

**Dumpsite Bricolage: The responses of the urban waste precariat to the formalisation and privatisation of waste management in the City of Tshwane**

**by**

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## Abstract

This dissertation examines how sections of the urban waste precariat, positioned in the City of Tshwane, responded to the formalisation and privatisation of the waste management system by the city's public authorities. Focusing on two landfill sites, it consists of an ethnographic description and analysis of the nexus between waste makers, waste governors and the waste precariat, including waste-pickers. Drawing on multiple theoretical perspectives, the ethnography brings to light aspects and dynamics of the waste management system which are invisible to the waste governors. These include a typical instance of "accumulation by dispossession" (Harvey 2004, Samson 2012), which involved the closure of three municipal landfill sites and the relocation of a section of the city's waste precariat to other landfill sites, as the state sought to capture the value of the waste generated by the waste makers in the city. Moreover, the closure of one landfill site located in the midst of a wealthy suburb also shows how this process of dispossession is constructed on older distinctions of race and class (Malan 1996, Ballard 2004). As those sections of the waste precariat move to another landfill they are confronted with new dynamics which include access to soft waste being controlled by an established waste-picker committee and city-supported cooperatives that have formed an alliance with the waste governors. As a result, the 'newcomers' are pushed into fringe recycling. This thesis contributes to the debate around the formalisation of waste picking in demonstrating how the process of formalisation, often pushed for and initiated by third sector organisations (Alexander 2009), engenders the exclusion of fringe recycling practices. As such this thesis contributes to a gap in the literature on fringe recycling, in the process also working towards portraying waste-pickers as a differentiated group. In theorising fringe recycling as part of the broader response of the waste precariat to formalisation and privatisation, this thesis deploys the concept of bricolage (Levi-Strauss 1966) in order to make sense of the creative and autonomous actions implied in improvisation. This emphasis on improvisation and creativity pushes the thesis into a consideration of 'things' (Ingold 2010) and the processes of formation, flows and the transformation of materials. Tracing the complex lines of flow and entanglement that exists between people and things in the context of landfill sites gives credence to the idea of a thing as a "gathering together of the threads of life" (Ingold 2010:2-3) and challenges our

established understanding of agency and indeed the effort by Appadurai (1986) to theorise value through tracing 'the social life of things'.

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## Chapter 1 – Introduction

*“We don’t like to have to see, or think too much about, the moment when living organisms come into existence, or dissolve away out of it. It’s the same with animals. It’s the same with commodities” (Graeber, 2012:227).*

The lines and flows of waste materials become obscured to the consumer once they are dumped. Capitalist consumption patterns necessitate that, in the same way that consumers are alienated from the production processes of commodities as argued by Marx, they are also distanced from the processes that transform them in the ‘post-consumption’ phase. However, as humans in capitalist systems, we are all intricately involved in waste generating processes; only a few might be able to argue that they do not contribute to the generation of waste materials. Today, generating and dealing with waste forms an essential aspect of being human.

In the administrative capital city of South Africa, waste management is performed by the City of Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality (CTMM), as well as a number of private companies. Together the state and the market are responsible for managing waste collection from domestic and industrial contexts, and for transporting waste materials to one of the five municipal landfill sites managed by the CTMM. The disposal of organic waste and building waste is regulated differently. The construction industry is required to transport their own building rubble to landfills. Organic waste is collected at various ‘mini-dumps’ across the capital managed by CTMM, serving as sub stations for the public and private disposal of organic waste. Municipal trucks transport the organic waste from these ‘mini-dumps’ to the larger landfills. These processes of collection and transportation by the ‘waste governors’ constitute the formally recognised waste management system of the city.

Unsurprisingly for anthropologists, there is another active waste management process in this city – and perhaps most other cities - which is not as visible and certainly not as formally recognised by the public authorities as the formal waste management system. This less visible



waste process comprises two important processes (there are more, but these are the ones highlighted by the researcher). One of these processes is driven by the pair of hands and feet behind the trolley-cart that one might hear noisily being pushed down the street in the early morning hours, as the trolley journeys to reach a (waste) buy-back centre before the morning traffic begins to pick up. These are the ‘trolley-pickers’ who have become an important feature of cities across the Global South (Schenck, 2011). These ‘trolley-pickers’ are waste recyclers who are also referred to as street waste-pickers. They search through the waste containers or bins that households and private companies leave outside their properties, looking for recyclable waste materials which can be sorted and collected. This is done in the mornings and afternoons in suburbs and streets across the city before municipal waste trucks make their rounds to collect the waste contained in these bins, in return for the municipality collecting rates and taxes. For this reason, street waste-pickers prefer to search through waste bins as early in the day as possible. The waste materials collected by street waste-pickers are transported within and on top of their makeshift trolleys, to buy-back centres or recycling stations. From here the materials are sold on further, to private companies who make money from reinserting waste into global commodity flows (Samson, 2012; Hornby, 2005).

The second process to be highlighted is even less visible than street waste-picking. This invisible aspect of the waste management system is executed by people who operate not on streets, but on landfill sites. In the literature such people are also referred to as waste-pickers yet, they differ from street waste-pickers in that they are positioned exclusively on municipal or private landfills. They are the men and women who hastily remove heaps of waste from pick-up trucks or motor vehicles or large trucks that enter landfill sites with waste and leave such sites without waste. On these landfill sites, such waste-pickers perform numerous practices of reclaiming, reusing and transforming waste materials. Some only reclaim soft waste such as paper and plastic that are separated, sorted and sold to recycling companies that have a presence on the landfill through a container or an office or a scale. Other such landfill-based waste-pickers reclaim bricks and wooden planks from building rubble dumped at these sites. They transform wooden planks into objects such as dog kennels that are then sold as commodities on the street corners of the city. A number of such reclaimed dog kennels now serve as shelter for the pets of

suburban residents across the city – i.e. ‘waste makers’. This second, unrecognised process in the city’s waste management system, situated on public landfills, will be the focus of this dissertation. In short, the dissertation grapples with the nexus in the urban landfill context between ‘waste makers’, ‘waste governors’ and ‘waste-pickers’ (or the ‘urban waste precariat’, a concept I develop in this dissertation). I do this by unpacking the complex lines of flow and entanglement that exist in both formal and informal waste management processes in the city between ‘waste’, ‘waste makers’, ‘waste-pickers’ and ‘waste governors’.

### **1.1 Problem statement and theoretical framework**

The dissertation consists of ethnographic descriptions accompanied by reflective analyses, and in this writing process I have made use of a conglomeration of concepts. These concepts have a prominent presence throughout the dissertation and therefore it is fitting that these terms are defined from the outset in relation to the theoretical framework employed in this dissertation. Prior to that, the problem statement that framed this ethnographic and analytical inquiry needs to be outlined: What has been the impact of the twin processes of formalisation and privatisation on waste-pickers that position themselves on public landfill sites? What is driving the processes of formalisation and privatisation of waste management in the city? How have waste-pickers, and the urban waste precariat more broadly, responded to these processes? How do waste, its transformation and its flows allow us to theorise the entanglement between humans and objects, and between those who make and pick and regulate waste? In other words, what is the theoretical use of taking waste seriously?

In answering these research questions, I borrow from the literature and coin a number of concepts in order to proceed with the argument of this dissertation. I use the term ‘waste maker’ to signify any person or entity that partakes in the consumption of commodities (the buying and destruction and throwing away of such commodities) and for whom this forms an important aspect of their urban identity. In the context of this city, I refer specifically to those residents of suburban households, whether they own or rent private property, in the use of the term ‘waste makers’. Although the term ‘waste governors’ might seem to refer to public

authorities only, I need to point out that it also includes companies, market-based and third sector organisations, and in some instances, also waste-pickers. My use of the term concerns situations where responsibility, ownership and regulation of waste material are exercised in relation to the public. I use the term waste-picker to refer to any person who engages in reclaiming, separating and sorting waste material for the express purpose of selling such materials in the market as part of their provisioning system. Some do this on a part-time basis, while others have immersed themselves fully into the growing 'waste economy'.

Anyone concerned with the 'waste economy' has to confront the waste management system. I use the term Waste Management System (WMS) to refer to the movement of and entanglement between both waste material and various social actors, all of whom are implicated in a unique way in the management of waste in the metropolitan area. The city-level public authorities are the most important actors in this management system as they are principally responsible for the process whereby waste material flows from the point of consumption to the point of burial in the "commodity cemetery", as geographer Melanie Samson (2012) describes the process of reinserting waste into commodity circulation. My conceptualisation of the waste management process is therefore wider than how it is typically conceived of by city managers, politicians and expressed in legislation, as I am interested in exploring theoretically the complex and inseparable relationship between materiality and human action in the context of the nexus between waste makers, waste-pickers and waste governors in the city.

