Alexander and Reno in their seminal work “Introduction to Economies of Recycling” (4).

The difference between garbage and waste is important to note. There is a distinct difference that separates them: If it is recyclable and reusable it is waste but if it is no longer recyclable or reusable it is garbage. In order for anything to become a commodity, that is to make it

appealing to the capital, it must have a value of use for others. In order for the owner of the capital, consumers and manufacturers to re-value the objects that they disposed of in the first place, there has to be a division of labor that will enable them to get a quid pro quo. Nowadays it is the exploitation of labor that forms the relationship the owner of the capital has with money, which is done without laying a finger on the waste what so ever. The process of seeing garbage piles as part of wealth was also made possible with this exploitation of labor. In this respect, labor is vital in the collection, separation and recycling of waste. Garbage is the raw material that when recycled has a residual use value however, now it constitutes the conditions of another ‘production’ process, therefore another process of labor, as embodied products in a given labor process. Before going into the process of labor and the reclaimers of waste, I want to look into the commodification of the process of waste. What goes into the process of commodification on a global scale? Looking at the data what can be concluded about this commodification?

The wild consumption of commodities depends on both economic growth and waste that is already inherent to consumption. In the US alone, waste consumption has doubled in the last 30 years (Rogers 2007, 231). Research shows that the plastic waste rate that the Pacific Ocean has accumulated is six times higher than that of the zooplanktons that live in it. Rogers underline that:

“Garbage is a miniature version of production’s destructive aftermath, which inevitably ends up in each person’s hands; it is proof that all is not well. Since rubbish has the power to reveal to consumers the realities of an economy that pushes many of its costs onto the environment, garbage has become a key site for corporate ‘greenwashing’...” (Rogers 2007, 231)

What makes the rates of the pollution ‘visible’ as of 1960s, as mentioned above, is undeniably the impact of the Second World War. There was a massive increase in industrial waste which was the result of the sky rocketing mass production and concurrently the household wastes were also rapidly increasing. While this sets the ground for a global environmental crisis, it can become an opportunity for certain countries and capitalists. The US produces 30% of the total waste generated by the members of Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development. In this scenario, where the price of pollution is not shared equally, the industrially developed countries assign their responsibilities to the less developed countries, while the companies made their consumers pay the costs of the waste that is generated during

the production stage. A group called *Keep America Beautiful* was founded in the 1950s under the management of certain companies. In its discourse on waste, this organization shifted responsibility from industry to individuals and promoted the packaging of consumer products into containers. The founders of this organization include the American Can Company, the largest bottle and can producer in America, and the Owens-Illinois Glass Company (Rogers 2007, 233).

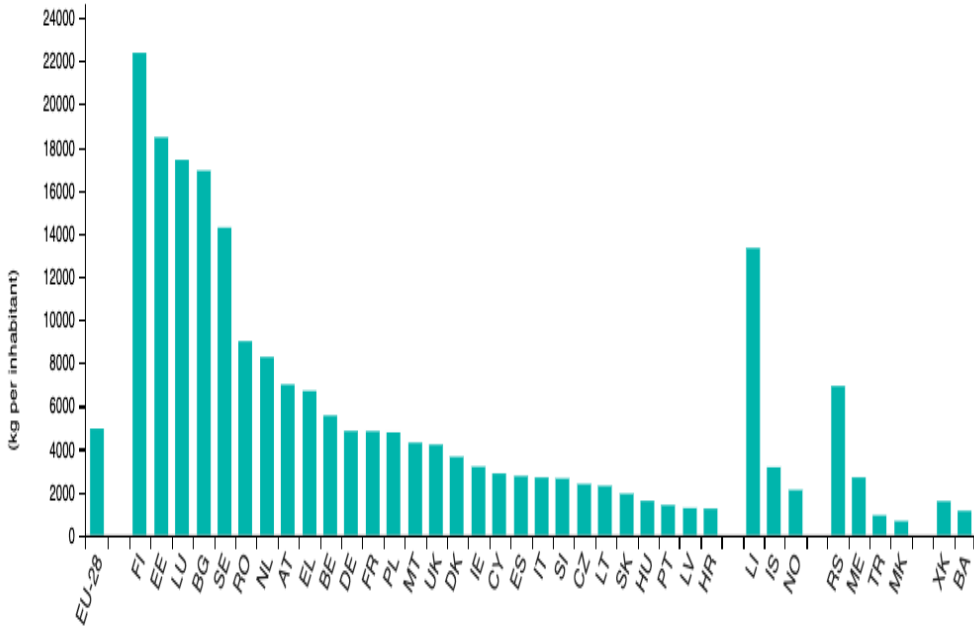
There are numerous reports on solid waste management and some of these reports include data and statistics on waste generation and recycling of the world. According to Eurostat's data, the total number of waste generated by all economic activities and households in 28 European Union countries in 2016 was 2 537 million tons. This is the highest score recorded since 2004 for EU countries, whereas Turkey had 75,534,645 tons in 2016.

Table 2.1. Solid Waste Generation in 2010 – 2012 – 2014 – 2016 in Europe

TIME	2010	2012	2014	2016
GEO				
European Union - 28 countries	2,454,720,000	2,484,270,000	2,507,090,000	2,537,770,000
Belgium	61,345,803	53,839,470	57,965,392	63,152,384
Bulgaria	167,396,268	161,252,166	179,677,011	120,508,475
Czechia	23,757,566	23,171,358	23,394,956	25,381,426
Denmark	16,217,736	16,713,822	20,808,843	20,981,931
Germany (until 1990 former territory of the FRG)	363,544,995	368,022,172	387,504,241	400,071,672
Estonia	19,000,195	21,992,343	21,804,040	24,277,879
Ireland	19,807,586	12,713,021	15,166,830	15,251,689
Greece	70,432,705	72,328,280	69,758,868	72,358,026
Spain	137,518,902	118,561,669	110,518,494	128,958,523
France	355,081,245	344,731,922	324,462,969	323,474,270
Croatia	3,157,672	3,368,714	3,724,563	5,277,598
Italy	158,627,618	154,427,046	157,870,348	163,995,048
Cyprus	2,371,203	1,870,769	1,974,160	2,462,503
Latvia	1,498,200	2,309,581	2,621,495	2,532,684
Lithuania	5,578,134	5,678,751	6,200,450	6,644,315
Luxembourg	10,441,469	8,397,228	7,072,758	10,130,076
Hungary	16,735,423	16,310,151	16,650,639	15,938,077
Malta	1,352,994	1,456,213	1,664,836	1,965,514
Netherlands	121,145,468	121,194,466	132,362,297	141,024,020
Austria	46,799,579	48,045,089	55,868,298	61,225,037
Poland	158,661,957	162,382,959	179,179,899	182,005,677
Portugal	13,640,079	13,359,517	14,368,003	14,739,135
Romania	201,432,951	249,354,926	176,607,415	177,562,905
Slovenia	5,986,106	4,546,506	4,686,417	5,494,362
Slovakia	9,384,112	8,425,384	8,862,778	10,606,966
Finland	104,336,944	91,824,193	95,969,888	122,869,183
Sweden	117,645,185	156,306,504	167,026,886	141,625,718
United Kingdom	241,820,047	241,690,407	263,319,476	277,254,977
Iceland	510,941	529,351	815,148	1,067,319
Liechtenstein	312,180	466,547	569,067	502,581
Norway	9,432,997	10,720,872	10,614,912	11,131,594
Montenegro	:	385,507	1,164,024	1,685,006
North Macedonia	2,327,590	8,472,343	2,186,612	1,424,859
Albania	:	:	:	:
Serbia	33,615,918	55,002,574	49,128,310	48,965,314
Turkey	63,540,624	67,383,777	73,075,119	75,534,645
Bosnia and Herzegovina	:	4,456,556	:	:

Looking at the numbers from 2016, for example, it is clear that the average amount of waste per capita in 28 European countries was 4,968.0 kg (Table 2.2.). Finland had the highest level of waste per capita. In 2016, there was 22,359.0 kg of waste per person in Finland. In Turkey 953.0 kg of waste was recorded per capita. According to Eurostat’s data 5.0 ton of waste was generated per EU inhabitant in 2016 and 45.5 % of waste were landfilled and 37.8 % were recycled in the EU in 2016.

Table 2.2 Waste Generation 2016 (kg per inhabitant)



However, along with the outcomes of the data, the kind of waste is also a very significant factor. Table 2.3. below shows the waste generation of different economic activities and households in 2016. Construction of the waste in 28 EU countries consists of 36.4% of the total in 2016, of which 25.0% of is mining and quarrying, 10.3% of is manufacturing. The amount of waste that is actually from construction and/or manufacture that contributes to this data is not specified however, it is clear that the highest waste contributor is from household garbage. Considering the entirety of Europe, the highest rates of waste from the households seems to be from Turkey.

Table 2.3. Waste generation by economic activities and households in Europe 2016 (%)

	Mining and quarrying	Manufacturing	Energy	Construction and demolition	Other economic activities	Households
EU-28	25	10	3	36	16	8
Belgium	0	23	1	31	36	8
Bulgaria	82	3	8	2	3	2
Czechia	1	18	4	40	23	14
Denmark	0	5	4	58	16	17
Germany	2	14	3	55	17	9
Estonia	26	37	25	5	6	2
Ireland (*)	18	23	2	12	35	10
Greece (*)	68	7	16	1	2	6
Spain	16	11	3	28	26	17
France	1	7	0	69	14	9
Croatia	12	8	2	24	31	22
Italy	0	17	2	33	29	18
Cyprus (*)	5	33	0	36	10	16
Latvia	0	19	11	4	30	34
Lithuania	1	41	2	8	32	17
Luxembourg	0	7	0	75	11	6
Hungary	1	17	16	23	25	18
Malta	3	6	0	69	13	9
Netherlands	0	10	1	70	13	6
Austria	0	9	1	73	10	7
Poland	39	17	11	10	18	5
Portugal	3	17	1	12	35	33
Romania	87	4	4	0	3	2
Slovenia	0	25	14	10	39	12
Slovakia	3	32	9	9	29	18
Finland	76	8	1	11	3	1
Sweden	77	4	1	7	7	3
United Kingdom	6	4	0	49	30	10
Liechtenstein	3	2	0	88	1	5
Norway	3	14	2	27	32	22
Montenegro	19	2	18	37	10	13
Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia	49	51	0	0	0	0
Serbia	79	3	12	1	2	3
Turkey	11	:	26	:	8	37
Kosovo*	14	20	40	6	10	11
Bosnia and Herzegovina (*)	2	27	71	0	0	0

(*) This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo Declaration of Independence.

(*) 2014.

(*) 2012.

Source: Eurostat (online data code: env_wasgen)

When waste treatment is being concerned, Table 2.4. provides the data necessary to assess the situation. Looking at Europe from the data available on the chart, it is apparent that there are two main categories of waste management which are recovery and disposal. Recovery refers to recycling, backfilling and energy recovery, and disposal refers to landfilling and other types of incineration that is without energy recovery. While the landfill and others category in Turkey remained obscure, the recovery category has the highest value.

Table 2.4. Waste Treatment Across Europe 2016 (% of total)

	Recovery			Disposal	
	Recycling	Backfilling	Energy recovery	Landfill and other	Incineration without energy recovery
EU-28	37.8	10.1	5.6	45.5	1.0
Belgium	76.9	0.0	12.6	6.4	4.1
Bulgaria	5.2	0.0	0.4	94.4	0.0
Czechia	49.5	29.0	4.5	16.6	0.4
Denmark	51.4	0.0	19.5	29.1	0.0
Germany	42.7	26.6	11.3	18.1	1.2
Estonia	21.6	11.2	2.5	64.7	0.0
Ireland	10.6	46.0	4.8	38.4	0.3
Greece (*)	3.2	8.1	0.2	88.4	0.0
Spain	37.1	5.7	3.6	53.6	0.0
France	55.0	10.3	5.4	27.6	1.6
Croatia	47.2	4.0	1.0	47.8	0.0
Italy	78.9	0.1	4.0	14.2	2.7
Cyprus	10.4	28.0	3.8	57.8	0.0
Latvia	71.7	1.1	6.8	20.3	0.0
Lithuania	33.4	4.1	5.8	56.6	0.0
Luxembourg	34.8	24.2	2.1	39.0	0.0
Hungary	54.1	3.7	7.4	34.2	0.6
Malta	19.1	63.4	0.0	17.2	0.4
Netherlands	45.6	0.0	7.6	46.0	0.9
Austria	37.0	11.0	:	45.9	:
Poland	46.2	22.2	3.3	28.0	0.4
Portugal	43.5	9.5	12.1	34.7	0.2
Romania	4.0	0.4	1.4	94.1	0.1
Slovenia	60.2	27.2	4.8	6.9	0.8
Slovakia	40.0	4.7	7.0	47.8	0.5
Finland	7.4	0.0	4.5	88.0	0.0
Sweden	12.0	4.9	6.6	76.3	0.2
United Kingdom	48.5	7.8	3.4	37.5	2.7
Iceland	22.8	51.3	0.1	24.6	1.3
Norway	42.3	3.1	33.6	20.5	0.5
Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia	0.0	0.0	0.0	98.7	1.3
Serbia	2.8	0.8	0.2	96.3	0.0
Turkey	33.0	0.0	0.8	:	0.2

(*) 2014.

Source: Eurostat (online data code: env_wastrt)

However, looking at the total recycling rates of the countries, it is clearly observed that Germany has the highest recycling rate with 67.6%. The recycled waste rate in Turkey is 9.2%. This is the second lowest rate in Europe after Malta (6.4%). What this calls for is having a closer look at the history of waste in Turkey and the evolution of recycling. What does looking at the data and the analysis reveal about the development of recycle and the conceptualization of reclaiming waste in Turkey?

2.3. Solid Waste Management in Turkey

What triggered the discussion for the first regulation on waste management in Turkey was the explosion that occurred in Hekimbaşı, a district of Ümraniye in Istanbul, in 1993. The explosion happened due to the accumulated methane in the garbage, 39 people died and 11 slums houses vanished. The bodies of 12 people were not found. Following the incident, the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality earthed the landfill site with soil and erected ventilation shafts to prevent a new explosion. This area, which was a landfill in the past, was afforested after the explosion and today there are some football and basketball fields.