A central dynamic which exists in the context of contemporary waste management systems in the capital city and elsewhere in the world is the twin processes of formalisation and privatisation (Fahmi, 2005; Samson, 2009b). In academic writing, the term privatisation is generally used in reference to the transference of responsibilities from the state to the private sector (Marshall, 1998). Historically, privatisation has taken on many forms, but in the instances with which this study is concerned, it particularly crystallised as the reduction of municipal activity in service delivery. In the dissertation, privatisation refers to a significant number of municipal responsibilities, in the form of service delivery, relating to the collection and

transportation and management of waste, transferred to private companies or market actors. Formalisation refers to the process whereby spaces or practices that formerly existed outside the purview of the state and formal market is transformed to a point of active regulation by public authorities and the market. My use of the term formalisation specifically relates to the process whereby unrecognised and unregulated practices that waste-pickers perform are transformed and transferred to a place of regulation by public authorities and private actors.

Waste-pickers engage in a number of practices that relate to what they do with waste. The literature on waste-picking contains various terms used to describe the actions performed by waste-pickers, and 'reclaiming', 'reusing' and 'recycling' are three of the most widely used in this regard. *Reclaiming* describes the act of retrieving waste materials that are dumped or discarded. On the landfill, this occurs when waste-pickers pick materials from the piles of waste (Hornby, 2005:1215). *Reusing* follows the act of reclaiming and is carried out once the reclaimer deems the waste material fit for self-consumption. Lastly, *recycling* occurs when a material picked from the waste pile is sorted and reinserted into commodity circulation (Samson, 2012). Recycling in the fieldwork of this study generally took place on landfill sites as waste-pickers sell their sorted waste materials to private recycling companies that have a presence on the landfill.

In the literature, the term 'waste-picker' is typically used to describe the actions of people who perform *soft waste-picking*. Soft waste-picking includes the reclaiming and recycling of plastic, cardboard, glass, white paper and scrap metals. These waste materials are valued by the market and waste-pickers sell these to recycling companies that in return insert them into wider commodity chains. In the fieldwork the researcher identified a number of recycling practices that do not fit the description of soft waste-picking, and which are not represented in literature. These recycling practices are what I refer to as *fringe recycling*, as it is performed spatially on the fringe of the landfill site and remains, in contemporary market dynamics, on the fringe of market valuations. Fringe recycling entails work other than reclaiming, sorting and recycling as the value of this kind of recycling involves transformative work. In my portrayal of fringe recycling I use the work of Levi-Strauss (1966) on the act of bricolage and the bricoleur as

one who uses a heterogeneous repertoire to perform work, making use of whatever is at hand, to describe this practice.

The term 'waste-picker' has been used by the media, scholars, activists and governments in reference to those individuals who generate an income through reclaiming and recycling waste outside of the formal sector (Chamane, 2009; Samson, 2009; The City of Tshwane, 2014). The literature review that I present in Chapter Two brings the adoption of this term, as well as other terms used, into discussion. However, in public discussions waste-pickers are typically represented as an undifferentiated group. While it may make sense for NGOs and social movements who are interested in organising waste-pickers around labour issues and to actively resist certain forms of privatisation to underplay the differences among all those who make a living from picking and selling waste, I argue it is opportune to raise the issue of heterogeneity among 'waste-pickers'. During fieldwork conducted for this dissertation I found that waste-picker cooperatives consist of numerous fragmentations and that a large number of people who are positioned on public landfills and who are implicated in the waste management process, are excluded from our discussion through the use of this narrow term 'waste-picker'. These various fragmentations and distinctions will be discussed in greater depth in Chapter Four. My data forced me to identify a more appropriate and more encapsulating term for all the social actors who have positioned themselves in a unique way within the waste management process and the waste economy. The term that I have found most productive in describing the practices of a wider range of individuals positioned within the waste economy is the 'urban waste precariat'. In his book *The Precariat, Standing* (2011) identifies and describes the emergence of a new class as a global phenomenon. According to Standing, the precariat fits within a class bracket between what he calls 'the core' or the old orthodox working class, and the formally unemployed. The precariat could be explained in simple terms as typical wage workers employed on a temporary contract basis and who do not have access to the benefits of formal labour related security.

However, the concept 'precariat' is no novel classification in the social sciences. Its origin dates back to the New Left ideas and analyses of working-class subjectivity in the context of the

deindustrialisation of Western Europe (Johnson, 2011). Over and above Standing's recent book, numerous other works of literature have recently discussed the 'urban precariat'. Of these writers, sociologist Loïc Wacquant has been the most prolific. Wacquant's work draws on a cross-continental comparative study of advanced marginality in the black inner-city ghetto of Chicago after the 1960s riots and the working-class peripheries of Paris in the period of deindustrialisation. Wacquant argues that the state serves as a stratification and classification agency in the production of an urban precariat (Wacquant, 2015). Johnson (2011) advances a similar argument in his analysis of the Humanitarian Design Movement, arguing that natural disasters, such as the earthquake in Haiti, hold the potential to create an urban precariat through processes of neoliberal restructuring. In Johnson's analysis, however, it is not the state that serves as the driving force behind the creation of an urban precariat, but rather the social enterprises and NGOs that form part of the Humanitarian Design Movement.

The resurgence of the term 'precariat' has however not occurred without scrutiny. The main criticism levelled at the concept is its Western European origin and the contention that it does not seamlessly fit into a sociological analysis of the Global South. Munck (2013) offers one such a critique and unpacks the recent use of the term through a genealogical analysis beginning with the 1960s studies of marginality. The context of Munck's critique is derived from the fact that the recent use of the term has been regarded as a novel classification, which claims that a new social subject has arisen in which precariousness forms a central element. Munck further states that this recent use misunderstands the complexity of class making and remaking (2013:751). But, in order to substantiate his critique, Munck downplays the role of neoliberalism as a formidable global force. The term was historically used to describe the impact of deindustrialisation on the working-class of Europe and North America, but neoliberalism made it applicable to describe a set of social and economic conditions experienced by workers globally, which then also applies to workers situated in the megacities of the developing world (Johnson, 2011:470).

In order to situate my use of the term 'urban waste precariat' within this genealogy, I state that I do not aim at announcing the emergence of a new social class. Rather, the term is used in

describing the conditions of informal income generation and provisioning under a unique form of neoliberalism which played out over the course of the last decade – and which has been described in South Africa by scholars (McDonald, 2012). For this reason, I have chosen to use the term ‘urban waste precariat’ as it encapsulates the fragmentations and distinctions of individuals who contribute to the waste economy. Others might argue that there does not seem to be a significant difference between the lumpenproletariat and the precariat. Marx fostered a negative opinion of the lumpenproletariat and he described this class fraction as “the social scum, that passively rotting mass thrown off by the lowest layers of the old society” (Marx, 1970:18). Marx contextualised this class in relation to their class position and exploitation by other classes. His negative opinion was rooted in the fact that he foresaw a lack of their participation in a proletarian revolution. In addition to having a connotation of passivity, the element of criminality is a regular occurrence in descriptions of the lumpenproletariat (Marshall, 1998; Henderson, 1997). I find an absence of this kind of description in Standing’s writing on the precariat. Although Standing refers to this class fraction as the new dangerous class, it is in reference to their potential to disrupt the current social order if they were to become a globally organised class.

‘Waste-pickers’ do not play an active role in how they are represented in the media and in literature. Rather it is ‘waste-makers’ and ‘waste-governors’ that shape the ways in which ‘waste-pickers’ are represented and regulated. Commercial companies, property owners and rate-payers’ associations shape the dominant perceptions regarding ‘waste-pickers’ and this in turn shapes how ‘waste-pickers’ are regulated, policed and managed. In Chapter Three I tackle this issue by exploring the perceptions held by private property owners in Pretoria East regarding waste and the urban waste precariat. I was struck by the similarity and differences between how white citizens of Pretoria under Apartheid responded to black subjects in urban areas – and the debate about ‘Black Spots’ – and how property owners respond to the presence of ‘waste-pickers’ in the affluent eastern suburbs of the city today. In order to explore these differences and similarities, and how they are represented in the media, I make use of Mary Douglas (1966) and her symbolic analysis of dirt as ‘matter out of place’. In her book, *Purity and Danger* (1966), Douglas unpacks the structured symbolic dimensions that societies hold of ideas

of purity, defilement and taboo. She argues from the assumption that absolute dirt does not exist, and that the idea of dirt remains a socially constructed classification. She further argues that perceptions of dirt, purity and taboo point to a symbolic system of value within a specific culture. Within these systems taboo serves as a protecting mechanism to regulate and uphold the existing value system from the disruptive threat that ambiguous elements might pose. Even though Douglas paid very little attention to the materiality of matter, and neglected to incorporate into her analysis a serious consideration of power and social change, waste (as material and as something that needs to be managed), does raise issues of purity, taboo and symbolic classification that informs the way we theorise power. Admittedly, analyses and understandings of perceptions and symbolic systems could be quite limited as they tend to neglect the material dimension implicated in power (whether these are manifested in class struggles or not). Perceptions of waste and symbolic systems relating to purity do play a role in the material relationships between 'waste makers', 'waste-pickers' and 'waste governors' in the city, and as such I do find Douglas' writings useful in thinking about these perceptions.