Although there were a series of improvements in 1994, especially on landfills and how to improve them technically, the first legislation that passed was back in 1991 which was legal regulation of solid waste management law by the Ministry of Environment and Forestry. This legislation was in fact, the first ever regulation on solid waste management in Turkey. However, despite these legal regulations, local governments did not have sufficient economic funds and tools to carry out the process as it was specified in the law. The practice of collecting solid wastes and putting them back into production by recycling has actually become widespread in the last 15 years in Turkey and it is often referred to as ‘irregular storing’.

Recycling can simply be defined as the process of re-producing “waste” as secondary raw materials through a number of chemical and physical processes. It is safe to assume that this makes recycling a line of work that is greatly remunerative. Altuntaş reports that instead of starting from scratch with whatever the necessary raw material is, recycling aluminum saves about 95% energy and recycling plastic about 97% energy.

Similarly, the energy required for reclaiming of copper compounds is only 13% of the energy required to extract this metal from the mines and 19% for iron / steel. Altuntaş underlines that not only does recycling and reclaiming reduce the consumption of raw materials, but also the socially standardized expectation of labor and time to produce as much products as possible is reduced (Altuntaş 2008, 38).

For Turkey the idea of recycling and reclaiming waste is not a new thing. It is clear that in the last fifteen years recycling and consignment from this reclaiming has gained momentum in Turkey; collecting glass bottles, metal scraps, picking paper waste are just some of the example of this growth. For example, recycling a waste paper is far less costly than cutting and transporting an excessive number of trees to obtain the cellulose required to produce a brand new one.

According to the data of the Ministry of Environment and Urbanization, the total amount of domestic wastes generated in Istanbul in 2019 is estimated to be 19,500 tons. In recent years this issue has been discussed in the context of “ecological modernization”. Increased environmental concerns have increased the relevance and the urgency in the discussion of recycling. The main contributors of the process between bringing the product from the consumer/user to the manufacturer are the waste paper pickers, the group of workers which I will discuss in length in the next chapter.

Today in Turkey, there are four types of waste disposal plants in the collection and utilization of waste which are regular storage, incineration, composting and sterilization facilities (TÜİK). In landfills, waste is systematically compacted and covered on a daily basis. In the combustion plants, as mentioned above, it is aimed to reduce the volume of wastes by burning in special furnaces. In the composting plants, 40-60% of the wastes which susceptible to being broken down and fermented are converted to stable products. In sterilization facilities, the ‘infected’ state of the infected medical waste is enforcedly dispelled and reclaimed into domestic waste.

As the recycling systems of solid waste were being established and were becoming widespread there was a significant increase in the profit gained from recycling. This increase led to recycling forming its own sector. In 1999, the Waste Stock Exchange was established in affiliation with the Turkish Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges (TOBB). The

main purpose of the Waste Stock Exchange was to establish an intermediary system that will cut back on the disposal expenses by reducing the amount of waste to be disposed in the first place. The 2006 laws and regulations related to solid wastes were as follows; Regulation on Control of Solid Wastes, Regulation on Control of Medical Wastes, Regulation on Control of Hazardous Wastes and Regulation on Control of Packaging and Packaging Wastes.

In 2005 the regulation on the Control of Packaging Wastes was established within the framework of the European Union adjustment laws. This regulation has been altered seven times up until 2010 and ended up being canceled in the seventh only to be reinstated once again in 2011. The regulation on the Control of Packaging Wastes dictates that packaging waste includes but is not limited to pet, plastic, paper, cardboard, aluminum, glass etc. products along with any type of product that contains 20% chromium weight. The main point of this regulation is that packaging manufacturers are obliged to collect, store and/or recycle as well as eliminate the part of their packaging that could not be reclaimed. Waste separation/classification is a public activity that the municipality has to be responsible of. Packaging production is line of work thus packaging manufacturers themselves make a profit, however the public activity that the municipalities are in charge of also have a cost. Therefore, the municipality does not want to be responsible of a cost which ends up helping the profit of other firms.

In 2005, the Ministry of Environment and Urbanization declared ÇEVKO an institution within the framework of the Packaging Waste Control Regulation that is authorized. ÇEVKO, Environmental Protection and Packaging Waste Assessment Foundation, is a foundation established in 1991 by 14 industrial organizations. It is useful to list some of the members of the ÇEVKO Foundation: BP and Shell & Turcas Petroleum, Coca Cola Beverage, Johnson & Johnson, Migros and more. One of the important turning points was when ÇEVKO obtained the right to use the “green dot” trademark. The green dot in question is the trademark that first was used in Germany back 1990s to determine the eligibility of a product’s collectability and from 1995 onward this trademark has been used internationally. On ÇEVKO’s official website this symbol is defined as: “The Green Dot sign on a Package means that the economic operator launching such packaged product to the market has satisfied its legal liabilities with regard to the recovery of packaging waste...” (cevko.org)

The green dot's introduction to Turkey with ÇEVKO was in 2002. This meant that ÇEVKO would become the authority as the institution to manage the European Union funds for other companies. This is marked the beginning of the monopolization in the field of recycling because since 2005, companies that handled packaged products have begun to delegate their reclaiming obligations to the ÇEVKO Foundation to be able to reclaim their packaging waste.

Even though there is no opposition to the Packaging Waste Control Regulation, it is breached almost all the time and their estimative data is not compatible because the regulation is designed for a kind of segregation of the waste at the source and picked up from the that source on certain days be it a house, workplace etc. by licensed companies. In Turkey, this separation of waste at the source is not optimal yet if it is not separated at the source the waste cannot be sent off to recycling. The collection of waste pickers is critical since licensed companies are not able to carry out this activity efficiently as the waste is not segregated at the source. Waste picking allows the waste to be segregated at the source and ready to be recycled which eliminates the hot demand of the raw material. Turkey's two major licensed companies are Sabancı and Albayrak and these two companies collect wastes and packaging wastes from factories, which they refer to as undiminished waste.

For example, it is estimated that approximately five million tons of paper are introduced to the market annually in Turkey. Only half of these papers, nearly two and a half million tons, are recycled and two million tons of recycled papers are collected by waste pickers and five hundred million tons are collected by licensed companies. It is fair to say that most of the paper waste is collected by the waste pickers to be recycled. The fact that they are collected by waste pickers from the garbage cans on the streets saves suppliers from buying raw material (mainly cellulose), consuming energy (electricity and water), paying for the transportation and the labor. With the increase in consumption, and with that venturing into producing distinctive packaging, the purchase of goods according to the brand value and image, not according to the need, caused the cost of packaging to be more expensive than the product itself. Thus, the raw material obtained from recycling cannot reach the consumption rate. This unbalance causes a great contention in the sector. So, what happens to the waste pickers that are right in the middle of this tension and are constantly taken advantage of?

2.4. The Hierarchy of Recycle and Waste Pickers

It is known that there are around 25 million waste pickers in the world (WIEGO, 2013). The waste pickers in Turkey are estimated to be over half a million. It is possible to examine waste pickers in two categories: waste pickers that are working in the informal and in the formal sectors. However, according to WIEGO, 80% of the 25 million waste pickers are informal sector workers. Although the work of waste pickers differs from country to country, there seems to be certain similarities which can be grouped in six categories. The first category is dump/landfill waste pickers. They usually collect organic waste from dumps and generally live in or near the landfill. The second category of pickers, which are referred to as street waste pickers, collects organic and inorganic wastes thrown into garbage bags and bins. The third category is called doorstep waste pickers and they are workers employed by the municipalities. These waste pickers are in charge of collecting large amounts of garbage by trucks and/or vehicles from the residential sites that are created with the cooperation of municipalities and waste collecting organizations. Another category is the one that work with itinerant buyers and they collect recyclable products from households or businesses in exchange for payment and they often work in fixed routes and do use certain collection tools. The fifth category consists of the pickers that separate and categorize trash from the conveyor belts taxonomically. Finally, the last are the handlers which are the processors of organic waste and they work in biogas plants.

Waste pickers also work directly with industries, municipalities or various organizations. In Brazil, for example, waste pickers often collect waste on their own on the streets. However, there are also waste pickers recently that work under a certain contract with the municipalities as a result of forceful organizations. However, in ‘developing’ countries, the number of these workers that work in the informal sector are increasing due to economic crises, high unemployment, enforced migration and the implementation of structural neoliberal policies.

As it is the case in most countries, in Turkey there is a hierarchical structure between the waste pickers and the industry. Industry is at the top of the pyramid, while waste pickers are at the bottom. Intermediate buyers, who used to be waste pickers and then became storehouse owners, buy waste from waste pickers and sell them to the industries in which the instrumental storehouses may be more than one. Intermediary storehouses and middlemen

play a significant role in this recycling hierarchy because they enable medium in which the informal and the formal sector come together. The main reason why industries prefer intermediaries is that intermediaries sell waste, specifically sorted waste. At the same time, industries prefer licensed storehouses because they cannot make a contract and or commit to any other legal responsibilities with the waste pickers.

The solid waste system operates as a network between formal and informal workers all around the world; municipalities, small and large-scale intermediaries and recycling companies. Workers work through a certain division of labor in and of themselves and in the relationships they form with the companies. Informal workers often have to depend on these intermediary storehouse owners because there is no written contract between them, and mutual trust is established. Because sometime the informal workers end up having to borrow money when they are unable to waste pick. This gives the storehouse owners the advantage of buying waste from the waste pickers at a very low price. Waste pickers get paid on a per-piece basis, this is because each factory buys a different item, and makes separate sales of those specific items, and receives a price per kilo. Since the sales are usually made through intermediaries, the payments made to the waste pickers are quite low. This shows how the wheels of exploitation mechanisms are turning about the employment relations in the industrial context. Just as it is the case in many countries, in Turkey the profit margin of solid waste exchanges is as substantial as the role of intermediaries.

The service that the solid waste pickers provide is what generates the valuable raw material of the industry. However, the firms choose to maintain the relations they have with the waste pickers on the basis of exploitation through laws and public or private institutions. For example, municipalities may try to deter workers' work for a period of time, impose fines, seize the necessary means for waste picking, and so on. There are numerous examples of this scenario in Turkey. Most recently in 2016, the Ministry of Environment and Urbanization made a statement that they will impose a penalty of 140 thousand liras on licensed storehouses that purchase paper from waste pickers based on the Packaging Waste Control Regulation they issued in 2011 (Gürbüz, 2016; Arslan, 2016).

However, it is clear that there are not criminal sanctions. There are many examples of discouragements like this. For example, a circular letter issued by the Ankara Governorship in 2016 prohibited people from picking waste from municipalities, and licensed companies. This

meant that waste picking was to be going to be the monopoly of the municipality and licensed companies (Ankara Haber, 2018). These sanctions, in ‘developing’ countries such as Turkey, are indications that there are direct attempts at trying to discipline the informal waste pickers by the state and the capital. On the other hand, the fact that everything about waste picking is recorded for the sake of licensing shows how unfair and inhumane the working conditions are for the waste pickers. The process of corporatization that comes with the reinforcements from the fund of the European Union shows how much trouble an independent waste picker has to go through to earn their livelihoods. The approach of these public policies and local governments, both in Turkey and across the globe, shows the struggle to obtain the prestige of the recycling sector among recycling agents but it also portrays the reasoning behind waste pickers being excluded from the chain.

The chain of recycling shows that the least share goes to the actors that play the biggest role in the grand scheme of things: the waste pickers. While the highest share belongs to the owners, recycling facilities are at the top of the hierarchy. Efforts to eliminate waste pickers for more profit, even though they take up the least revenue in the system, not only show that those higher up do not want to share the income, but also the kind of animosity towards the waste pickers as they are an obstacle between them and a bigger share of the income. As this is the scenario in many cases all around the world, the struggle the waste pickers share has become a collective experience and has led to certain organizations and unionizations. For many years, solid waste pickers have struggled with governments and municipalities to protect their income and they continue to do so. In countries such as India, Argentina, Egypt, Mexico, Colombia especially in Brazil, solid waste pickers have taken significant steps towards legal recognition and improving their living conditions. Cooperatives and associations play an important role in this process. At the 1st International Waste Collectors Conference held in Bogotá, Colombia on 1 March 2008, waste pickers identified themselves as “waste pickers”, and expressed their demand to be recognized as part of the working class so that they could establish their own organization. (Waste Pickers Conference Report, 2008).

For the capital waste is actually the raw material. Waste is a line of income that brings profit and value to the capital, regardless of the method used in solid waste management. The history of the waste actually reflects; the history of the societies that come to produce, the environment in which the generation happens, and the relationship consumers have with the resources. Waste used to be defined as a material that the owners plan to dispose of before its

present meaning, and today it has become a commodity that is valuable for the capital through industry of recycling. The waste crisis and the problem of waste management reflect a process that makes it possible to turn waste into reclaimed waste. With the emergence of the dire problems like “climate change”, “environmental crises” and “sustainable development”, the issue of waste has become part of a greater discourse. Recycling is the recovery of what consumed them through the chain of production in the first place. As Rogers put it, the recycling phenomenon is a significant concept for understanding “greening” of the future reforms. The fact that environmental costs has pushed capital to further commodification, and the industry has used recycling to create green branding shows that, the flagrant necessity surrounding recycle and reclaiming has been taken advantage of. While capital conceals the increasing consumption with the discourse of recycling, the capital denominates individuals as those responsible for the environment and ecological balance. Recycling workers do most of the waste picking for industrial recycling. However, waste pickers are not included in the narratives of ecological gains. The most compelling part of the labor process inherent in each commodity, or rather the workers of the labor process that makes it possible to make waste commodities, are waste pickers to begin with.

3. BLOOD, SWEAT AND MONEY: WORKING AS A WASTE PICKER

From a modernist and progressive rationale, the informal sector was bound to disappear and formalize over time. It was thought to be temporary; a brief transition from what was pre-modern to modern. The informal sector was predicted to be free from low productivity along with precarious and poor working conditions. However, it is clear that the informal sector has gone beyond its predictions and expanded in time for the role of informal sector in urban waste management, which is the baseline for this research, is indisputable. Similar competitive rates could be seen in countries with high recycling rates through the informal sector and, countries where waste management is formalized. It is clear that disadvantaged groups such as poor groups and migrants are a source of income for these countries in the informal sector. In this chapter, I will address various theories and examine the context of the relationship between urban poverty, primarily migration, and waste collection as an informal work. There is an extensive web of academic literature regarding the sociological place of waste and people who earn their livelihood from waste. What is compelling is the fact that, in this web of research most field work is based in Ankara.