I found however, that it is not sufficient to write about practices, kinds of persons and perceptions in order to explore the entanglements that waste encourages between people and objects. So, in Chapters 5 and 6 I attempt to move beyond using the language of static categorisations in social scientific writing. There I make use of the concepts of 'lines', 'meshwork', 'life' and 'things' to describe the movements and flows of entities and bodies, in constant transformation, and in relation to 'waste', 'waste makers', 'waste-pickers' and 'waste governors'. The result is a dissertation in which I employ a variety of theoretical concepts in order to address different aspects raised by my engagement in the field. This heterodox approach allows me to discuss and analyse, in different chapters, a variety of central questions. Throughout the dissertation, however, I follow a grounded theory approach (Marshall, 1998:265-266) while emphasising a processual approach in writing my ethnography, and analysing the waste management system as it unfolded during my fieldwork period at the Garstkloof and Hatherley Landfills. Such a processual approach (Ingold, 2010) encouraged me to think about the unfolding waste management system within the CTMM as being both the outcome of a historical process and as being transformed as part of a political and economic



process. The unfolding responses of the urban waste precariat are similarly conceived of as a process that is both completely undetermined and still taking place – as such processual approaches emphasise development in space and time. The heterodox approach, coupled with an emphasis on processes, prevents the author from overemphasising either side of the age old binary between materialism and idealism. I found great inspiration in David Graeber’s writing on the social theory of value - which places emphasis on processes, flows, materiality, actions and entanglements between human actions and objects (Graeber, 2001).

Likewise, I was inspired by Melanie Samson’s writings on waste and value under capitalism. Samson (2012) has also sought to theorise waste and value through focusing on the circulation of waste. She has identified three strands of thought in her critical review of the body of literature on waste and value. The *first* strand poses that capitalist production necessarily generates ever-increasing amounts of physical waste, but that parallel to this, wasted human and productive capacity are also generated. This line of thought identifies the structural relationship between the production of waste and the production of value within capitalism, but here waste is presented as a static concept. Within the *second* strand, waste is viewed as something out of which value is generated. The definition of waste is perceived of as a spatial as well as a social process, and the material aspects of the objects carry the potential to create or destroy value. However, in this strand of literature the actual process has not been interrogated and a theory of labour does not form part of this analysis. Contrary to this, the *third* strand of literature does incorporate a labour theory of value, but it is argued that capitalist value production has the outcome of transforming people into human waste. Instead of aligning herself to any particular strand, Samson brings all three strands into a productive conversation with one another and develops an innovative approach to theorising waste and value (2012:6-8). The current study strives for the same conversation between the three strands mentioned above but, instead of developing a new theoretical approach as did Samson, I bring into conversation the value theory developed by Graeber (2001) and the approach suggested by Samson (2012).

In *Towards an Anthropological Theory of Value*, Graeber (2001) develops his thinking on theories of value by invoking the historical debate between Parmenides and Heraclitus. Opting to side with the tradition that emanated from Heraclitus which sees object/things as patterns in constant flux and movement, Graeber advocates for a theory of value based on perceiving “objects as processes, as defined by their potentials, and society as constituted primarily by actions” (Graeber 2001:52). Graeber blames Parmenides’ approach, which suggests that objects should be perceived as existing outside of time and change, for informing the ‘Western Scientific Tradition’ that was developed by the philosophers of the time. He argues that at its most extreme this approach or tendency develops into Positivism, and he is certainly critical of this epistemological position. As we know, and as Graeber argues, positivism has had a tremendous influence on the social sciences, and August Comte was arguably the most ardent proponent of this intellectual tradition. Comte tried to apply the positivistic, *a priori* laws of “Natural Science” to social studies and left us with the empiricist legacy in the social sciences (Marshall, 1998). The natural sciences have since contradicted this positivist tradition and we know today that Heraclitus was more right than he could possibly have known. The Heraclitian approach perceives objects as things in constant change, flux and movement, rather than fixed and statically existing outside of time and space.

In Chapters 5 and 6 I raise this debate with reference to my research material and make an effort in my analysis to move away from the use of static concepts in social analysis. More specifically, I argue that the responses of the urban waste precariat to changes in the waste management system mirror the way in which ‘waste objects’ at public landfill sites hardly ever seem to be fixed or sedentary. In my analysis, I am primarily interested in the reclaiming and recycling actions of the urban waste precariat, even as I bring these into a relationship with the ‘waste-makers’ and ‘waste governors’. I argue that, in performing these actions, the waste precariat illustrates an entanglement that exists between processes of human action and material medium, which could also be found in many other places, but which vividly plays out on the two public landfills where I conducted most of my field research. This perspective and argument is certainly a consequence of the specificity of waste landfills, but I contend that this specificity may have a more general applicability in that processes that seek to categorise,

manage and value waste reveal aspects that may be hidden from sight elsewhere. I therefore analyse the responses of the urban waste precariat to change by theorising (waste) objects as processes defined by their potential, and the process of waste management as constituted primarily through the creative human actions (Graeber, 2001:52) of the ‘waste governors’. The broader implication here is that society (and the waste economy) is fashioned through human action, and that human action cannot be separated from its material medium.

Conversely, as Graeber illustrates, the general acceptance in the social sciences of the position articulated by Parmenides has had an enormous influence on Western scientific and philosophical thought. Aristotle’s hylomorphic model also derives from this theoretical tradition where form is imposed onto passive, static matter by an agent with an end goal in mind (Ingold, 2010). We find an expression of the same static concepts in many Marxist analyses of capitalist value production where human labour is imposed onto raw material in the production of commodities. This theoretical tradition has been paramount in the fashioning of a modernist society, and our theoretical response to it. I use the term ‘modernist’ here with specific reference to modernist ideals prevalent in the early twentieth century. In his book, *Expectations of Modernity*, Ferguson (1999) refers to ‘the myth of modernisation’ in his unravelling of the urbanisation process in the Zambian Copperbelt. Ferguson outlines the process whereby the expectations of Zambia to emerge as a developed country were shattered after the economic crises struck in the 1970’s. He uses the concept of myth to illustrate how the lived understandings of the mineworkers were replaced with a cynical scepticism, where once there was an expectation of modernity. My use of the term ‘modern’ lies within this train of thought.

How cities deal with waste – human faeces, the dead and sickly, depleted commodities, nuclear waste, and so forth – is a central issue in the expression of modernism in relation to urban governance. Ingold (2010) and Laterza (2013) are anthropologists who form positions that critique the use of static categorical concepts in social scientific writing. Ingold advocates for the overthrow of the hylomorphic model and suggest its replacement by an ontology that assigns primacy to processes of formation as against their final products, and to flows and

transformations of materials as against states of matter. His concept of ‘meshwork’ forms part of this rethinking (Ingold, 2010). Following Ingold, Laterza (2013) applies this approach to analyse his ethnographic fieldwork in a sawmill factory in Swaziland. Through his adoption of the concept of meshwork he illustrates the biosocial entanglements that are neglected in hylomorphic analyses (Laterza, 2013). Directing his critique at the modernist tradition, Laterza (2013) holds that modernists envisage a clean and controlled environment in the so-called modern cities of the world only through a process that seeks to measure or delimit every little thing.

A consideration of waste brings this point to the fore. The unmanageability of waste becomes an anomaly within the bounds of modernist ideals; its successful management becomes a symbol of modernity. Thus, Moore (2009:426) writes that “Processes of modernization that have produced an expectation of cleanliness in modern cities have, at the same time, relied on production and consumption patterns that create more and more garbage. It is this inherent contradiction that provides a space for marginalised people to use garbage as a political tool”. While I agree with Moore’s argument in writing about the Mexico context, and in relation to the potential of waste as a political tool in the hands of the marginalised, I am not primarily interested in waste as a political tool. This was partly because my experience in the field led me in other directions, namely in seeing practices of reclaiming and recycling as forms of human creative action which do not immediately or necessarily translate into political statements or strategies.