While studying the literature about the waste pickers of Turkey not only was I able to analyze the limits of my data and my preparations going into my fieldwork but I was also able to realize the similarities along with the boundaries of these theories that overlapped with my own. What kind of a work is waste picking? What does it entail for the worker or the employer? What is the experience of an immigrant waste picker in Istanbul and how is it different from a seasonal worker in waste picking? In this chapter I introduce the concepts that are related to waste pickers and waste picking. I underline the theoretical framework revolving around the informal sector the waste pickers work in, the poverty they face and migration as a possible force in their lives. Along with the expectations I had prior to my fieldwork and the data I have acquired in the process, I reveal my experience and the associations I make amongst theories of waste picking.

3.1. Informal Sector, Migration, New Urban Poverty in Turkey

Up until 2010's the work force of the waste industry was mainly occupied by Kurdish waste pickers in Istanbul and in many other cities of Turkey. Today, however, it is clear that the presence of Kurds in the sector is gradually diminishing and they are largely being replaced by Afghan and Syrian immigrants. Especially in Turkey, waste studies are related to the issues of urban poverty, the informal sector and exclusion in the social sciences. Through the literature that is diverse and complex in its take on waste picking, I aim to assert the main features of the informal sector and then try to reveal its relationship with migration. This requires a reading of new urban poverty and its stark differences from old forms of poverty which I will contextualize with endorsement of the waste industry.

The visibility of the waste gathering in Turkey as it will be prevailed later on in this chapter, depends on many complex shifts and changes that took place in the world as of 1980s. In a broad sense, those who are in underprivileged classes in the city are those who do not have a specific job, and maintain their livelihoods in connection with the informal sector along with the lack of means to transform their lives and include social exclusion within this poverty experience.

In a broader sense, informality is an all income-generating activity, except for the contract-based and regulated employment. Sassen says: "Because the particular characteristics of informal work are derived from the existence of a context where such work is regulated, the informal economy can only be understood in its relation to the formal economy—that is, regulated, income-generating activity" (Sassen 2000, 8). While the formal is defined as "large- scale, regulated, registered, numerated, under government protection, 'modern', the rest remains informal; small-scale activities, largely escaping recognition, enumeration, regulation or government protection" (Moser 1978, 1994).

The shift in the logic of production which is directly related with the developments such as the shift of production with the spread of post-fordist production systems, the dominance of flexible and temporary working conditions, and the withdrawal of the state from the agricultural sector are read as the effects and consequences of globalization. In relation to these consequences the deterioration of the rural urban balance has led to the accumulation of

people coming to the cities with forced migration along with the creation of new lines of work for the people who are trying to make a living in the city. The emergence of transnational companies, the changing idea of the welfare state, nation-state losing its importance, increasing competition and privatization encourage informalization. One of the outcomes of globalization and new economic policies is that the masses become more vulnerable and impoverished vis-a-vis these policies. Having to face these competitive conditions, the masses have to produce goods even cheaper whilst being price pressured and/or work in informal jobs. This is easily observed in all countries, says Sassen and Portes, regardless of their income; be it high or low. Their statement goes to prove how the matter is not just about inner factors but global economic factors that are much bigger in scale. Sassen and Portes underline this issue by saying:

“Decentralized production, "flexible" labor arrangements, and subcontracting down to low-cost small enterprises form part of a mutually reinforcing set of circumstances affecting countries at very different levels of development. Thus, the process of informalization is reinforced in the Third World by efforts of producers and countries to break out of economic stagnation through an export-oriented strategy; but the latter promotes, in turn, the reproduction of similar labor arrangements in the developed world as the affected industries struggle for survival. Simultaneously, the very circumstances of the economic crisis and efforts to cope with it create an abundant labor supply that further encourages and facilitates informalization” (Sassen and Portes 1987, 55).

Waste collecting sector is an informal line of work caused by the neo-liberal policies that has become more apparent in Turkey as of 1980s. All of these impacts and results fall in line with the factor that a living is made by waste.

One of the most important qualities of the informal employment is the fact that employment is easier in the informal sector than it is in the formal sector. The informal sector is labor-intensive; informal jobs are not based on economic capital or they require less economic capital. It also operates in a narrower area whereas family businesses are at the forefront. The informal sector consists of a competitive market and it covers activities that are not guaranteed, without a contract and not subjected to regular fees.

In the waste collecting sector, the number of Kurds that came with internal and forced migration was extremely high. Starting from the 1950s one of the most important causes of internal migration in Turkey was economic in nature. At the same time, however, there was a

rapid population movement towards the south and west of the country, especially in the 1990s, from Eastern and Southeastern Anatolia. This major population movement is one of the most important factors that shaped the hierarchy in the sector today. In the 1990's most of the Kurds were displaced due to the ongoing civil war, under the state of exception in the east of Turkey. People who are forced to migrate and leave their lands and jobs, managed to survive in Istanbul and other cities through their ethnic relations and their networks based on kinship. They constitute a considerable part of the cheap labor force since they lack formal education, and most of them worked in informal sector, especially as waste pickers. According to the 1997 data from the governorship of the state of emergency (OHAL) as a result of the evacuation, an estimated number of 450,000 people had to migrate from the region. This report also reveals that these people, whose villages were evacuated, often migrated collectively and settled either in the Urfa, Van, Diyarbakır which are major cities in the region or they settled in cities where there are opportunities for agricultural labor which did not require a special set of skills or prior education² (Kaygalak 2001, 141).

Before the Syrians and Afghans, Kurdish immigrants worked in waste picking, and they continue to do so, however the number of Syrian and Afghan migrants in the sector has increased immensely. Most of the immigrants have to make their livelihoods on their own without economic capital. Migrants were obliged to work in the informal sector because they were not able to find jobs that tended to their workmanship and skills in Turkey or because of the language barrier. In this respect, it is easier and faster to incorporate incoming immigrants to the informal sector compared to other sectors.

New urban poverty is one of the most crucial consequences of class inequalities that I've discussed above which describes the socially and economically excluded segments of the society which have to make earn livelihoods with precarious and marginal jobs, live in collapsed urban spaces of the city and are denied of the social and economic relations of production and consumption. The concept of new urban poverty has been started to be used as a key concept in the analysis of the new migration and the new urban both as the results of major displacements and globalization with the outcome of constant flow of low-skilled labor

² "OHAL Bölge valiliğinin 1997 yılı verilerine göre, toplam 905 köy ve 2.523 mezranın, yani 3.428 yerleşim yerinin boşaltılması sonucu, bölgeden 450.000 kişi göç etmek zorunda kalmıştır. Raporun açıkladığına göre, köyleri boşaltılan bu insanlar, çoğu zaman toplu halde göç ederek, ya bölgedeki Urfa, Van, Diyarbakır büyük kentlere ya da tarım işçiliği gibi eğitim ve beceri gerektirmeyen istihdam olanaklarının bulunduğu Mersin, Adana, Antalya gibi kentlere yerleşmektedirler (Kaygalak, 2001, 141)."

to the cities (Özgen 2001, 89). Concepts such as “underclass” and “urban outcast” (Myrdal) are used in this framework in the literature. Bauman, when defining new urban poverty, says: “The poor are not needed, and so they are unwanted. And because they are unwanted, they can be, without much regret or compunction, forsaken...” (Bauman 1998, 113).

Poverty transformed into something new after 1980s. Like other developing countries Turkey too was affected by capitalist reconstruction mechanisms and the retrogression of the distribution of income under the influence of neoliberal policies which has made the process of impoverishment and exclusion even more inveterately chronic. Discrimination of class has become even more obvious and absolute. Poverty was used to be concentrated in certain rural areas; however, this eventually changed., Urban areas increasingly became the places where urban poverty was intensified and explicit. Indeed, one of the many outcomes of modernization and globalization is new urban poverty which depicts the inveterately chronic.

3.2. Defining Waste Picking

The area of waste picking, or area of recycling in other words, appears as an exchange of power and extreme calculation of income and profit. In the first chapter, what I was trying to do was to look at the power relations and income and pronounce them further by tracing the steps. I tried to look at the processes of how materials become valuable and how they are deemed utterly invaluable as they are disposed. Up until this point in my research, I looked at how the power relations in question were molded through practices and organizations in Turkey, especially in Istanbul. My aim is take a closer look at the labor process and waste pickers that make this work possible. The fact that waste pickers are at the bottom of the hierarchy in these power relations but are also the ones that end making the material more valuable again was the focus of my research. As labor is what adds value to the material, in other words it makes the material valuable, what makes waste valuable is the waste pickers that represent the labor inherent to recycling.

I have concluded 12 semi-structured in-depth interviews. Three of these interviews were with Afghan immigrants. I was able to do 2 interviews at different times with the former president of the Waste Paper Workers Association, Ali Mendillioğlu. With the findings from my field

research I want to look at this labor process more closely and explore the conditions the waste pickers work or live under, and the relationship they form with the city and the urbanites. I want to delve into the relationship they have with their jobs and how they regard themselves because of their jobs.

Waste picking in Turkey is actually done in the city, before the waste is sent to certain storehouses. The picking is physically and visibly done in the city's streets and neighborhoods. The waste pickers pick the recyclable waste from small shopping centers like Migros or Carrefour and small business. The reason why they cannot pick the waste from bigger chains or from factories is because it is out of their jurisdiction. The municipality or licensed companies are the only ones allowed to pick the waste of these facilities and that is why many of them use rubbish bags. As it is the case in most cities in Turkey, the waste pickers in Istanbul have to collect the waste before the garbage truck of the municipality or one of the private companies get to them. They have to use the urban space efficiently and get to the place where there is an abundance of waste before anyone else. They have to walk great lengths to get the waste, the city center where the consuming rate is the highest is more desirable. The higher the rate of income for that district, the more potential waste it possesses. No matter the city or the district the waste picker has to obtain information about that particular place. Observing the urbanites for the relationship they form with the city and the materials they "value" is an integral part of a waste pickers job.

For a waste picker, the shift starts at 6 am, at the latest. The waste pickers leave the places they are staying at 6 am and walk to their target destination in the city. This hustle and bustle of waste picking goes on until 10 pm. Even though there are waste pickers who work solely on or through the night, the waste picking is usually done in the daytime. The waste is not randomly picked. Each waste picker has their own district that they assign between themselves and rules that they set for themselves. Usually the waste pickers that stay at the same storehouse circle the storehouse that they stay in. Each waste picker has their own route. If I were to come across a waste picker as I was walking and decided to ask them something one of the first things I noticed was the fact if by any chance another waste picker is around the same area he was usually a relative or fellow kin of the waste picker I was talking to. The rule was even if they were passing through the same street if one of them already started picking waste the other would pass by that street.

For example, seven of the waste pickers I interviewed were in the Kadıköy district: 2 of them were in Kadıköy Rıhtım Street, 5 of them were in various neighborhoods of Kadıköy like Göztepe, Caddebostan and Erenköy. All 7 of them lived in the storehouses around Fikirtepe, an industrial district in Kadıköy. Fikirtepe is one of the districts that has the greatest number of storehouses in the Anatolian Side of Istanbul, followed by Göztepe and Bostancı. Even though the interviews I conducted were at different times and independent from one another I was able to observe that 5 of the waste pickers I interviewed with stayed in the same storehouse and were acquainted with each other. The waste pickers all reported that they picked waste from the same districts regularly on a daily basis. I realized that the reason why they were assertive about this was due to the fact that they were able to estimate how much they would walk and what kind of waste they would pick up from a certain neighborhood. They also stated that this allowed them to have affinity with the urbanites and the business and home owners that they collected the waste from which made their job easier. From this perspective it is clear that the relationship the waste pickers have with the city is an important part of their jobs.

These relationships allow them to form networks in which they are aware of the work that one and another do. However, when poverty and economic factors are concerned there is also a slight edge to this relationship the waste pickers form with the city and the urbanites. When questioning what it means to be an “urbanite” Neşe Özgen points out how waste pickers are/are not incorporated to the city and are in fact invisible for the urbanites. Her field research, which was conducted in Denizli and Samsun, she utilizes the waste picker category as a tool to discuss the concept of new urban poverty.

Özgen’s study shows that in both cities, the waste pickers who earn more money than the cost of living index cannot be incorporated into the city. For instance, waste pickers in Denizli earn more than the average standard of living. However, they live in slum areas of the city where there are no basic municipal services and there is limited access to health and education services. Özgen opposes the argument that the increase in earnings in the city and the increase in the time spent in the city correlates directly to incorporation into the city. The study shows that, earning more money does not necessarily translate to being urbanite. Modernist approaches assume that there is a strong relation between the increase in income and incorporation into the urban life and the time spent in the city. However, this case study challenges these modernist approaches to the urbanization of immigrants.

Özgen argues that we have to look at the changes in the patterns of incorporation into the city. She asserts that when it comes to urban poverty the question that should be raised is: ‘what determines being a person of a city?’ (98). Through the question “What determines being a urbanite?” Özgen talks about how direct capital or the variables like the amount of, the continuity and the regularity of it doesn’t work with this example at hand and states that new variables should be taken into account as they are the case in many cities in Turkey. Özgen states that the outcomes of this research should shed light to incorporation into the city and establishing a formal relationship with the city as conditions that impacts urban poverty.³

Despite the high profitability of waste picking, its status is very low. Özgen’s research shows that while some waste pickers see waste picking as a job, some of them consider waste picking as ‘a temporary job that should be abandoned immediately’ (98). Özgen argues that waste pickers are not only nonexistent in the city’s prestigious places, but also they are made invisible in the city. She concludes that waste establishes a domain of power which correlates to a barrier that cannot be bought with a relatively high price. There is no direct relationship with the amount of income and power relations. The things that are not consumed are the indicators of these power relations.

Waste pickers stand right in the middle of where waste and value intercept which has a kind of dynamism. In a way they are create their own forms of temporality; they are responsible of their own working pace. It could even be said that they have control over when to pick up pace or when to stop. Most of the waste pickers I interviewed have given this as the main reason they picked up this line of work. One of the participants said this about the relationship he forms with his work: “... I am my own boss, I don’t work under anyone. I don’t want to take order from anyone. That is the beauty of this job. You get to decide when you want to ‘pick’. The way I see it, it is not the case for other people... Working somewhere is not my cup of tea ”. In fact, this notion of ‘not having to work for someone’ is a common point that most waste pickers referred to whilst talking about the advantages of their jobs. They point out the fact that they have their own mobilities and working paces in the city allows them to have a self-regulation of time and work space makes waste picking “tolerable”. Both the

³ “Bir kentin insanı olmayı belirleyen nedir? Doğrudan kazanç, ya da kazancın miktarı ve sürekliliği ve düzenliliği gibi değişkenlerin, bu örnekte işlememesi, Türkiye’de pek çok kentte var olan yeni değişkenlerin tartışılması gerektiğinin habercisidir. Bu çalışmadan çıkan sonuçlar ışığında; kent yoksulluğunu pekiştiren etkenlerin başında, kente eklemleme ve kentle formel ilişki kurma yollarının engellenmesini pekiştiren güç ilişkileri olduğunu söylemek mümkündür.”

waste pickers and the material that they ‘pick’ have a mobility in the city. The waste that comes from the clean and polished looking streets are gathered in the waste storehouses which not so polished and are in the outer spheres of the city. This shows the great dichotomy in the social topography of the city.

The dedication behind the notion of being my own boss, as most of my participants have proclaimed, signifies not just the determination regarding work and authority but implies a kind of agency that is complex and intriguing. The proclamation of working as my own boss, calling my own shots and underlining that this line of work is not for everyone signifies a strong and tenacious narrative. When looked at from this perspective Kathleen Millar’s significant ethnography *Reclaiming the Discarded: Life and Labor on Rio’s Garbage Dump* presents a conceptualization that is akin to my chain of thought. Her work focuses on waste pickers’, or the *catadores* as they are called in Brazil, life and labor in the Jardim Gramacho dump, which is the biggest garbage dump in Latin America in which 8000 tons of waste is collected daily. Millar tries to understand the lives and labor of *catadores* by focusing on their stories and desires and affects in a study she conducted between 2005 and 2012.

Millar examines the different trajectories which first led *catadores* to enter the dump and how were they able to accustomed to the dump. Millar discusses the first day experiences of *catadores* in the dump with Julia Kristeva’s conceptualization of abjection. She argues that *catadores*’: “...stories spoke to the ontology of the dump as a world of burial that one must enter into physically and existentially in order to do the work of reclaiming the discarded...” (Millar, 65).

Millar observes that *catadores* who quit the dump and found a formal full-time job and who, have in fact, quitted that job and went back to picking which Millar observes as a general pattern among the *catadores*. According to her research, the *catadores* describe dump as “pure suffering” and even though dump is tormenting it is still a “refuge”, which is the main conflict at the core of Millar’s curiosity. She says: “Like wage labor, work on the garbage dump is a site of subject-making, which *catadores* experience and express as transformative of their inner dispositions...” (2014, 45).

According to Millar, the *catadores* seek relational autonomy this is due to the nature of waste picking. Working in the dump is a permanent job and the hours depend entirely on the worker

which makes it a constant in their lives around which they have to shape their social lives and obligations. The autonomy is relational in the sense that they need this kind of autonomy to care for their lives outside of the dump and away from the waste. Millar points out that the *catadores* stay in this job in order to cope with their precarious lives. When talking about the fact that it is this precariousness that stabilizes their work she says:

“The politics of detachment is thus not only about departure. Turning away from something involves turning toward something else—in Rose’s case, a re-turning to the dump and to the forms of living and relationality that it enables. Far from a politics of disinterest or disengagement, this movement of detachment entails loosening certain normative ties so that other attachments can be retained. The precarious labor of *catadores* allows relationships to be woven, life projects pursued, and social worlds reproduced amid the disruptions of the here and now. The garbage dump becomes, then, not an overdetermined end for Rio’s poor. Rather, the re- turns of *catadores* to the dump constitute a politics of detachment that enables life to be lived in the precarious present.” (Millar 2018, 93).

According to Millar the reason why the *catadores* find it hard to adapt to formal work is because of the way in which they acquire a specific worker subjectivity working in the dumpster. The *catadores* seek relational autonomy and need their job to correspond to the precariousness of their life.

Another important point Millar makes is her reformulation of the formal / informal dichotomy of *catadores*’ work. She uses the term “plasticity”, inspired by Catherine Malabou’s study on neuroplasticity, in order to describe the *catadore*’s economy rather than flexibility. Because she argues that plasticity implies that people give form to new economic conditions while flexibility refers to people’s adjustment to economic conditions. She says: “Plasticity, which is fundamentally relational, draws attention to the everyday encounters that make up economic life. In doing so, it allows us to rethink economy not as a “real” structure in the world that can be measured and modeled but as the effects of all this inter- play between different forms of living...” (150). They are struggling in their own way with the countless restrictions imposed by the waste management companies. One of the examples Millar gives is about uniforms in which, when forced to wear a certain type of uniform, the *catadores* shared these uniforms with unregistered workers.

Millar describes the dump as a manifestation of social life which has ‘value’. Her research is not only a rich ethnographic study but theoretically a valuable study to the anthropology of

capitalism. There are many studies about the *catadores* of Brazil, however Millar's stands out amongst them with the depth and insight she offers. The directions she takes has inspired my approach to waste pickers of Istanbul.

One of the first things I realized was the fact that waste is not simply waste for waste pickers. This is because waste pickers do not call what they 'pick' waste. We, the consumers, call them waste disregarding the sort of material they are when the value once attached to them diminishes. The consumers do not care whether the waste is aluminum, plastic or glass, however for a waste picker they are extremely important. In one of the interviews when I asked them when they started picking waste one of the participants corrected me by saying "paper picking". Even though it is not just paper they pick, the waste pickers prefer the term "paper pickers" and refer to themselves as paper pickers. This is because determining the material and separation of that material an essential part of actual 'paper' picking. There are other workers involved in the categorization and separation of the material and it is a collective part of the job that is actually done in the storehouses. In some storehouses this categorization is done by women and children. When the picked material is separated into their categories and the parts that might decrease their value is adulterated, when they separated from what they call 'defected-waste', the material is weighed. Proportionally to what they weigh the price is calculated. The price of the paper varies from time to time. This fluctuation depends on the competitive market conditions.

The picked waste material is brought to the storehouse at the end of the day. The pick-up is usually achieved either by walking or by trucks that have a pre-determined pick-up zone. For example, one truck that is supposed to take the picked waste to one of the storehouses in Fikirtepe comes to the Göztepe Park. Waste pickers that are ready to load the truck at the end of their day come to this park to load the truck. For these waste pickers, the second step starts after coming back to the storehouse. At this step, the waste that comes to the storehouse has to be sorted and re-loaded to the truck that is going to take them to the factory or, if there is one, an intermediary facility. Sometimes waste material that comes from small storehouses are baled in bigger storehouses and then re-categorized according to their type.

These wastes that are categorized in the storehouses and reloaded to trucks to go to recycling factories meet the what is formal at this stage in their cycle. The fact that the waste is sold to factories is where the point where the informal meets the formal. There are several

intermediaries that do this step. Owners of trucks bring the categorized material at midnight and after it is sold waits for the unloading to take place. The truck owners then drive the truck back to the storehouse in the wee hours of the morning. Even though there are several waste pickers that work without a storehouse, it is very likely the majority of the waste pickers work with storehouses. The position of the waste pickers in this big chain of hierarchies show the precariousness. However, it is important to point out that the most precarious of them all is probably the waste pickers that work independently. Because as I have stated in the previous chapter, most factories prefer to work with waste pickers that actually work with storehouses because they don't want to deal with waste pickers individually. Also, they trust storehouses to provide the most reliable categorization and classification of the waste material.

Some of my participants defined their jobs as a liability, as an obligation in their lives. Being a waste picker is usually regarded as the last chance to earn your livelihood and stay alive. Being higher in the chain of hierarchy and/or working other smaller business' is also a possibility for some people. However, it is clear that hoping that they would be working in a better job with better conditions is not the case anymore. Waste pickers are adamant that the work they do, should not be done if there is nothing better to pursue. Some waste pickers prefer to travel to other cities because they have a family member or an acquaintance that does this 'filthy' work even if they have waste pickers in the city, they live in. They suffer from wry looks and stares due to the 'dirty' and low status of their job. They define themselves as "third-class citizen". Some of the waste pickers defined their job as "filthy" and something to be "ashamed" of, some state that they don't even consider what they do as "a job". One of my participants said:

"There is no being ashamed of elbow grease-work but there is something that bothers me about this job. When I take that cart out on the streets it bothers me to rummage the garbage containers. No one does this thing willingly. Some come up to me to ask isn't there something else to be done than this. This aggravates a young man. Sometimes they put money in my hands. This makes it more torturous for me. Because I am already working. I am doing this to earn a living. Okay, it is out of good will, but little do they know it is actually killing me..."⁴

⁴ "Emekten utanılmaz ama beni rahatsız eden bir şey var bu işte. O arabayı alıp sokaklarda, insanların içinde o çöpleri karıştırmak rahatsız ediyor. Kimse severek yapmaz zaten bu işi. Çoğu da söylüyor yavrum başka bir iş yok mu diye. Bu genç adamı rencide eder. Arada eline para sıkıştırıyorlar. Bu daha büyük bir eziyet çünkü ben çalışıyorum zaten. Ekmeğimi kazanmak için yapıyorum. Tamam, iyi niyetinden yapıyor veren de ama bilmiyor ki beni öldürüyor."

As a result, when looked at the relationship the waste pickers have with the city and the urbanites, it is obvious that they are ignored, excluded, feared upon and disgusted by. Urbanites are disgusted by and/ or scared of the waste pickers; they go so far as diverting their ways not to come across them. However, it is clear the relationship the waste pickers have with the city is in a whole different level. For them, getting to the waste is the means to survival, and as a matter of fact, it is seen that the relationship the city has with the waste pickers are being projected to the relationship the waste pickers form with the waste. It is this projection that emphasizes and builds the notion of what can be identified as new urban poverty.

In a different manner, Sibel Yardımcı and Ali Saltan in their article “Sokak Toplayıcılarının İş ve Yaşam Koşulları Üzerine Bir Değerlendirme” (*On the Work and Life Conditions of Street Pickers*) discuss the concept of new urban poverty in the case of waste pickers in Beyoğlu. Yardımcı and Salta state that their research tries to elucidate where the waste picking sector is standing with the new discourse of poverty (209). They underline the fact that waste picking is a line of work that has close relations with what is political, environmental and welfare of community. Their research shows that the idea of “fellowship” as citizens and ties of family has influenced the way many waste pickers have entered the sector and the hierarchy in the sector itself (218).

It is clear that the relationship between the idea fellow-citizenship, incorporation to the city and migration is not something new. Oğuz Işık and Melih Pınarcıoğlu’s research “Nöbetleşe Yoksulluk” (*Poverty In Turns*) is an example that sets this statement in the context of Sultanbeyli in Istanbul. The aim of this research was to look at Sultanbeyli’s urban poor and their strategies of survival as they tried to make a living after 1980s. The definition of poverty that Işık and Pınarcıoğlu build is not just referring to the group of people who live in the poorest and perhaps most desperate which live in the most crooked debris in and around the city center but also to the group that are devoid of hope and the capacity to reclaim unlike the suburb-poor before them. The research claimed that the poor who lived in and around the city center are not a homogeneous group especially when considering the social and cultural change that has been substantial since 1980s and that they are a group that has acquired the potential for segregation within the city. What they suggest with their term “poverty in turns” underlines the inequality of power relations in this heterogenic group in which a particular

poor group in the city becomes richer through a poorer group that is newly settling into the city.

Poverty in turns is strategy developed in order to survive the harsh economic and social conditions after 1980s. According to Işık and Pınarcıoğlu the core of the process of poverty in turns is the story of the enrichment of some groups at the cost of others which is based on the cycle of circulation of land: The protagonists of this story are the first group who contributed to the land occupation process and those who mediated the seise of the land from its last occupants which make this story the story of total unequal enrichment. Işık and Pınarcıoğlu also underline what they call the “second story of Sultanbeyli” which is closely related to the first story and is the story of establishing a community through the ideals of protectionism of congregations. The research concludes that the prosperity of the process of acquiring land was mostly in the Islamic community and this group dominated the politics of Sultanbeyli...” (179).⁵

When we look at the case of waste pickers, we see that the group organized through kinship with similar characteristics. The waste picking sector had already gained importance after the 1980s with the expansion of the informal economy in Turkey. According to Yardımcı and Saltan, in waste picking sector too, just like the ones who passed down their torch of poverty to the next group of migrants in this cycle, some of those who have migrated before and who have been doing this line of work for a long time came to own storehouses (219). Storehouse owners have a partial formal identity because they provide jobs and accommodation for newcomers and are able to earn money over them at the same time. Yardımcı and Saltan’s research state that storehouse owners put by from what is left from the waste pickers and even pay advance to waste pickers in need and/or other smaller storehouse owners to secure their pay and livelihoods. This also makes it possible for them to buy the collected waste from the waste pickers who are in debt at a cheaper price or at a price they want. This web of relationships also underline the fact that in the waste picking sector it is possible to talk about a stratified relationship of hierarchy and exploitation.