The argument made by Moore (2009) falls within the strand of literature identified by Samson (2012) as being concerned with waste and value and which identifies the structural relationship between the production of waste and the production of value within capitalism. Moore and others who write in this strand suggest that waste represents a fundamental contradiction within capitalist value production and thus might serve to lead to its overthrow. But in Samson’s critique of this approach she suggests that their deployment of a static view of waste and value precludes them from providing a viable proposal about how this overthrow might be

accomplished. I argue that in adopting the approach to value as suggested by Graeber (2001) I might contribute to this debate.

Having outlined some of the key concepts and theoretical insights which I borrow and deploy in this dissertation, let me now offer a brief summary of the chapters to follow.

Chapter Two introduces the reader to the global discussion around waste management, environmentalism and waste-picking through a review of the relevant literature. Current debates and the politics related to practices of reclaiming and recycling at landfill sites and the governing of waste-picking and landfill sites around the globe, are summarised. The discussion then moves to the regional and local sphere where fieldwork was conducted, namely the City of Tshwane, South Africa. The various social actors implicated in the transformation of the waste management system are described and discussed. I investigate the case of Kwaggasrand Landfill site which has been presented by the ‘waste governors’ as the model landfill site in the city’s Integrated Waste Management Plan (The City of Tshwane, 2014). The data used in this chapter consists of newspaper articles, articles published by the Global Alliance of Waste-pickers, the City of Tshwane’s Integrated Waste Management Plan, the city-level Solid Waste Bylaws, and interviews conducted with municipal officials from CTMM.

Chapter Three offers a portrayal of the recent transformation of one of the public landfill sites in the city, namely Garstkloof Landfill. This landfill is situated in the wealthy suburb of Pretoria East, in the midst of the ‘waste-makers’. A historical account of the transformation of this landfill situated among ‘waste makers’ on which ‘waste-pickers’ were making a living is offered. This is followed by a historical and comparative section on Pretoria’s equivalent of Johannesburg’s Sophiatown and Cape Town’s District Six - Lady Selborne. In the same way that white residents of Pretoria during Apartheid represented black subjects as dangerous and not belonging in the city, the contemporary private property owning residents (‘waste makers’) represent the urban waste precariat on the landfill as a threat to their existence and properties. Today’s ‘waste makers’ are not able to appeal to racist laws to have the undesirables removed from their doorsteps. Private property owners seek other avenues and strategies to remove the poor and unwanted. Using critical discourse analysis to analyse statements made by such

private property owners, documented in two local newspapers, I analyse the relationship between ‘waste-pickers’ and ‘waste makers’ through the transformation of this public landfill. The data used in this chapter are drawn from newspaper articles, structured interviews and archival documents, supported by map illustrations.

Chapter Four moves from the closure of Garstkloof Landfill site to another public landfill site in the city, namely Hatherley Landfill. The research field dictated this move and many of my research participants opted to move to Hatherley Landfill as Garstkloof Landfill was being closed down. The landfill is located close to the township of Mamelodi, as opposed to the affluent suburbs of the east. This chapter provides a social history of Hatherley Landfill and describes the current waste management operations at this landfill site in relation to Garstkloof Landfill and the model Kwaggasrand Landfill site. This account emphasises the role of the third sector in the formation of waste-picker cooperatives, offering the possibility of solidarity initiatives in the formation of a waste-pickers union. Ethnographic vignettes of internal meetings of a waste-picker committee are detailed, as well as descriptions of meetings between the municipal management and the committees. The ethnography is used to describe the relationship between ‘waste-pickers’ and ‘waste governors’ amidst city-wide changes in the waste management system. I argue that the twin processes of formalisation and privatisation, which are presented in policy discourse as empowering and inclusive, have in reality served to benefit only a minority of the urban waste precariat positioned at Hatherley Landfill. What is currently seen and portrayed by scholars and third sector initiatives as the ideal response to privatisation and formalisation fails to offer a resilient strategy to the waste precariat as a whole. Inasmuch as these initiatives are proclaimed to be inclusive, I point out the exclusionary consequences which these initiatives had on Hatherley Landfill.

Chapter Five offers a depiction of the various responses of the urban waste precariat to the changes in the waste management system as discussed in chapters one and two. I make use of ethnographic data to convey the subjectivities of ‘waste-pickers’ and members of the urban waste precariat. In the process I discuss those who decided to identify as waste-pickers and who opted to join the cooperatives that were established as part of the city’s efforts to

formalise the urban waste precariat and their practices. I also discuss those who decided not to identify as waste-pickers, thus opting out of formalisation. The chapter further discusses how these various responses were shaped by both the materiality of the landfill (the actions connected with material medium) and the political consciousness of the urban waste precariat.

Chapter six entails a detailed description of the idiosyncratic daily processes unfolding on Hatherley Landfill site, as inspired by Ingold's (2010) emphasis on lines, flows and materials. I use this approach not only in describing the flows of waste on the public landfill but also to theorise the agency of the waste precariat in the same way that Laterza (2013) theorised agency. That is, to move beyond the ways in which agency was theorised in Marxist factory ethnographies by theorising workers and industrial production lines as separate entities. Instead, I too adopt a meshwork approach to agency that defines it as "the attribution of the ability to act to specific entities, human, material, technical or otherwise" (Laterza, 2013:164).

## **1.2 Methodology**

Most of the existing scholarly research on street-level waste-picking and waste-pickers has been produced by researchers adopting a qualitative approach. However, research specific to waste-picking on public landfills has tended to be quantitative and was conducted by social workers and journalists (Chamane, 2009; Paul, et al., 2012; De Kock, 1986; Hayami, 2006; Rankokwane, 2006; Vazquez, 2013). I contend that there are phenomenological aspects of the daily practices of waste-pickers on landfill sites which cannot be understood by following the positivist paradigm which has been adopted in quantitative studies. As an anthropologist, I decided that the largest component of my research approach would consist of "complete participation, in which researchers intensively interact with other participants and might even get to participate in and perform the very activity they are studying" (Durant, 1997:99). Parallel to such an attempt at complete participation, I incorporated into my research what Letkemann (2004) calls 'informal methodology'. Letkemann describes it as an important methodology that "can provide contextual and behavioural knowledge that interviewing often cannot do. 'Hanging around' as informal methodology may not be systematically rigorous, but over time it

facilitates analysis that makes sense out of gross categorisations” (2004:245). I found this informal methodology to be appropriate for conducting research on public landfill sites. It enabled me to capture the social organisation and the multi-layered dynamics that construct everyday events, processes and actions.

The research question I wanted to address required me to spend as much time as possible, observing and participating in the acts of picking and sorting on the site and observing the entanglements associated with the rhythms of public landfills. In order to develop an insight into the multiple routines and various rhythms of the sites, I made visits to the landfills on different days of the week and also at different times of the day. The research questions I wanted to explore could not possibly be answered through mere structured interviews or group discussions. I found it necessary to participate in the very act of waste picking along with the research participants in order to grasp the processes involved in reclaiming, separating and sorting waste materials. This approach was coupled with an interpretive perspective in order not to impose presupposed ideas and concepts onto the participants, but rather to gain an understanding of waste picking at participant level – from their perspective, so to speak. This method eventually highlighted the limitations of the classifications which I had applied to the people and processes present on the landfill, prior to conducting participant observation. Being in the field forced me to adopt new ways of seeing and classifying.

One of the main research questions I had set out to investigate involved understanding the perceptions that private property owners or ‘waste makers’, fostered concerning ‘waste’ and ‘waste-pickers’. To this end I used critical discourse analysis as well as structured interviews with three key informants: Rita Aucamp (ward councillor of the ward in which Garstkloof Landfill is situated), Simon Mhlangu (CTMM-appointed municipal manager of Garstkloof Landfill) and Frans Dekker (head of landfill operations CTMM). These interviews gave me insight into the wider political context in which Garstkloof Landfill was embedded.

Another prominent component of the research project employed the “social life of waste” approach outlined by Arjun Appadurai (Appadurai, 1986). This approach helped me to perceive waste objects as ‘things in motion’, situated in specific processes and contexts. I deployed this



approach to document the biography of waste materials, tracing the materials back to their commodity phase. This approach also encouraged me to experiment with what Marcus (1995) called ‘multi-sited ethnography’.

Given the confines of doing research for a Masters degree, I decided to focus on certain aspects of the waste management system in the CTMM and to exclude other aspects. For example, throughout the dissertation I focus on the position of the urban waste precariat and do not consider in detail the operations of the private recycling companies situated on the landfills. Most of my material on private recycling companies I sourced from the literature rather than from interviewing people who own or are employed by these companies. Although the term *middlemen* appears more than once in the dissertation and refers in part to people employed by these companies, a thorough investigation of their role in the waste management process was omitted from my fieldwork process. Likewise, the focus of this dissertation is not on the ‘waste-governors’ per se. I did not conduct ethnographic research on the waste management division of the CTMM even though I interviewed one CCTM official who manages the Landfill Operations section. I had informal conversations with some CTMM employees who I encountered on Garstkloof and Hatherley Landfills but my focus in this dissertation is not on the ‘waste-governors’. Also, I did not visit any of the other six municipal landfills situated in the city.

As part of my data collection I attended three waste-picker committee meetings, during which I did not actively participate by speaking, but simply observed. The first two meetings were held respectively by the Garstkloof Landfill waste-picker committee and the Hatherley Landfill waste-picker committee. The third meeting I attended was facilitated by officials from the CTMM and was attended by waste-picker committees and some of the newly established waste-picker cooperatives. I used unstructured interviews as part of my research methodology and I personally asked for the consent of all participants interviewed. It is necessary here to add that my attempts at informed consent was not limited to a singular event of asking for consent, but was comprised of a continuous and dynamic process of negotiation. These negotiations included a continuous opportunity for participants to withhold or withdraw from the research

whenever they found fit to do so. In situations where participants were performing actions that might have been interpreted as illegal I have anonymised their identities in order to protect them. For these participants I have used pseudonyms in this dissertation, in line with the ethical guidelines provided by Anthropology Southern Africa (Anon., 2016). The research did not involve the participation of any individual under the age of 18.

The period of conducting fieldwork required eight months of participant observation from February to October 2014. Field visits produced an assortment of unanticipated experiences. I entered the field with an awareness of my positionality as researcher and the possible power dynamics at play. Unsurprisingly, during fieldwork, I was constantly reminded of my position as a white, middle-class male on the Garstkloof and Hatherley Landfills as most of the people working on the sites were people of colour. During these visits to the landfills I did not observe any white person waste-picking and when I put on my waste-picking gear and delved through the piles of waste, it raised eyebrows. I found my position as a male and outsider to be an obstacle in my interaction with female waste-pickers. Even when I attempted to converse they mostly ignored me. However, during waste-picker committee meetings female pickers were more comfortable in conversing, and to be seen conversing with me. Also, most of the female pickers were committee members. For these reasons race and gender are not central themes in my research but they are certainly not unimportant research questions to ask in the context of the urban waste precariat.

Throughout the dissertation I made use of the name City of Tshwane when I write about the city and the larger municipal area. The name Pretoria is still widely used by residents of the city to refer to the city as a whole, even if its use seems more appropriate to refer to a specific section of the inner city. I prefer the use of Tshwane as it is more inclusive. The name Tshwane refers to the municipal district (City of Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality) which includes the former black and Indian and coloured townships. I therefore chose to incorporate the name Tshwane which embraces both the former Pretoria Municipal Region and the new City of Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality.

## Chapter 2 – Governing Waste: From a Global to a Local perspective

All over the world, cities are finding it hard to deal with the overwhelming increase in waste generation. In many cities of the Global South, rapidly expanding urban contexts with old and insufficient infrastructure find it difficult to cope with the ever increasing proliferation of waste. Conventionally, it is the responsibility of public authorities to provide waste management services through local municipal structures. But in attempts at coping with the infrastructural demands of rapidly expanding cities and global ideological shifts towards neoliberal governance, a large number of the services provided by the public sector have been transferred to the private sector (The City of Tshwane, 2014:100). Waste management is one such service which has undergone large scale privatisation in developing countries over the last two decades, including the City of Tshwane (The City of Tshwane, 2014). The privatisation of waste management mainly plays out in two possible ways. In the first instance it refers to the reduction of government *activity* in service delivery. In the second it entails the reduction of government *ownership* when government ownership is divested to less regulated or unregulated private ownership (Cointreau-Levine, 1994). Both these instances have been analysed through the Marxist concept of accumulation by dispossession introduced by David Harvey (2004). Samson, for example, argues that in developing countries this phenomenon involves attempts by the state to take control over spheres of accumulation opened up by informal social actors in order to transfer them to formal private enterprises (2012:113). Samson makes this argument in reference to the state's privatisation of waste management systems on landfill sites in developing countries, as well as the informal recycling practices performed by the urban waste precariat.

In response to the same processes, waste-picking formations have emerged as a global movement. In 2012 the International Labour Organisation (ILO) estimated that 15-20 million people around the globe earn their living from recycling waste (WIEGO, 2012). Waste-picking is growing, especially in developing countries, where urban contexts lack the infrastructure to accommodate waste management based on the principle of 'separation at source'. Separation at source entails separating different types of waste at the point of generation and having it transported directly to a point of recycling. The lack of waste recycling infrastructure in

developing countries creates the need and opportunity for a space serving as a reclamation and separation area before the waste is collected by recycling companies. It is in this space of separation that the urban waste precariat position themselves. In many developed countries, waste is transported directly from the point of generation to recycling companies, where a system is put in place to separate waste in the vicinity of the company. In the waste management systems of many developed countries, those engaging in waste-picking would be formally employed by the recycling company and therefore not form part of the *informal economy*. Analytically, the above-mentioned paragraph describes the distinction between private and public waste management systems; however, this distinction does not play itself out in such a simplified manner within developed urban spaces. In numerous joint ventures, the responsibility of waste management is shared by both private and public actors. Moreover, as Hart has argued, privatisation may also entail informalisation (Hart, 2010).

The use of the term ‘informal economy’ in this study is in the ethnographic sense, as presented by Hart (2011), and not in the bureaucratic sense with policy formation in mind. The urban waste precariat in developing countries typically utilise the spaces of public landfill sites and is seen as part of the informal economy as they are not employed by municipalities or recycling companies. It must be added though that this doesn’t mean their practice of waste-picking is unregulated or without pattern, a point which will be elaborated upon in the following chapters.

Several scholars have recently contributed to the burgeoning body of literature on waste-picking, analysing the engagement between public, private and informal actors within the waste management process. Against the backdrop of neoliberalising states and the privatisation of public services, most scholars are concerned with the implication that these transformations might hold for the livelihoods of waste-pickers globally (Paul, et al., 2012; Fahmi, 2005; Samson, 2012; Samson, 2009a; Samson, 2009b), a concern which this study shares with these scholars.

This same body of literature is characterised by demographic data and descriptive writing that is concerned with the way individuals perform the very act of waste-picking. These works

further consider issues of the privatisation of waste, how waste work is formalised, how waste-pickers are integrated into formal waste management systems, and the roles that waste-pickers fulfil in the waste management sector.

## **2.1 A brief review of literature on waste-picking**

Birkbeck (1987) was one of the first writers, in English at least, to theorise the act of waste-picking or what he called 'informal recycling'. In his study of informal recycling at a landfill site in Cali (Colombia), he makes the argument that informal recyclers are nothing more than casual industrial outworkers who carry the illusion of being self-employed. He refers to them as self-employed proletarians; self-employed, but selling their labour to recycling companies. Birkbeck was critical of those scholars who saw in waste-picking a dignified form of labour, approximating self-employment. Numerous scholars have since drawn on Birkbeck's argument and formulated their own theoretical approaches to waste-picking practices.

Research conducted by De Kock (1986) marks one of the earliest published works on waste-picking in South Africa. She agrees with Birkbeck that waste-pickers cannot be seen as entrepreneurs or incipient capitalists, but rather as workers. De Kock suggests that waste-pickers should be formally employed by municipal authorities or private companies in order to improve their working conditions. Along similar lines Tevera (1994) argues that waste-pickers could be seen as 'piece-workers' earning a 'piece-wage'. Tevera illustrates how waste-picking on urban landfills serves as a source of income for those with little formal education, skills and social connections. These initial ground-breaking studies aside, a few significant works have followed within the last decade. Only a few are mentioned here. In support of Tevera, Medina (2000) argues that ultimately, waste-pickers should be incorporated into formal waste management processes. He brings the formation of waste-picker cooperatives into discussion and poses it as the first step in grassroots development towards a more resilient position for waste-pickers. He argues that cooperatives offer a position for waste-pickers to negotiate with public authorities for improved policies concerning their work.