⁵ “Nöbetleşe yoksulluk sürecinin özünü oluşturan ilk öykü, arazi dolaşım döngülerinin farklı getirileri temelinde bazı grupların diğerlerinin sırtından zenginleşmesinin öyküsüdür. Bu öykünün kahramanları, arazi işgal sürecine ilk katılanlar ve arazilerini güçülterek son işgalcilerin eline geçmesine aracılık eden kesimlerdir. Bu tam bir eşitsiz zenginleşmenin öyküsüdür. Sultanbeyli’deki ikinci öykü, birincisi ile yakın ilişki içinde ve himayecilik ilişkileri sayesinde gerçekleşen bir cemaat kurma öyküsüdür. Arsa edinme süreci ile oluşan refah en çok İslami cemaat içinde olmuş ve bu kesim Sultanbeyli politikasına hâkim olmuştur”(179)

According to Yardımcı and Saltan there is a fundamental difference between “poverty in turns” and waste picking. Many waste pickers cannot earn enough to move on to a new sector or have the means to own a storehouse making the actual number of people who are able to own a storehouse are small and limited (220). Not only does this reason make the difference between “poverty in turns” and waste picking significant, but it also makes it closer to new poverty. Yardımcı and Saltan say that the waste picking sector is one of the informal lines of work accelerated by neo-liberal policies that have made its presence felt in the 1980s. They say that is was with the abdication of the state from the agricultural sector and the escalating civil war in Eastern and Southeastern Anatolia; the problems of the population, that settled into the cities with the deterioration of rural-urban balance and forced migration, remained unsolved. Their conclusion is that the waste picking sector does not come about due to the failing structure of neoliberal policies, but on the contrary, as a result of its functioning (210).⁶

However, the studies examined above address the waste picking sector in the macroeconomic framework. In other words, they give primary importance to the economic changes depending on globalization and its result as a new phenomenon of urban poverty. It is a fact that macroeconomic policies are decisive in the development of the informal economy. In today's developed countries as well as ‘underdeveloped’ countries, informal economic activities create limited employment, especially in times of economic crisis. However, Altuntaş underlines that there is a huge industry behind waste picking and this issue cannot be explained by focusing on new urban poverty (32).

3.3. Networks of Waste Pickers and Migration Stories

As I have discussed in greater detail in the previous chapter, from medieval and modern Europe to Ancient Romans, many groups made their living by picking waste (Medina 2007, 20-25). The groups that are waste picking in Istanbul nowadays have migrated to the city as of 1980s. The occupation has been shaped by the kinship of immigration. With the

⁶ “Toplayıcılık sektörü, 1980’li yıllarla birlikte ağırlığını hissettiren neo-liberal politikaların hızlandırdığı kayıt-dışı iş kollarından biri. Devletin tarım sektöründen çekilmesi ve Doğu ve Güneydoğu Anadolu’da tırmanan iç savaş ile birlikte, kırsal dengelerinin bozulması ve zorunlu göçle kentlere yığılan nüfusun sorunları çözümsüz kalmıştır. Bu anlamda toplayıcılık sektörü neo-liberal politikaların işlemindeki aksaklıkların değil, tam aksine, işliyor olmasının bir sonucu olarak ortaya çıkmaktadır.”

development of new forms of industrial production, waste picking has emerged as an informal work for immigrants. Even though it is the municipality's duty to collect, organize and recycle, waste picking is a line of work in Turkey, as it is the case many 'third-world' countries around the world. This job has become, and/or was made into, a unique way to hold on to one's life for the lowest levels of society economically and ethnically. This job is carried out by the Kurds who migrated *en masse* to Turkey's largest city, as it the case with Romans in Egypt, the groups that is the lowest strata in the caste system in India and the indigenous groups in Latin American countries. Therefore, when Turkey is concerned, the factors that create jobs and transform it into a source of income is the state's political orientation in many "third world" countries in the world with the current economic crisis. Waste picking is the only means of livelihood for an increasing number of people due to extreme economic conditions.

A large part of the literature on waste pickers in Turkey focuses on the enforcedly migrated Kurds in the 1990s. Kurds, who came to the big cities of the west side of Turkey like Istanbul due to the civil war, were the largest group in this sector. The Kurds gradually grew in the sector and established their own settlements and businesses. By mastering the work, they have become the dominant group in charge of waste picking in certain regions. Some of them managed to accumulate capital and became storehouse owners and were able to buy machinery and motor vehicles. Most of the waste pickers in Istanbul come from Urfa, Diyarbakır, Hakkari, Şırnak, Mardin and Van. Up until 2005 majority of the sector belonged to the Kurds. However, with the latest waves of migration Syrian and Afghan waste pickers increased drastically. Some of the waste pickers I interviewed were Afghan but I was not able to conduct more interviews due to the language barrier. But, how did the Afghan waste pickers come to be waste pickers in Turkey? How did they enter the sector? Why did they come to Turkey?

Many immigrants come to Turkey because Turkey is a country in which the widespread informal employment is widespread, and the informal economy is strong. There are many factors for migration like the issue of safety due to war in the country of immigration, high unemployment rates, low income, economic needs of families and wanting better living standards. Along with these factors the fact that Turkey gave citizenship to Afghans in 1980s. It is due to the flexible migration policies many "undocumented" Afghans who came illegally were able to become Turkey's citizens and were able to gain social capital and networks. This

also made it easier to find jobs in the informal sector (İçduygu 2004, 48). It is common for these migrants to find a temporary job, to go back to their homes when saved up enough money and to then return once again when they need it. This is called circular migration (İçduygu 2008: 4, Erder: 2007: 43). Illegal immigration or shortening the visa or exemption period and the geographical distance make this process difficult, thus increasing the number of irregular migrants and providing less protection. The illegal immigrants in Turkey are already precarious, the fact that they cannot find jobs outside the informal sector make them choose to earn their living by waste picking. In fact, employers prefer immigrants, especially indifferent migrants, because the demand for cheap labor cannot be met locally (Toksöz 2008). Despite the high unemployment and excess labor available in the local labor market the demand for migrant workers is high in Turkey.

In addition to waste picking, Afghan immigrants work mainly in labor-intensive sectors such as textile, construction, tourism, agriculture, sex work for low wages. As in the recycling sector, the presence of small-scale or informal enterprises in the textile, construction and tourism sectors depends on the employment of cheap labor. Factors such as the lack of education of migrants and the exclusion from trade union organizations, especially for Afghans, make immigrants easy targets for the employers. However, even if they reside illegally or with permit they are informally employed. Many Afghan migrants are afraid of getting caught or being deported and that is why they accept to work for peanuts. That is the reason why the utility workers' wages are lower than the local labor workers. Accordingly, because migrant workers are preferred, social security issues keep arising: the migrants work for long hours without paying overtime. Labor costs are reduced due to migrants being forced to work conditions that were rejected by the local labor force. Even if they were employed in the formal economy the current Turkish legal system does not allow migrant workers to work competitively with the local labor force.

The social network also plays an important role in international migration studies (Canefe 2016). These networks are vital for the well-being of immigrants. These networks are not unrelated to region and countries but are specific to location. Neighborhoods, spaces and places can serve both social exclusion and inclusion (Schiller and Çağlar 2009, 177). Once the first networks have been established, new immigrants were able to find accommodation through these networks and gradually join the neighborhood and the community there. Strong social networks include households and the next of kin, as well as local communities, and are

important in having access to jobs and living spaces. Social and symbolic connections can be formed based on religion, language, ethnicity and national unity. Shared meanings are ongoing bonds with memories, expectations and symbols. The relationship between these types of immigrants in Turkey is being established with social and symbolic ties. Over time, the number of social and symbolic ties between the homeland and the residence increases. These ties establish migrant networks.

There are many Afghan immigrants who have started waste picking over the networks they have formed over time with other Afghans. In the 1980s, Afghans established their own storehouses and new Afghan immigrants used their networks to stay and work in these storehouses. Therefore, the accumulation of social capital for Afghan immigrants has become a major source of survival. There are many Afghan storehouse owners in Zeytinburnu and Beykoz districts in Istanbul. 3 Afghan participants stated that they came to Istanbul illegally through their acquaintances. One of them stated that they went to Iran first and then came to Turkey. Another one stated that he walked his way to Turkey, he arrived in Van and from there he came to Istanbul. And one of them shortly stated that it was because of civil war that he came to Turkey. Because these 3 participants did not know how to speak Turkish the interview couldn't be very efficient however, I was able to observe that all three of the Afghan waste pickers stayed in a storehouse in Hasanpaşa and picked waste in the same district. I conducted this interview in Kadıköy. All the Afghan waste pickers earned their living only through waste picking. However, that was not the case for Kurdish waste pickers.

Some of the Kurdish waste pickers in Istanbul are seasonal workers. Even though there are some who do this job on a daily basis, some of the participants I've met with did this job seasonally and irregularly. 4 of the participants were from the same neighborhood in Diyarbakır. The storehouse they worked for and stayed in were owned by two siblings that were also from that neighborhood in Diyarbakır. The siblings who owned the storehouse stayed there alternately. The participants did waste picking at certain times of the year with certain intervals and went to back to their hometowns only to return after working here and there in Diyarbakır. One of the participants has been waste picking for 8 years and the another one for 9 years. A 16-year-old waste picker from Diyarbakır that I interviewed stated that he has been waste picking for only 2 years. Back in their hometowns waste pickers worked in agriculture and livestock breeding. They all stated that their families lived back in Diyarbakır; two of them were married and two of them were single. One of them has said:

“You can’t do this work regularly. Teacher, we are usually expatriates. 2 months, 70 days... We stay as much as we can and go back to our hometowns... Yeah, we go back to our hometowns and rest. Then, we come back again. Start working again...”⁷

When I asked them how they started waste picking, almost all of them gave the same answer: They all started waste picking through their acquaintances or relatives. To this day kinship and family relations are very significant for a waste picker to enter the sector and for the hierarchy in the sector itself. Network relations determine the position of the waste picker in the sector's hierarchy. Warehouse owners often want to work with a waste picker from their social capital or network. These networks also facilitate the establishment of a certain trust in the relationships. However, what does the hierarchy in the sector mean for the rivalries and disputes amongst storehouses and waste pickers? In what way does it shape them?

⁷ “Bu iş her zaman yapılmaz zaten. Hocam, genellikle gurbetçiyiz. 2 ay, 70 gün... Kalabildiğimiz kadar kalıyoruz, kaldıktan sonra da zaten memleketimize dönüyoruz. İşte gidip de memlekette kalıyoruz, orada dinleniyoruz. Sonradan gene geri geliyoruz. Aynı şekil çalışıyoruz.”

4. THE HIERARCHY WITHIN AND THE HIERARCHY WITH-OUT: THE UNCOMPENSATED REALITY

In this chapter I aim to evaluate the hierarchies within the sector and how these hierarchies are shaped. It is clear that the discrepancy is not just between the waste pickers and the state but also amongst waste pickers. I aim to underline and analyze the power relations that are in accordance with the state and the intermediaries responsible for the market. As I point out the explicit shift from mainly Kurdish waste pickers to Afghan and Syrian waste pickers in Istanbul, I will use these various and rich ethnographies to establish a comparative analysis and diverse perspective. As the rest of the chapter will show I will look at the inner conflicts that they might have due to the awareness of being exploited. Do they have conflict with other migrant groups? What kind of conflicts do they have with the storehouse owners or the buyers who are at the top of the hierarchy?

4.1. Disputes and Rivalries Amongst Waste Pickers

It is possible to state that Afghan migrants and Kurdish waste pickers have a stiff tension between them. Beyond the point of being legal citizens Afghans, which are not even considered refugees, are constantly in conflict with other groups that have been dominant in the sector. As the Afghans who started waste picking, ventured into the areas where other groups have been picking waste for a long period of time, the conflict between the groups increased. This has been stated by almost all of my participants who were not Afghan. The fact that Afghans keep increasing in number and thus are being picked over others due to the fact that they are a cheaper workforce is bothering a lot of people in the sector. This shows itself with the statement: “They make us unemployed” which was said by almost all participants. One of the participants summed what has been said repeatedly very well: “We

have been unemployed ever since they arrived. There are no jobs available like there used to be. They go out, they fight us. Because of them I've thought about quitting this job..." Almost all participants said that the tension and conflict increase from day to day. One of the participants said:

"Some of our friends go and fight the Afghans etc. without a reason. Like, I don't know, you say something, you don't understand what they are saying, etc. that is why they fight. You look at them, he is about my age, in good health, has eyes, has everything, hale and hearty human being came to work here. You see, when it doesn't suit them they scare the women, the girls. People are getting scared..."⁸

Another participant reported the violence the Afghans are subjected to by other waste pickers, said: "Our people beat up the Afghans too much, they knock them around... they rip them off because they can't speak the language. We make more than them..." However, one participant stated that a few months back "an Afghan" stabbed his cousin in the middle of the street. About the Afghan waste pickers, one of the participants explained:

"For them too, like us, PKK's etc. they call it Taliban in their language. They are running away from Taliban. They don't have job opportunities. They can't work there. They say that they are taking them away by force. They say, at least for a month, they are on the road they say, walking, some come and cross the border. Most of the one who make it are wounded. From Diyarbakır to here there are countless searches anyway, some of them are sent away. Something happens to someone, they die, no one knows about it. When you look at them, they say Turkey is better, may god never leave anyone without the state..."⁹

However, it is possible to state that this attitude towards the Afghans is similar to the attitude towards Syrians. Even though the number of Syrian waste pickers is relatively lower than that of the Afghan waste pickers, it is known that some percentage, although it is small, works as waste pickers. A similar kind of labelling, associating with crime, exclusion and hate speech is also the case for Syrian waste pickers. One of the participants have said the following for this statement:

⁸ "Bazı arkadaşlarımız gidiyor kavga ediyor Afganlarla falan, sebepsiz yere. Ne bileyim yani bir şey söylüyorsun, anlamıyorsun dilinden falan, o yüzden yani kavga ediyorlar. Bakıyorsun, adam benim yaşında, eli kolu tutuyor, gözü var, her şeyi var, sapasağlam insan gelmiş burada çalışıyor. İşine gelmeyince, bakıyorsun kadınları korkutuyor, kızları korkutuyor. İnsanlar korkmaya başlamış".

⁹ "Onlar da bizim gibi PKK'ler falan, kendi dillerinde Taliban diyor. Taliban'dan kaçıyorlar. İş imkanları falan yok. Orada iş yapamıyorlar. Bizi götürüyorlar zorla diyor. En az bir ay falan diyor, yoldayız diyor, yürüyerek, kimi geliyor sınırlardan geçiyor diyor. Gelenlerin çoğunlukla yara falan oluyor. Diyarbakır'dan buraya gelene kadar zaten kaç tane arama oluyor, bazılarını gönderiyorlar. Birinin başına bir şey geliyor, ölüyor, kimsenin haberi olmuyor. Ona bakarsak aslında Türkiye daha çok güzel de, Allah kimseyi devletsiz bırakmasın".

“I’ve never seen Afghans harassing people, but I have seen Syrians do it a lot. I’ve been coming here for 9 years, I’ve never seen Afghans harassing people. They are Muslims, a little better than Syrians. They keep yelling ‘Syria!, ‘Syria!’ as if they were born here. I don’t think it is their right to stay, because no matter what you do they *-the Afghans-* are Muslims, akin brothers. From the same religion...”¹⁰

The hate speech against the Afghans does include and is supported by a nationalistic discourse. Almost all participants refer to this discourse. This discourse was stated by one of the participant as the following:

“It’s not like they served in the military, they protected their country. They come and argue with us. If you are a war victim you gotta act right, straight. You are not gonna meddle with anyone’s business. If you are a war victim, go fight in your own country. Why should my soldier go there and their parents cry over here? I’ve done it, I’ve done the same thing. I am not going to leave for your sake...”¹¹

I can say that the attitude towards the Afghan waste pickers is not just from other waste pickers but also by other urbanites or employers that are in the community. This also shows that the attitude towards people who have been doing waste picking for a long time has changed too. One of my participants has said this about the statement mentioned above:

“Someone comes up to me, asks me where I am from. I say, I am from Diyarbakır brother. He cheers and says ‘Ah, you are one of us then’. He never realized; we have been doing this for a long time. They weren’t like this before. Now it is okay, they say, come to me brother let me give this to you. You go into the market; someone says if he is Afghan don’t give it to him...”¹²

As a result, regarding the arrival of Afghan immigrants as an opportunity for cheap labor in the informal sector and pronouncing their precarious legal status further exacerbates the exploitation. The hate speeches violence, social and economic exclusion directed to the Afghan waste pickers tend to increase with Kurdish waste pickers’ interaction with other groups. This has increased the conflict and tension, but it has led to the establishment of new networks of solidarity among Afghan immigrants. While these interactions actually transform the urban areas socially, economically and politically, they also reveal the increasingly

¹⁰ “Afganların taciz yaptığını görmedim, ama Suriyelilerin çok gördüm. Ben 9 senedir geliyorum buraya, Afganların taciz yaptıklarını görmedim. Onlar Müslümanlar, Suriyelilerden birazcık daha iyi. Sanki burada doğmuş gibi, Suriye Suriye diye bağırırlar. Bence hakları değil burada kalmaları, sonuçta ne yaparsan yap Müslüman, insanın kardeşi. Aynı dinden.”

¹¹ “Kalkıp da askerlik yapmamış, kendi ülkesini savunmamış. Gelmiş burada bizimle tartışıyor. Savaş mağduruysan doğru olacaksın, düzgün olacaksın. Kimseye karışmayacaksın. Savaş mağduruysan kendi ülkende savaş. Benim niye askerimi gönderip de oraya buradaki anası babası ağlasın. Ben de yaptım, ben de aynısını yaptım. Ben senin için gitmem.”

¹² “Adam geliyor, sen nerelisin diyor. Diyarbakırlıyım abi diyorum. Adam diyor ha sen bizdensin o zaman, adam seviniyor. Hiç görmemiş, bu işi biz çoktandır yapıyoruz. Önceden böyle bakıyorlardı bize. Şimdi iyiymiş kardeşim gel sana bunu vereyim diyor. Gidiyorsun markete, adam Afgan ise verme ona diyor.”

complex social and political dynamics that migrants bring with them to the new settlements and the various mechanisms they develop together with their inhabitants.

The daily lives of Afghan waste pickers, their conflicts and interactions with other immigrant groups while working pronounce various differences. Afghan immigrants actually interact with other immigrants in various aspects of Istanbul's political, economic and social life with their tangible 'visibility' in daily life. Their legal insecurity hinders their physical presence and social participation, because the networks they have developed and the neighborhoods where they have settled over previous migrant groups, and their involvement in these areas, express their intentions and practices to make themselves visible. The urban areas of the city emerge as areas that offer immigrants divergence in terms of inclusion or exclusion in urban life. At the same time, the city is constantly transformed by the visibility of Afghan immigrants.

4.2. Intermediaries

As I have mentioned in the previous chapter, one of the acting agents in the sector are the intermediaries. There are two reasons why intermediaries are as significant as they are: The first one is the fact that they stand at the interception of the informal sector and the formal sector. The material collected by waste pickers who work for a warehouse are sold by these warehouse owners. These warehouses are mostly informal institutions. Secondly, as I have mentioned while I discussed the networks of waste pickers, these warehouses enable waste pickers that have migrated to the city or came and gone as seasonal workers to get used to the urban life and make a living for themselves in the city. However, these intermediaries are also the ones who have the biggest role when it comes down to the exploitation of waste pickers. Even though these intermediaries, through the networks of kinship, provide advantages to those who migrated to the city like finding them a job, finding them a place to stay and take on loans for those who are unable to. However, they are also the ones who exploit them the most. This is due to the fact that people with a certain amount of savings are the ones who used to be waste pickers who then became warehouse owners in time. And as they become warehouse owners they profit from new waste pickers and become richer, which was what I talked about with "poverty in turns".

Nearly all of my participants feel a great deal of gratitude towards the warehouse owners. They seem to be socially and economically content about working depending on the warehouse owners. The guarantee the warehouse owners provide for the waste pickers include safety, flexible working hours, employment security and availability of loans. Another important thing to be underlined out about this relationship is the fact that waste pickers describe these relationships as a kind of moral responsibility narrative. For example, a waste picker would not sell their material to any other warehouse owner. One of my participants has stated that “he wouldn’t be able to wrong the person who enabled him to feed himself”. Even if another warehouse offered a higher price the waste picker would not consider it morally right to sell it to anyone else. On the other hand, having a regular material influx from the waste pickers has numerous advantages: such as buying the waste material below the market value and selling it to the factories more expensive than the market value. This relationship affirms certain ethnic favoritisms and exploitations of the system. The fact that if waste pickers were to work with formal working conditions or work in factories, warehouses would diminish or worse they would have to hand their jobs to licensed companies. The fact that intermediaries are critical in shaping the hierarchy and by doing so reaffirming the system that keeps on exploiting the waste pickers is visible not only in Turkey but all around the world.

For example, Chris Birkbeck’s article, which he wrote in 1978, “Self-Employed Proletarians in an Informal Factory: The Case of Cali’s Garbage Dump” is a significant article for my research and it will be a prominent source that I will come back to often. In this article, he examines the organization of waste pickers in the garbage dump in Colombia, Cali. Firstly, he focuses on how waste pickers organize themselves at work. Birkbeck calls the garbage pickers ‘self-employed proletarians’ in order to underline “the essentially contradictory nature of their class location; they are self-employed yet in reality sell their labor power...” (Birkbeck 1978, 1174). He describes waste pickers as ‘self- employed proletarians’ and waste as a ‘factory’. He argues that:

“Garbage pickers are not only the recyclers in Cali, for there are some large – scale, capital – intensive companies which are also in the same business, but the majority of recuperated material still appears to come from the pickers. Because of the nature of their relationship with the industrial market for recuperated materials, the garbage pickers in effect work for the factories but are not

employed by them. They are little more than casual industrial outworkers, yet with the illusion of being self-employed. They may be in a position to decide when to work and when not to, but the critical factor is control over the prices of recuperated materials and that control very definitely lies with the industrial consumers” (1774).

As Birkbeck points out, it is easy to think that waste picking and a standard industrial workplace have nothing in common. It is assumed that waste pickers do not have fixed working hours, or that they work independently from a boss or a supervisor and that they determine where they work place is going to be. Birkbeck shows that even though there are no written rules, there are informal mechanisms that regulate waste pickers’ work. Waste picking has fixed working hours. Although they seem free to determine the price of the waste they sell, it is actually determined by the competitive market conditions.

Unlike a worker, who receives wages for their work in a factory, the money collected by the waste picker varies depending on the type of goods (for example, whether it is plastic or metal or paper) as well as the demand for the goods and the number of intermediaries. Informal workers generally have to depend on these intermediary storehouse owners, as there is no written contract between them and mutual trust has to be established when they need to borrow money if/when they are able to carry out waste picking for one reason or another. This gives the storehouse owners a leverage which they use with buying the waste at a low price. Waste pickers all work on a per-piece basis since each recycling factory buys different items and makes separate sales according to those items. As a result, they receive a price per kilo. Since the sales are usually made through intermediaries, the payments made to the workers are quite low (1776).

Birkbeck also defines waste pickers as relatively skillful entrepreneurs because it is clear that considering the amount of work they do and the amount of effort they put in it they are neither unskilled nor unorganized, unproductive or unenterprising (1180). In order to survive in these harsh market conditions, they venture into other lines of work that are related to waste picking in some way, sometimes to be buyers themselves or just to have an extra source income. Some, for example, collect shoes or clothes that other waste pickers do not collect or some rent out storehouse space to keep the collected waste of someone else and thus earn some extra money. Some rent their trucks and some work in the classification of the collected waste. According to Birkbeck these waste pickers create a space for themselves in what come

be deemed a limited opportunity. Not only do they allow themselves room to earn more money, but also, they allow themselves room to earn more money and grow in the sector, such as owning a storehouse and increasing income.

Birkbeck's study is contextualized with a Marxist approach not only because he refers to Marxist theoretical devices, like when he talks about exploitation but the fact that he analyzes what the collectors do in order to survive in the sector by making a space for themselves is also what makes him major contributor to the literature about waste picking. The way he is able to analyze the market and establish the relationship with the waste collectors themselves is what makes him constantly referenced.

Martin Medina in his book *The World's Scavengers: Salvaging for Sustainable Consumption and Production* criticizes Birkbeck's argument because according to Medina it contradicts itself. He uses the term "scavenging" and states that, unlike Birkbeck's explanation, it is not just an articulation of the capitalist mode of production which seeks raw material. For the capitalist mode of production, waste becomes a raw material for industries as it is discussed in the first chapter. For Medina, scavenging includes collecting "for self-consumption, for artisan activities and for agricultural activities..." (Medina 2007, 260). Thus, scavenging is more than an industrial factory model and regardless of the economic system, capitalist or not, chronic poverty is enough for scavenging to occur in that society. One of the most important things to consider about Birkbeck's study is the fact that it was written in the 1980s and a lot has changed since then.

Another research that I would like to introduce is Kaveri Gill's article "Interlinked Contracts and Social Power: Patronage and Exploitation in India's Waste Recovery Market" which focuses mainly on "the nature of exchange relations between two groups of informal laborers engaged in waste recovery, that is, waste pickers and itinerant buyers and their respective dealers, in the context of interlinked transactions across a number of urban markets, predominantly those of labor, output (in this case, waste), land and finance..." (1448). She describes her work as an economic ethnography that seeks to grasp "the deeply personalized and surprisingly long-term exchange relations between the two parties on multiple levels" (1449). Gill underlines that new institutional economics fail to understand the differentiation of exploitation levels between these two groups and their relationship with dealers. She states

that adopting a political economy approach helped her understand the underlying social context of the transactions and demonstrate the issue of power in the relationship (1449).

In Delhi, waste pickers do not get paid for the things they collect from dumps, streets and containers. They travel on foot around 5 km per day. On the other hand, itinerant buyers buy paper, plastic and metal waste from houses, flats and slum areas. Itinerant buyers have three times more mobility than waste pickers because they travel by bicycle approximately 25 km per day. Waste pickers collect *kooda-kachhra*, which is non-decomposed, organic and inorganic, wet waste. Itinerant buyers collect *kabada*, which is decomposed, inorganic, dry and recyclable material. The monthly income of two groups is different; waste pickers are making less money than itinerant buyers. Moreover, waste pickers sell their waste to the *panni* dealer and itinerant buyers sell to the *kabadi* dealers. If a waste picker finds any material to sell to a *kabadi* dealer, they do sell it. However, 70% of the *kabadi* dealers do not buy garbage from waste pickers. The reason for this is not a decrease in the value of the recyclable material, but rather because they do not like waste pickers (1451). In terms of caste groupings, itinerant buyers, *kabadi* dealers and recycling company traders belong to *Khatik* caste, while none of the pickers and *panni* dealers belong to (1452). Gill states that there is no interaction between these two groups and the lack of interaction reflects the maintained hierarchical status between the groups (1452).

Gill examines the nature of the exchange relationship in three domains which are the domain of goods and services exchanged, length and exclusivity of exchange relationship and termination rights and asymmetry in power. According to Gill, waste pickers and itinerant buyers' position within the market are determined by the factors: waste, credit, free labor hours, protection and influence in the domain of goods and services exchanged. *Kabadi* dealer itinerant gives cash money to the and may or may not pay them back whilst they work together. Itinerant buyer may take monetary credit from the *kabadi* dealer. *Panni* dealers do not pay the waste pickers cash money on a daily basis; instead they allow them to collect *kooda-kachhra* freely. The waste pickers pay back the money they owe to the dealer at the end of the day and earn some money for some of their expenses.

Not only do the waste pickers have to collect the garbage but they also have to categorize them which is something that they do not get paid for. *Panni* dealer's also give credit to the waste picker's because they are not able to request one officially from a bank through the

formal ways as they are informal workers. Similarly, *panni* dealers also provide accommodation for the waste pickers. When safety is concerned *panni* dealers are unable to protect the waste pickers from harassment from the police. Itinerant buyers on the other hand have a power over the police either by bribe or by network and thus are able to persuade the police otherwise. In an environment such as this the waste picker is unable to choose their dealer and have to work with a dealer for a long time which obviously does not apply for the itinerant buyer.