Concerning the link between waste-pickers and the buyers of waste, a theme not fully explored in this dissertation, Gill (2007) sheds some light on the unique relationship between waste-pickers and itinerant buyers of waste in the context of Delhi, India. He portrays a personalised and long-term exchange between the parties which includes being embedded in the caste hierarchy. A somewhat similar relationship exists between the Zabaleen and Wahiya in Cairo's long tradition of waste collection. Fahmi (2005) analyses this longstanding relationship in the face of local solid waste management privatisation in Cairo, Egypt. His writing illuminates the effect of privatisation on the Zabaleen (waste-pickers), and recognises the significant role they fulfil in urban waste management. Fahmi shows how privatisation policies serve business interests at the cost of local community livelihoods. In reaction to state endeavours of privatisation, Fahmi emphasises the need for third sector involvement to voice the concerns and interests of the urban poor. Concerning the issue of advocacy and protest, Moore (2009) emphasises the fact that each context forms distinctive characteristics, in particular, the relations between public authorities and waste processes. Moore's case study refers to waste-pickers making use of marginalising processes as provision for political leverage in order to achieve developmental goals. She points out how waste serves as an effective tool in protests due to the hazardous characteristic ascribed to it. In parallel, Fredericks (2013) investigates how waste-pickers in Senegal use ideas regarding dirt and disorder as a means to forge a right to the city. These demonstrative actions illustrate the power dynamics that form an integral part of waste management (Fredericks, 2013).

## **2.2 Global sphere**

Central to the current debate among government officials, developmental workers and scholars is whether waste-pickers should be incorporated into the formal waste management system – whether this is managed by private companies or by public authorities (Paul, et al., 2012; Medina, 2000; Godfrey, 2016). This debate includes competing arguments around policy – specifically whether or not waste management systems should be privatised – as well as whether waste-pickers should be organised into unions or not. Unionising those engaging in

waste-picking would entail such workers being formally employed, either by government or private recycling companies, and thus also protected by labour legislation while being subject to regulation. These debates have contributed to a growing body of literature on waste-picking and experiments in unionisation.

In 2005, a network of leaders of waste-picker groups from Brazil, Chile, Argentina, Colombia and Uruguay formed the Global Alliance of Waste-pickers (GAWP) in Brazil (Fernandez, n.d.). This solidarity economy initiative attracted the attention of the AVINA Foundation<sup>1</sup> which had also identified the significant role that waste-pickers fulfil in recycling chains. My use of the term 'solidarity economy' is congruent with what Laville suggests is the European approach which seeks to include cooperatives and mutual societies, unlike the North-American approach which exclusively refers to the third sector (Laville, 2010). The AVINA foundation's advocacy efforts ensured that the Foundation for Sustainable Development in Latin America recognised the contribution of waste-pickers in waste management and ecosystems. In these advocacy efforts the contribution of waste-pickers is often quantified through the amount of waste material that is averted from landfill sites. Locally the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research estimated that in South Africa waste-pickers annually averted 16-24 tonnes of waste material per picker from landfills. This amounted to R309.2-R748.8 million in landfill airspace (Godfrey, 2016). In practice such 'recognition through quantification' suggests that waste-pickers who tend to function on the margins of society and struggle for a precarious livelihood within stigmatised spaces of urban contexts, should be recognised and formally integrated into waste management systems.

WIEGO<sup>2</sup> felt the need to extend the emergent waste-pickers alliance to other continents in order to make it a truly global alliance and joined the GAWP to ensure that networks of waste-pickers were established internationally. The outcome of this collaborative effort was the formation of waste-picker associations in Africa and India. As a result, the South African Waste-pickers Association (SAWPA) was established in July 2009. The environmental justice organisation, groundWork, played an important founding role in this initiative, but given that at

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<sup>1</sup>A foundation based in Switzerland, promoting sustainable development.

<sup>2</sup>A global network gathering researchers and grassroots workers, concentrating on the informal economy.

the time it was based in the City of Pietermaritzburg, it has had the initial effect of limiting this process to the province of KwaZulu-Natal (Chamane, 2009). SAWPA has been an active group ever since, and had a significant presence in 2011 during the COP 17 meeting held in the City of Durban where they demonstrated and marched to create awareness regarding waste-pickers and their contributing role to society (Fernandez, n.d.). Because of these local actions and global campaigns, in 2013, the Government of South Africa, through the Department of Environmental Affairs, awarded a tender to the company Khabokedi to ‘determine the status and role of waste-pickers and to train them’ (Department of Environmental Affairs, 2013). The formation of waste-picker networks and formal organising has generated pace as a result of the advocacy efforts of NGOs such as those mentioned above. Through these ongoing efforts to extend the waste-picker alliance, waste-pickers situated in cities such as the capital City of Tshwane have now also joined this alliance.

Much like these waste-picker network formations, waste material circulation has gradually expanded to the point where it currently forms an integral part of global commodity flows. Samson (2012) noted that in 2008 the waste recycling industry was one of the first sectors to show the damaging results of the global financial crisis. The noticeable change in the waste recycling industry was due to the fact that China had ceased to import waste materials from Europe and North America once the crisis had set in. The disposal of electronic waste (e-waste) is another process which illustrates how intricately waste materials are embedded within global commodity flows. Over the past two decades the global electronics industry has arguably progressed faster than any other industry in terms of innovation. This progress has accelerated the pace at which commodities reach a point of obsolescence, and in turn has increased the accumulation of e-waste. Tong and Wang (2012) explain that the strict regulation of e-waste disposal in countries of the global North created incentives for e-waste producers to export large quantities thereof to less developed countries (2012:98). They illustrate how this process led to disastrous environmental pollution in the rural areas of southern China, which could be traced back to the improper removal of secondary materials from the waste. These are two brief examples that illustrate the significance of waste material flows within the global economy.



### 2.3 Regional/City Sphere

In this section I discuss aspects of the transformation of the waste management process in the City of Tshwane. My sources include public statements by officials from CTMM, newspaper articles and legislation and city by-laws.

Since South Africa's transition to constitutional democracy and the first democratic elections in 1994, the City of Pretoria has expanded its municipal borders to include the former township areas of Ga-Rankuwa, Atteridgeville and Mamelodi into what is today the City of Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality. The expansion of this municipality drastically heightened the number of people to whom the CTMM had to deliver services. It also had a direct effect on waste management, including the capacity and functioning of the city's public landfills. The municipality's immediate response to the drastically increased demand was to initiate a process of market orientated restructuring and the privatisation of municipal services (Samson, 2012:121). The implementation of this approach, which Samson labels neoliberal, has meant that today the CTMM's waste management is 70% privatised (The City of Tshwane, 2014:100).

One consequence of this approach has been that flows of waste are no longer contained within city-level spheres as it was under Apartheid but that flows of waste have been inserted into global flows of waste and recycled commodities. Despite this push towards privatisation, the waste-governors have been unable to effectively keep up with the surmounting increase in waste generation produced by its growing urban populace, who have also inserted themselves into global commodity chains and consumer culture since the end of Apartheid. The inability of the private and public sectors to effectively govern waste during the country's transition period created opportunities for informal practices of reclaiming. This transition period further permitted local waste flows to be connected to the global circulation of waste. In other words, waste became valuable as commodity chains increased.

During his State of the Capital Address in April 2014, Executive Mayor Kgosietsso Ramokgopa made the following statement regarding the city's waste management:

“Landfill gas generation will see seven of our landfill sites being used for the extraction of landfill (methane) gas to produce concentrated natural gas (CNG) or more electricity. In

December 2013, we closed three of our landfill sites and we are fast running out of space at the remaining sites. We are, therefore, commencing a multiple sorting and recycling facility at the Kwaggasrand site and linking that with a plant that will process the remaining waste for electricity generation” (Mayor Kgosi Ramokgopa, 3 April 2014).

In further elucidation of the CTMM’s plan for transforming the waste management system, an article published in the *Pretoria News* in February 2015 informed the public about the municipality’s new waste strategy to be implemented over the following five years. The specifics of this new strategy included energy generative plants at seven identified landfills within the city. Great emphasis was placed on how much energy would be generated through applying technological innovations such as a biowaste digester and a fired renewable energy plant. The article concluded by saying that job creation will be one of the many benefits created by these projects; the fired renewable energy plant for example promises to create 96 employment opportunities. However, no mention was made of existing informal sector practices, such as waste-picking, that is a feature of landfill sites and how these were to be integrated into the CTMM’s transformative strategies.