Gill reveals that waste pickers think they don't need any kind of capital to be in this line of work but in order to be a *panni* dealer there has to be some kind of stock-in-trade. The relationship waste pickers have with their dealer is a relationship of gratitude. Gill says: "It is not a case of improving their income-earning opportunity, instead it gives them a choice to have an income. They are almost certainly better off in the relationship than they would be out-side it." (1465). In this case, waste pickers are not willing to, nor do they tend to, become an itinerant buyer. She points out that the reason "...why pickers do not become itinerant buyers, or indeed pick one of many alternative informal sector occupations, lies in institutionalized discrimination in the larger social sphere..." (1466)

Gill emphasizes the social part of the economic exchange relationship. Her research shows that:

"Pre-existing, structural social links underlie the exchange relationship between itinerant buyer and dealer. Of itinerant buyers, 72 per cent belong to the same caste; 20 per cent have migrated from the same village and 10.66 per cent share consanguine or alliance kinship ties with their dealer. In terms of the density of social relations between pickers and *panni* dealers, they too share multiple social ties with each other. Of pickers, 73.33 per cent belong to the same caste; 13.33 per cent have migrated from the same village and 10 per cent share consanguine or alliance kinship ties with their dealer..." (Gill 2007, 1467)

The core of the economic exchange relationship is that factors like dealer loans are used to keep it stable so that it will be less affected by income fluctuations. And these economic factors overlap with social factors which Gill describes as "social embeddedness of exchange relationship". There are social ties which are the denominators of economic exchange. Gill's analysis is important to understand the idea of social embeddedness of exchange in Turkey

even though the lack of itinerant buyers do not provide a space to make an accurate comparison.

Parallel to Gill's work is Diego Coletto's "The Informal Economy and Employment in Brazil: Latin America, Modernization and Social Changes" published in 2010. The study includes the role of the street vendors in informal economy, one of which is waste picking in Porto Alegre. *Catadore* is a word used to describe the waste pickers and, similar to Gill's study, there are "middlemen" involved in shaping the economic independence of *catadores* and configuring this relationship of exploitation, called the *atravessadores*. Coletto also mentions other factors that contribute to this relationship: "...the *atravessador* almost always grants credit to *catadores* in difficulties, and he provides a place where they can sort their loads, mend their handcars, and in many cases, get some sleep. For the many garbage collectors driven into the city from the countryside by poverty and the need to find work, the middleman is an employer on whom they may depend economically, and in other ways..."(Coletto 2010, 82). It is clear that the economically and socially excluded and marginalized positions of waste pickers increase their dependence on middlemen.

Gill, Birkbeck and Colleto provide different examples that show the exploiting relationship between the intermediaries and the waste pickers. They showcase the power relations particular to these relationships. As a matter of fact, ownership of warehouses and intermediation are part of the system that was created by the first wave of migrants when the sector itself was booming in the 1980s. The exact number of warehouses in Istanbul are unknown because there is no data for such an estimation. Most of the known big warehouses in the Anatolian side are located in Göztepe and Bostancı. It goes to show how the warehouses came to be located adjacent to the group that has a high level of income. Warehouse owners use the advantage surplus value of economic and social networks of waste pickers.

4.3. Conflicts with the Municipality and The Waste Control Regulation

The struggle for survival within the waste picking sector is becoming increasingly dire. In particular, due to the changes about packaging in the waste control regulations and the

practices developed by the municipalities around these regulations, the situation for the waste pickers are getting stickier. The fact that this work, which is supposed to be the service of the municipality, is undertaken by unregistered waste pickers shows that this group, which was previously ignored, shows that there are attempts to hinder their work activities. There are many problems such as the demolition or closure of storehouses, the seizure of vehicles by the police and being subjected to violence. A waste picker used the following to describe the problems they had with the municipality and the municipal police:

“The municipal police are the worst. Wherever they see our carts, they take it away. I’ve fought with them a lot. They used to take seize our carts and sell it back to us. If they see us on the streets, they chased us. It used to be worse. I couldn’t walk around properly. They still chase us. Like when they didn’t go around with their patrol car. They raided the place we slept in. They took our carts. They take the paper, the plastic we picked and sold them. They won’t let us do our jobs. How many people got beaten up, so many... There used to be gypsies, they won’t do this to them but to us. It’s getting there hardly...”¹³

These instances have a profound impact on the work activities and daily lives of the waste pickers. However, it is possible to say that these practices and these approaches of the municipal police are short-term practices intended to intimidate the waste pickers, rather than a systematic one. Systematic practices would entail a strict enforcement of banning all the unregistered waste pickers from work, which may in fact cause thousands of people to become unemployed. Moreover, the unemployment of the waste pickers and the lack of separation of the waste would also create a major problem for the local authorities and the municipality. It is clear that the municipality’s intention is not this at all. Especially in the last two years, municipalities have been put under the spotlight because of their policies of privatizing the waste picking business and transferring it to licensed companies instead of providing employment to waste pickers. The main purpose of the municipality and the state is to prevent waste pickers as much as possible and transfer this sector, which has become a field of income, to transnational companies through tenders which has the potential income of millions of dollars. Although there were steps taken by municipalities to formalize the waste pickers, none of these included long-term plans that were written and legally regulated. At the

¹³ “Zabıtarlar çok kötü. Nerede görse arabamızı alıyorlar. Ben onlarla çok mücadele ettim. Bir ara kendi arabamızı alıyorlardı, bize yine geri satıyorlardı. Caddede görse, kovalıyor. Eskiden daha da kötüydü. Bir ara hiç dolaşamıyordun doğru düzgün. Kovalıyorlar hala. Kendi ekip otosuyla falan gezmedikleri oluyordu. Yattığımız yerlere baskınlar yaptılar. Arabalarımızı topladılar. Topladığımız kağıt, plastiği alıp kendileri satıyorlar. Bırakmıyorlar ki çalışalım. Kaç kişi dayak yedi, kaç kişi. Eskiden çingeneler falan vardı, onlara yapmıyorlar bize yapıyorlar. Zar zor oluyor.”

same time, however, many waste pickers opposed the formalization process. Many collectors refused to work with a license with municipalities. One of my participants has said:

“I already make 1000 liras a week, believe me, it is not enough. We can’t make ends meet. 1000 liras is not enough. We don’t make as much as we used to. They came to us and said they wanted us to wear uniforms. They will work with us, they said. You will work from this hour to that, they said. Why would I wear a uniform? They were gonna give me 2000 liras a month. I make more than that. Why would I be your slave?”¹⁴

Taking into consideration all the hardships of their current position they don’t want to give in and take a less paying ‘job’ rather than lose their autonomy. The freedom to manage their own time and being ‘their own boss’ are privileges that the waste pickers mention frequently. In fact it is one of the reasons why waste pickers say they prefer waste picking than a regular full-time job.

For waste pickers who are forced to work with companies, this is not desirable in an economy where the competition is increasing with more and more people joining the sector every day. There has been a decline in the social rights and wages of the workers entering the formal sector. Waste pickers think that this process is only for the benefit of companies and recycling factories. Organized waste pickers, especially in Ankara, sat down with the municipality to negotiate for better conditions, but failed. In 2005, there were around 500 storehouses in Ankara and more than 10,000 people working in them however, the number of storehouses decreased to 50 in 2007 and the number of people working in the sector decreased to 6 thousand (Altuntaş 2008, 39) The reason for this is the removal of waste pickers from the sector and the collaborations between the ITC (Invest Trading & Consulting AG) with Metropolitan Municipality and SİMAT (Construction Machinery Food Contracting and Export-Import Marketing and Trade Co.) with Çankaya Municipality show that they intend to push the waste pickers away from the sector (Altuntaş 2008, 39).

Municipalities do not deny the existence of waste pickers in the sector. The short-term solutions they offer are not sustainable for waste management to function well and not

¹⁴ “Ben zaten inan haftada 1.000 lira kazanıyorum, yetmiyor. Geçinemiyoruz biz zaten bu parayla. Artık 1.000 lira da etmiyor. Eskisi gibi kazanamıyoruz. Geldiler bize üniforma giydirmek istediler. Bizimle çalışacaksınız dediler. Bu bu bu saatlerde burada çalışacaksınız dediler. Ben niye üniforma giyeyim. Bana 2.000 lira vereceklermiş aylık. Ben daha fazla para kazanıyorum. Niye senin kölen olayım?”

functional to integrate recycling workers into the system with safe, healthy and without a loss of rights and benefits. The policies of the municipalities are aimed at pushing subcontractors to a weaker and invisible place rather than protecting the rights of waste pickers. All these privatization processes aim to reduce the labor costs and increase the profit in recycling by transferring the share of waste pickers in the sector to entrepreneurs and licensed companies. As a result, police violence has become a part of the daily life of waste pickers. This also caused waste pickers distrust the public and the municipality. This insecurity is not unaccustomed, given the historical background of the Kurdish waste pickers. However, it is possible say the despair is widespread and all waste pickers in one way or another distrust each other. This feeling of insecurity caused the waste pickers to respond violently to the violence they have been subjected to.

4.4. Unionization

The efforts of the waste pickers to solve these problems with the municipality and the municipal police resulted in the establishment of the Waste Paper Workers Association, in 2005. Founded in Ankara, the association is not active today but still exists. The association does not have any offices, it is clear that this is not possible because of economic difficulties. Although the expectations of the members of the association differ from this organized struggle, it is seen that they are in unison in the search for solutions. The former president of the association expressed this with the following:

“Here is the problem, the function of the association became more of a mediator that stands between the municipality to find solutions for the problems that keep arising. As I have said, since it is impossible for this job to be formalized in Turkey, our first demand is usually the security of our friends when they are working. Pretty basic things like for them to be able to go out to work everyday, their carts not being seized. When these things happen, other than that we have a network of solidarity. The old, the sick or even in death we try to support financially. Which we sustain with the solidarity network. It doesn't make a lot of sense to demand anything. It is a pretty simple system, it is not a call for help for the members. Let's say something came up at Tarlabası, we can provide this amount of money or that amount of money. It is a primal mechanism that works with the support we receive from our kith and kin and acquaintances, but it works.

If an attack happens somewhere, they contact us. We come and talk with the municipality, positive or negative...”¹⁵

Surely, the association plays an active role in solving problems with municipalities and solving economic and social experiences of waste pickers. At the same time the solidarity network established among themselves is maintained through the association. When looked at waste paper cooperatives in other countries, it is seen that these cooperatives provide a more equitable income, social insurance and similar social rights to their members. According to Martin Medina sustainable development can be achieved in many countries if waste picking is supported, jobs can be created for many poor groups in this way and raw material prices may decrease by the increasing competition for the recycling industry. This will also contribute to reducing the pollution and protecting the environment. When asked about Turkey and the lack of such an organization the waste pickers either responded they don't have any thoughts on this issue or that they are just hopeless. Some participants thought that the work itself and the working conditions should be improved by tackling it and especially challenging it by being organized. A member of the association has stated:

“In the end the association is struggling to gain rights. With this claim no organization can achieve anything. The energy is dying in itself. At one point you suggest something but most of our friends are already tired. And the thing to be underlined is, it is not just our association, all unions and organizations in Turkey are going through the same thing. There needs to be a stop to this. What should we say, I mean, associations, trade unions, wherever the labor movement is organized, act with a claim from above rather than deal with it. It should be organized with common demands and a more political movement should be developed. Personally, this is what I think. I can't see any other way. This is not just about us. Whoever, in the 80 million people that lives in this country, can foresee their near future should come to the frontlines and say something...”¹⁶

¹⁵ “Şöyle bir sıkıntımız var, derneğin faaliyetleri daha çok belediyelerle yaşanan problemlerin çözümü noktasında arabulucu olmaya dönüştü aslında. Dediğim gibi Türkiye’de bu işin formelleşmesi mümkün olmadığı için ilk elden talebimiz şu oluyor: arkadaşlarımızın günlük çalışma güvenliğinin sağlanması. Yani işte her gün işe çıkabilmeleri, araçlarına el konulmaması gibi çok temel talepler. Bu tür durumlar yaşandığında, onun dışında da belirli bir dayanışma ağımız var. Yaşlıdır, hastadır, ölüm olursa maddi destek olmaya çalışıyoruz. Onu da kendi dayanışma ağımızla sürdürüyoruz. Bir şey talep etmek çok anlamlı değil. Çok basit bir sistem, üyelerle ilgili bir yardım da değil. Diyelim ki Tarlabası’nda bir mesele oldu, ver üç lira ver beş lira. Eşten dosttan yakın çevremizden tanıdıklarımızdan destek alma şeklinde gelişen çok ilkel bir mekanizma yani ama işe yarıyor. Bir yerde bir saldırı olursa bizi arıyorlar. Biz gidip o belediye ile görüşüyoruz, olumlu ya da olumsuz.”

¹⁶ “Dernek neticede bir hak alma mücadelesi. Bu iddiayla hiçbir yapının gidebileceği bir yer yok. Enerji yavaş yavaş kendi içinde sönüyor. Bir yerde şey diyorsun, arkadaşlarımızın çoğu yorulmaya başlamış zaten. Ve şey noktasına bakmak gerekiyor, sadece bizim derneğimiz değil. Türkiye’de sendikalar da dahil olmak üzere herkes aynı şeyi yaşıyor. Yani buradan bir çıkış gerekiyor. Ne diyelim yani, emek hareketinin örgütlü olduğu dernekler, sendikalar bununla uğraşmak yerine daha yukarıdan bir iddia ile hareket ediyor. Ortak taleplerle örgütlenip daha siyasal bir hareket geliştirmesidir. Ben kişisel olarak bunu düşünüyorum. Başka çözüm görünmüyor. Bu sadece bizimle ilgili bir durum değil. 80 milyonluk ülkede kim önünü görebiliyorsa, kim yarımını görebiliyorsa o söylesin.”

In various parts in the world, especially in Brazil, waste pickers are officially part of the recycling systems through certain cooperatives (Dias 2011). Furthermore, the positive impact of the Brazilian movement has influenced other Latin American countries to come up with improved conditions for solid waste pickers. Dias underlines that the success of the cooperatives in Brazil was possible with to the help of non-governmental organizations, which provided a high level of organization and social mobility. The solid waste pickers' ability to be organized by being a part of a cooperative and having legal regulations to protect their rights, protects the earnings of solid waste pickers against other actors in the recycling economy.