The above-mentioned newspaper article was sourced from the City of Tshwane’s Integrated Waste Management Plan (IWMP) (2014). This policy report, released in December 2014, expounded on the municipality’s aims in waste management transformation, aligned with a movement towards a greener economy. These aims were congruent with the 2055 Tshwane Vision as well as the City of Tshwane Green Economy Strategic Framework (GESF). In the IWMP, the CTMM drafted ‘21 strategic issues’ which opposed the ideals of a “liveable, resilient and inclusive city”. The document states that the municipal landfills are “overrun by illegal waste-pickers” (The City of Tshwane, 2014:8-9). This is portrayed as one of the 21 strategic issues, and a lack of security and access control to public landfill sites are mentioned as a root cause. It suggests that an estimated three million tons of waste material is transported to the city’s landfills annually and the municipality plans to reduce this amount by 25% by the end of 2016. In addition to the problem of unmanageable amounts of waste making its way to landfills, a number of the city’s public landfills have reached their limit in terms of capacity. Three landfills

were closed between 2013-2014: Kwaggasrand, Temba and Garstkloof. Only five remain to manage the waste produced by the city. Facing the reality of a costly and languid process of land acquisition, the CTMM did not consider establishing new landfills, but rather transforming the way existing landfills were being operated. They planned to divert the growing amount of waste from ending up on the landfill and to rather develop transfer stations and multi-purpose recycling facilities (MRF) situated close to the landfills.

Kwaggasrand was the first of the closed landfills to be selected for the development of a multi-purpose recycling facility. The MRF would be accompanied by a transfer station adjacent to the landfill site. This transfer station would be fully managed by a private service provider. The MRF facility would comprise three components; a sorting facility dealing with household waste separated at source, a compost processing plant where chipped and shredded garden waste would be turned into compost and a building rubble crushing plant making use of an industrial stone crusher to manage building rubble waste (The City of Tshwane, 2014:128). The three waste management components mentioned here and outlined in the IWMP all constituted waste recycling processes that waste-pickers already incorporated in their practice (see chapters 4 and 5). The IWMP shows the city's push towards increased privatisation of the formal waste management system.

Furthermore, the IWMP described the presence of waste-pickers on the city's landfills as unwanted and that the 'waste-governors' would tolerate organised waste-picking exclusively as a temporary arrangement. Ideally the CTMM would have the waste-pickers incorporated into buy-back centres and removed from public landfills (2014:141). A first step in that direction, as outlined in the plan, was for waste-pickers who were registered with a cooperative to be formally employed by a private recycling company. But this would not provide employment for all waste-pickers; such private initiatives would not be able to provide a large section of the urban waste precariat with employment.

Finally, the IWMP suggested the implementation of Clean Development Mechanisms (CDM) initiatives at landfills as part of a transformed waste management process. CDM initiatives were introduced by the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in 2006

as a means of limiting private sector exploitation of natural resources (Anon., 2014). However, what is today known as the carbon credit market experienced a significant collapse in May 2013. As a commentator critical of the growing market in carbon credits, Monbiot (2013) explained that this collapse was a result of an oversupply of credits which swamped the market and which in turn were orchestrated by the lobbying power of large businesses. He argues that rather than creating a sustainable process of natural resource utilisation, it has had the effect of rationalising the polluting practices of the private sector (Monbiot, 2013). Now, it is true that the CTMM simply has the intention of creating a process of green energy generation, and making use of the CDM carries the potential to realise this ideal in a sustainable manner, but in connecting this micro process to the global economic reality, the CDM initiatives are aligned to neoliberal principles where the state is increasingly adjusting to the dictates of the market.

The closure of Kwaggasrand Landfill was followed by the closure of two other landfills namely, Temba and Garstkloof. My fieldwork commenced on Garstkloof Landfill a month after its closure on 31 December 2013. The following section comprises an ethnographic account of the position at Garstkloof Landfill during this initial phase of conducting research.

#### **2.4 Local: Changes at Garstkloof Landfill**

Garstkloof Landfill is situated in the south-eastern part of the City of Tshwane, within a highly populated residential area. It is one of the landfills selected for a second round of municipal landfill closures, along with Temba Landfill. Garstkloof had been officially closed for approximately a month when I made my first field visit on a Tuesday afternoon, around 16h00. I parked my vehicle at the Engen filling station, situated on the corner of the main R50 Delmas Road and the main entrance to Garstkloof Landfill. Approximately six months had passed since my last visit to the landfill in order to confirm whether I would be able to conduct my fieldwork there. During this previous visit one of the waste-pickers informed me that a rumour had made its rounds among the pickers that the landfill would be closing at the end of that year (2013). At the time he was not greatly concerned about this rumour since similar rumours had been circulating on the site in the past with nothing coming of it. Believing him, I too did not take this

threat seriously. However, on 4 December 2013, the CTMM made an official statement published in *The Rekord East* newspaper. The article briefly stated that Garstkloof Landfill would be officially closed on the 31<sup>st</sup> of December 2013. This development would have immediate ramifications for my research project as a whole. I arrived at the landfill on this particular day with knowledge of the closure, and a measure of uncertainty. I will explain the closure of the landfill later; suffice to say that the decision to close this landfill impacted not only on my research but more importantly it had an impact on what I call the ‘urban waste precariat’.

*Before entering the landfill one has to pass through the main gate which consists of nothing more than a small double story building, serving as a control centre, with a weighing bridge on either side to regulate and weigh the influx of waste. At about 20 meters’ distance from this building I noticed that the entrance and exit had been blocked-off by yellow plastic barricades, generally used for traffic regulation. Behind these barricades I noticed four security guards sitting quite relaxed as the working day drew to a close. Upon passing these guards I decided to stop and question them about the state of affairs at the landfill. They confirmed that the landfill had indeed been closed to all public use and only municipal trucks were still allowed to dump here. Concerning the waste-pickers, they informed me that a small group of individuals remained on the landfill, but that most had left in search of new waste-picking opportunities. The main road that lead into the landfill curved to the left, forming a demarcated corner where a group of carpenters used to construct dog kennels out of discarded wood. But on the day of my visit they were nowhere to be found and no evidence was left that they had ever been there. They had clearly relocated to a new space.*

*About 50 meters up the road a group of approximately twenty people were busy filling up their large white recycling bags to the brim before they loaded it onto a two tonner truck with railings on both sides. The waste-pickers referred to the owner of the truck as a middleman. Middlemen<sup>3</sup> are individuals who form the connecting link between the*

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<sup>3</sup> The term ‘middleman’ will be further explained in Chapter 6.

*recycling company and the waste-pickers on the landfill, when the recycling companies do not operate directly from the landfill. They buy the waste from the waste-pickers at a certain negotiated price and then sell it to the recycling company at a higher price in order to make their profit. Not all recycling companies buy from middlemen; some own trucks that do the rounds, collecting the reclaimed waste directly from the waste-pickers. Due to the landfill's closure, no private companies were operating from the landfill anymore. Which left me wondering how this particular middleman gained access to the site...*

*Standing quite close to the truck I noticed a group of about five people huddled in a circle and I decided to join what seemed to be a convivial gathering. This group included four men, all above thirty years of age, and an elderly woman no younger than 60 years. As I approached them they welcomed me and indicated to me to take a seat between one of the men and the elderly woman. The woman introduced herself as Maria and after these brief introductions I found it to be a fitting opportunity to ask a few burning questions.*

*I first wanted to know how this small group of waste-pickers were able to remain on the landfill even though it was officially closed. To this, one of the men replied saying, that the landfill had only been closed to public use, but that garden refuse was still being transported from the city's mini-dumpsites situated within suburban areas. These loads were transported exclusively by municipal trucks. He also mentioned that up to that day they had not been threatened with forced removal from the landfill. I then asked them whether the waste-pickers had resisted the closure of the landfill. The same man then replied that the news of the closure was communicated about six months in advance and thus, no one had reason to protest against this decision. He further explained that they all formed part of a committee established by some of the Garstkloof waste-pickers and that most members, including the leaders, had moved to other landfills in the city. The majority of people had moved to Hatherley Landfill. I concluded my questions by enquiring how this middleman had managed to gain access to the landfill, knowing that only municipal vehicles were allowed. then explained that they contact these middlemen when they have gathered enough waste for collection and selling. But knowing that only municipal*

*vehicles were allowed entrance they needed to offer the security guards, working at the main gate, a bribe in order for these middlemen to gain access to the landfill. In concluding our conversation Maria explained that she had no intention of leaving Garstkloof. She had worked on the site for 26 years and stated that as long as the landfill contained waste she would remain on the site to recycle it.*

The above ethnographic vignette offers a brief account of the immediate ramifications that the closure of Garstkloof Landfill had on the urban waste precariat who had positioned themselves at the site. The drastic decline in waste being dumped on the landfill forced the majority of waste-pickers to relocate to other landfills in the hope of earning a living. However, a small number of pickers decided to remain. The decision to remain on the site will be explored in chapter five. But for now it is necessary to take a socio-historical approach to the transformation of the space known as Garstkloof Landfill in order to answer the following questions: how did the waste-makers from the wealthy suburbs around Garstkloof Landfill perceive the waste-pickers on the site? What was their role in forcing the waste-governors to close down this waste site? How do the responses of the waste-makers to the waste-pickers compare with how white residents of the city under Apartheid viewed and treated black residents?