Rodriguez-Garavito's article about cooperatives of informal garbage pickers in Colombia is a good example of an analysis of a cooperative that may be useful to cases in many countries. He focuses on the collective struggle of waste pickers to improve their working and living conditions in Bogota. Garavito argues that solidaristic forms of economic organizations, especially cooperatives in the case of waste pickers, constitute promising strategies in order to "eliminate the exploitation of popular economic actors and release the emancipatory potential of these type of economies" (46). %1 of the population of Colombia, which is approximately 300.000 people, earns their livelihoods by waste. The cooperative was established in 1990s; upon the failure of the municipality to provide garbage collection services, waste picker associations came together to undertake this work and came to terms with the municipality. With the 2000s an agreement called Master Plan for Garbage Collection was signed between private companies which undertook both garbage collection and recycle. However, Garavito's research shows that the cooperatives have positive effects at the micro level, particularly in the lives of its members. For instance, the members of the cooperatives benefit from healthcare, paid vacations and pensions. At the same time, cooperatives make it possible for them to access waste, and by doing so, provide a safer workplace. Cooperatives also provide work clothes to waste pickers and give a good garbage truck. One of Garavito's participants expresses this as follows: "when I worked on my own, I didn't do great because I didn't have the same guarantees that I have here (at the cooperative). For example, stability, wearing a nice uniform, having good advice, having my cart in good conditions... there are many little things one doesn't have when one works on his own..." (59).

As I have previously mentioned these cooperatives that exist in Colombia, and many other countries, do not exist in Turkey; the Waste Paper Workers Association, *Atık Kağıt İşçileri*

Derneği, is still an association without an office and is unable to fulfill many duties that may befall to an organization of this kind. However, even though it seems bleak there is still hope for the case in Turkey. It is apparent that with a proper and well organized cooperation all challenges might be surpassed. In that sense Garavito's study sheds light on and underlines the importance of cooperation when waste picking is concerned.

One of the research projects that I want to include come from Cairo, Egypt. Cairo is one of the biggest cities of the peninsula. What makes looking at the studies on waste picking in Cairo significant for the scope of my research is the fact that waste for Cairo has been not only a matter of collectors or the local government, but a situation that involves organizations such as the World Bank, international NGOs and multinational companies. There is a community in Cairo known as *Zabaleen*, which has been collecting, sorting and recycling the city's waste since the 1940s. The *Zabaleen* group consists of people who emigrated from the Dakhla oasis and settled in the Cairo city center. *Wahiya*, on the other hand is another group that worked with building owners contractually, were the only ones responsible for the collection and disposal of Cairo's household waste. Initially the first payment was made by the owners but then monthly payments were made by the tenants. (Fahmi and Sutton 2006, 811) It is worth noting that %85 of the waste is recycled by the *Zabaleen* people.

However, there is a difference between these two groups. *Zabaleen* use donkey-pulled carts to accumulate the waste in the region that they live in and then separate it with their family members. More importantly, the *Zabaleen* are also big breeders thus not only did they pick waste but also sold pigs to make their livelihoods. Along with being a source of income, picking waste was also a way to find food for the pig that they bred. They were able to find the food for their pigs from organic waste. As the *Zabaleen* were interested in transporting the waste and disposing it the *wahiya* were interested in the access to it and the collection of it. Considering the hierarchical relationship between them, the *wahiya* was kind in the middle of the households and the *Zabaleen*. And the *Zabaleen* had to pay a kind of tax like payment in order to gain access to the waste in the first place.

At the beginning of the 1990s the municipality imposed some regulations about waste management which concerned both the *Zabaleen* and the *wahiya*. The first steps taken were to make the waste management more technological and more hygienic. One of the first measures, for example, was to replace carts with trucks but no funding was given to the

Zabaleen community. Fahmi and Sutton report that 7 garbage collecting settlements were pushed to the periphery by the municipality with the justification of the increase in population and expansion of the city limits (Fahmi and Sutton 2006, 812). These peripheries that the *Zabaleen* were pushed to were poor neighborhoods and slum areas.

As it is with this case, urban transformation and displacement were supported by claims of modernization and hygiene which was also the case in many countries including Turkey. The municipality in Cairo ran their campaign with the claim of a “cleaner environment” for the *Zabaleen* community. However, the fact that waste collectors were pushed to the peripheries of the city made things way harder on them which jeopardized their livelihoods even more because people whose livelihood was waste to begin had to extend their routes. Moreover the lengths that they had to go through and the cost of doing so were not funded by local governments or any other agencies whatsoever.

Recently the municipality wants to take away the *Zabaleens* garbage collection license and the increase in the number of waste management companies leaves the *Zabaleens* at risk of unemployment. And even though the amount of companies that are responsible of waste collecting is increasing there are no laws or regulations that prohibit the *Zabaleen* from collecting waste. What the *Zabaleen* did challenge this was establishing associations in collaboration with local NGOs and currently they are waiting to be integrated to the new waste management system. Fahmi and Sutton point out that: “It can further be argued that the *Zabaleen* community is the victim of the governments hidden agenda for the Moqattam district of Cairo. Behind the declared objectives of improving the *Zabaleens*’ livelihoods and the settlement’s environmental conditions, of upgrading waste collection systems and of expanding the associated recycling industry lies a wider but hidden agenda involving urban redevelopment of this part of the city” (836).

There are some studies focusing on the political organizations of waste pickers and emphasize the process of establishing cooperatives in Turkey. For example, Cahide Sarı’s “In Between the Formal and the Informal: A Critical Look at the Experience of Waste Pickers in Ankara” (*Formel ve Enformel Arasında: Ankara’da Atık Toplayıcılarının Deneyimine Eleştirel Bir Bakış*) looks at the informal sector from a historical perspective and analyzes how it expanded whilst introducing the experiences of waste pickers in Ankara. Sarı’s main objective is to

propose social policy proposals to the scene with the hope enabling the formation of collective identity which is essential.

Sarı talks about the process of making the waste pickers association into a cooperative, which to this day, is still not recognized as an association and still not a cooperative. If the association was actually a cooperative, Sarı predicts, the paper prices would have been more humane, the intermediary parties would have been eliminated which would allow recycling factories have a direct contact with the waste pickers and regular health scans would have been made available to prevent potential health problems of the waste pickers (135). Sarı's research backs this point up by giving the example of the case in Ankara. Through the Çankaya Municipality, all of the solid waste picking and reclaiming rights have been given to a company called *Simat*. The company, even though promised to transfer the waste pickers to the formal sector, did not prove to be beneficial to the rights and warrants the waste pickers were in need of.

One of the prominent research projects in this line of work, which has a different in tone than other fieldworks, is Demet Dinler's doctoral thesis *The Problem of Existence for the Worker (İşçinin Varlık Problemi)* which includes Dinler's fieldwork and personal notes that she collected through 2007 to 2011 in Ankara. What makes her work different from the other theories I've mentioned is the fact that her work focuses on the class, masculinity and emotions of male waste pickers. Waste pickers that are at the center of this book are presented in three categories: waste pickers, storehouse owners and the labor union presidents which used to collect paper and are working on organizing waste pickers.

In her book, Dinler focuses on issues such as class, body, masculinity, collective action and emotions, as well as the political organization of waste pickers. One of the arguments she makes points to the fact that workers and waste pickers are not in a fight for their bread, but that this fight is already their way of life. She underlines the fact that instead of talking about a collective aim of liberation or exploitation; they speak of how their own lives could be different (124). She emphasizes that the internal conflict of both the worker and the waste pickers signifies the potential for a strong class movement and for a kind of politics that is transformative in nature.

As a result, the fact that the movement in Turkey is only at the level of having an association and is not organized proves that there is a lot to be done. The association in Turkey is more engaged in finding solutions to everyday problems of the waste pickers. At the same time, these networks of solidarity, are established over previous networks and thus exclude many waste pickers. For example, while Kurdish waste pickers and the waste pickers involved in these solidarity networks are part of this movement and association, Afghan immigrants, however, who have recently entered the sector and are often in conflict and competition with other groups in the sector are completely excluded from the networks of solidarity. This is due to the fact that cooperatives rely on the need of equal partnership of waste pickers with the cooperatives themselves. When contracts are made with places such as institutions, organizations, and households which produce waste, the money spent by the municipality would be reduced and as a result the income of unlicensed waste pickers would increase. In this way, living and working conditions of waste pickers can be improved and thus, they can be incorporated into the city.

The number of waste pickers working in the waste sector in Istanbul increases day by day. Even though there are other groups in Turkey who have been working dominantly as waste pickers for a long period of time, due to the wave of immigration to Turkey the second largest group of waste pickers are Afghan immigrants. Increased interaction between groups increases competition which results in conflicts and fights. The waste picking sector is a well-organized sector in Istanbul. Many waste pickers have similar reasons for starting this job, they are a heterogenic group with different economic backgrounds. For most waste pickers, there is nothing beyond waste picking. The situation is even worse, especially for Afghans who do not have citizenship or refugee status. For them, there is no possibility of working in formal jobs except for the jobs in the informal sector. Waste pickers in Istanbul shoulder the burdens of migration, poverty, displacement and social exclusion. They are not only struggling with these burdens, but also with all kinds of restrictive problems that prevent them from doing their jobs. They don't just fight for their lives, but they also fight for their jobs, sometimes with the municipality, sometimes with other waste pickers. No matter who or what they fight against, one thing is certain: they are continuously and tirelessly struggling.

5. CONCLUSION

My main purpose in this thesis was shedding light on the things there were left in the shadows, things that were hushed and set aside. Waste pickers are the unacknowledged, unseen and uncredited pillars of the city. Istanbul is proud of its cleanliness, the municipality boasts about Istanbul beauty which is attractive on a global scale. The municipality also brags about how Istanbul is a city that recycles, and the municipality prides itself on the recycling center they have helped established. However, in all these accounts waste pickers are nowhere to be mentioned. Even in history they are invisible, their stories left untold or undiscovered. In my thesis I underlined the fact that just as the material they pick, the waste pickers are also trying to be “recycled”, picked apart and left in pieces to be extinguished. The threat the unrecycled waste poses the recycling sector’s ideology that promises to produce sustainable circulation for the state. Waste pickers have to be integrated as wage laborers in the formal systems of recycling.

In the epigraph to my first chapter I give a quote from Olga Tokarczuk’s novel *The Flights* in which she defines waste as a creature that is lurking around us. This creature is right in front of our faces, however, it somehow manages to grow each day to eventually swallow us whole. In the end waste turns into something we longer need and we want to part our ways with it. Waste is a byproduct of a process that allows us to differentiate and practice value giving on materials. In another sense, cities tend to separate waste from those who produce them. Even though waste is disposable, it can always be recovered and there are different ways to re-evaluate it.

Before starting my fieldwork, the questions I had in my mind were along the lines of the following: What kind of a sector is the recycling sector and are the waste pickers agents or passive actors of the production system? Along with trying to survive to stay in their sector how can the waste pickers deal with the being exploited? These were the questions I tried to

answer in this thesis. The main dichotomy is what causes the hypocrisy in the end. It is the consumers that decide what is or isn't waste and the consumer markets that are driven by demand. It is the global market that defines what can or cannot be sold back to the industrial system.

Likewise, it can be said that the relationship between waste and value of consumer households is determined by the means of consumption models that dominates the advertising industry and class dynamics. In my thesis, I claimed that market circuits while applying a classification system that exploits and excludes waste pickers, it also promises to integrate them into economic production cycles. The work that exerts the waste pickers to the periphery of the city is also what connects them to wealthy consumers that are interested in recycling. In countries where this is achieved through informal means, as it was the case in Brazil, the recycling sector promises to include waste pickers in the system but repeatedly excludes them from value judgment.

The analysis of the social processes of disposal of materials points directly to the issue of recycling and resource efficiency. Waste is a resource that has been used and disposed of and re-emerged from an efficient cycle. Recycling is important both at the material and ecological level. In the part where I described the historical analysis of urban recycling, I tried to show the evolution of this process and how the relationship people had with their waste changed over time. The predominant values and classification systems in urban recycling are based on the concept of limited productivity of the industrial model that causes the urban waste problem. In this thesis, I have tried to question this value system by focusing on consumers, waste and a population that is stuck between the industrial production and the urban recycling systems: generating value from waste is only possible with waste pickers.

I discussed the contribution of labor and waste pickers as a part of the social and economic dynamics of waste and recycling. I questioned the assumptions about their role in the recycling industry, along with my own. I tried to understand the role of the urban poor, waste pickers in the city's economy and how they managed to establish a "regular" occupation. The city continues to exclude waste pickers with re-evaluation systems and waste dynamics. The recycling sector excludes waste pickers through the imposition of limited valuation frameworks.

In this thesis, I wanted to collect more information on waste picking as a line of work. Waste picking and a common approach of the labor that is waste picking relates to the fact that this informal work is an irregularly unorganized work performed by independent individuals who will be eliminated and destroyed when modernized waste systems are implemented. As a result of my research, I argue that this sector is a highly organized sector and a line of work. Waste pickers, not only in Istanbul but all over the world, are a heterogeneous group of people that are pushed to the bottom of the recycling chain due to the dynamics of the industry. The formation, history and functioning of this sector are closely related to the reasons why people choose to stay in this sector in the first place. The ties and the social relations between the waste pickers and the intermediaries generate economic relations and enable the environment to do this work and maintain the exploitation system. Waste picking is a way to survive the harsh conditions of poverty. My analysis of how the sector works has shown that it is a sector that is shaped by the power relations between the employees and the networks that function to connect people. As the conflicts between Afghan and Kurdish waste pickers and other groups show, this informal work in Istanbul is a highly established and shared hierarchical sector.

All these arguments are not only still valid but continue to increase day by day only to become even more complex. I can conclude my research by underlining two points that can be important and critical for other studies. The first one is about the fact that waste pickers in Turkey are still unable to be organized amongst themselves to make their voices heard. The establishment of structures such as cooperatives, which will strengthen their arguments in the current fight to create employment, creating a safe environment for themselves and being recognized as a line of work can be supported. There are a lot of actual steps that need to be taken for the sake of waste pickers, such as health assurances, social security, and an annual income. Continuing from this line of analysis, there is a very trending and relevant zero waste movement that could also be researched further. What is the relationship between this movement and the recycling sector? How is the zero-waste movement co-opted by capitalist ventures and how do waste and wastelessness coexist side by side and aid the same capital? The zero-waste discourse is not only related to my analysis in the sense that it concerns waste, but it is also related to the hypocrisy and exploitation of material and thus to the limited natural sources. It supports more consumption with a commercialized and idealized lifestyle and rests on a kind of politics that related to conscience rather than actual scientific action-taking.

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