## **Chapter 3 – ‘Black Spot’ or ‘Dirty Spot’? The transformation of Garstkloof Landfill**

### **3.1 Introduction**

In this chapter I offer a portrayal of the recent transformation of one of the public landfill sites in the city, namely Garstkloof Landfill. This landfill is situated in the wealthy suburb of Pretoria East, in the midst of the ‘waste-makers’. I offer a historical account of the transformation of this landfill, on which ‘waste-pickers’ were making a living. This is followed by a historical and comparative section on Pretoria’s equivalent of Johannesburg’s Sophiatown and Cape Town’s District Six - Lady Selborne. Not unlike the way in which white residents of Pretoria during Apartheid represented black subjects as dangerous and not belonging in the city, so too contemporary private property owning residents (‘waste makers’) represent the urban waste precariat on the landfill as a threat to their existence and properties. But there are important differences as is demonstrated by the comparison.

During times of political uncertainty, public services often serve as an arena for social actors to contend for power (Fredericks, 2013; Moore, 2009). This is true for South Africa as well and municipal level contestations over service delivery and economic growth have become a feature of our landscape (Jordaan, 2016). In addition to housing, land, transport and employment, the formal waste management system represents one of these arenas. Contestations over power are never only about the materiality of such struggles. They are also accompanied by structures of meaning and symbols. In this chapter I show how private property owners (waste-makers) seek to maintain the value of their properties by stigmatising the waste-pickers who work in their midst. This is happening against the backdrop of a history of segregation within the very same city and region.

### **3.2 A history of Pretoria East**

Preceding the 1994 first national democratic elections, the City of Tshwane (then named Pretoria), represented a typical Apartheid city with its predominantly white population residing



in and around the Central Business District (CBD); visibly segregated residential areas separated by buffer zones and the black population residing on the periphery, in proximity to the industrial areas (Badenhosrt, 2002). In the early 1900's Pretoria was nothing more than a large town consisting of what today is known as the Pretoria CBD and its few surrounding suburban areas. These suburban areas stretched only as far as Mountain View to the north and Hazelwood to the south-east. The extensive suburban developments that today are known as Pretoria East were then large farms situated on the outskirts of the city. Some of these farms such as Garstfontein, Elardus Park and Irene, kept their names as they were gradually bought out and transformed into suburbs by private property developers, first for white residents and now for wealthy, mixed-raced suburban neighbourhoods (Malan, 1996; Meiring, 1980).

The Native Land Act of 1913 that was promulgated by the National Union Government after unification in 1910 is widely regarded as an important step towards segregated urban spaces, regulating the acquisition of land by natives and also dispossessing them of land (Malan, 1996). However, a small number of black landowners retained title deeds to their land after the 1913 Land Act was sanctioned, and a few pockets of black settlements weren't immediately relocated to black reserves (Malan, 1996). These were called 'Black Spots'. In Pretoria, in 1904, a certain Mr De Braal addressed a complaint to the acting district commandant about drunkenness and disorderly conduct of natives on what was then the Garstfontein farm. The police reacted to this complaint and duly organised a police raid on all illegal beer produced by natives on this farm. They arrested 56 young 'boys' who were found without a pass in this area. In this letter, which I sourced from the National Archive in Pretoria, the district commandant ascribes the problem of illegal beer trade and disorderly conduct to the lack of policing in this newly urbanising area in the east of the city (Constabulary, 1904). This was one of the first references to Garstfontein which I found in the archives.

Malan (1996) makes reference to Garstfontein in his work on Pretoria when he describes how a few demarcated areas on the farms located in the east of Pretoria were requested in 1921 to be demarcated as Black and Coloured townships. One of these farms was Garstfontein<sup>4</sup> and the

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<sup>4</sup> Garstkloof's name is derived from Garstfontein

demarcated area was known as Gatsmere but the request was turned down by the National Department of Native Affairs in 1928. The reason was that some of the Garstfontein residents were opposed to the idea of this farm being converted into a location. A certain Mr J Debbes stated in a letter to the Secretary of Native Affairs that “a location would devalue the Garstfontein farm” and he wrote that “the Blacks crossed his farm and stole his wood as they liked and their animals destroyed the farm land” (1996:79). Through the 20<sup>th</sup> century, white residents in the cities of South Africa expressed fears of uncontrolled movement of black people to urban areas. Yet at the same time they expressed a need for a ‘not too far removed’ labour force that can attend to their needs. The 1921 Stallard Commission and the 1923 Native (Urban Areas) Act sought to regulate this influx and address these fears, ensuring that black individuals were only allowed into urban areas in order to minister to white needs (Ballard, 2004b).

Thus, even if earlier requests for black settlement on the Pretoria East farms were rejected by public authorities, in the 1920s black labourers were allowed to establish informal settlements on the farms in the areas of Valhalla, Claudius, Garstfontein, Waverley, Eastwood and Eersterus. Here black labourers could rent the land from the farm owners and commuted daily between the CBD and informal settlements (Malan, 1996:333). In the 1940’s, at the dawn of Apartheid, these areas became known as ‘black spots’. The term referred to farms located in declared ‘white’ South Africa to which Africans held the title of deeds, dating back to before the Natives Land Act of 1913 (Gerhart, 2010). The term also refers to certain white farms which housed informal settlements for black people. Horn (1998) records that Garstfontein was listed as private land which on 19 June 1913 retained undefined locations on its property. The Pretoria City Council showed some reluctance to fully implementing the minimalist land policies which it had introduced in 1936, which offered some tolerance regarding black spots in and around the city. During this period, it was a common practice of the city authorities to use health scares as a mechanism to enable surveillance and control over informal settlements and townships (Ballard, 2004). The legislation used include the 1919 Public Health Act, the 1923 Native (Urban Areas) and the 1934 Slum Act (Ballard, 2004). In 1947 such surveillance was implemented by way of Health Committees in the areas of East Lynne and Garstfontein (Office

of the Administrator of Transvaal, 1947). But it was the Group Areas Act 41 of 1950 which sought the end of the tolerance of black spots (Horn, 1998; Carruthers, 2000). The locations of Atteridgeville, Vlakfontein, Klipfontein and Thembisa were established to serve as the new relocated areas for those removed from the so-called 'white urban areas'.

While this is not meant to be an exhaustive history of black settlement outside of townships in the east of Pretoria, already a century ago white property owners resisted the 'encroachment' of black settlements onto their land by accusing black people of thievery and devaluing property prices. As in many other cities in Apartheid South Africa, the removal of the black spots from so-called 'white urban areas' was carried out systematically and gradually in an attempt to follow through with the implementation of the Act without meeting much resistance from black residents. This attempt worked for most of these removals, but one particular case demands some discussion.

### **3.3 The case of Lady Selborne**

Lady Selborne was a township formed in 1905 in the north-western part of the city, in the suburb today known as Suiderberg, situated against the southern slope of the Magaliesberg (Carruthers, 2000). The township was initially established as a freehold 'coloured' township, and was unique to Pretoria in the sense that Africans here held title deeds to the land (like Sophiatown in Johannesburg and District Six in Cape Town). Carruthers mentions that "from the outset, the residents of Lady Selborne were politically sophisticated and resisted the ever-enveloping tentacles of state control over their daily lives" (Carruthers, 2000:25). With the growth of rural-to-urban migration the surrounding townships becoming overcrowded. Lady Selborne's number of residents grew as landlords rented out their plots to tenants, resulting in a multi-racial community, unwanted in the eyes of the public authorities. Lady Selborne became known as a 'mixed race' freehold township. Because of Lady Selborne's political position and legal formation, its residents were able to resist the Native (Urban areas) Act of 1923, 1937, 1945, to the frustration of the local government, which turned their attention to policing urban influx control and preventing illegal squatting. The municipality received

complaints from white residents bordering Lady Selborne that the township posed a health threat to surrounding (white) residents. On the other hand, the residents of Lady Selborne raised concerns about increasing municipal tax payments. They stated that their tax payments were subsidising the services given to the surrounding, predominantly white suburbs which enjoyed better service than their own (Kgari-Masondo, 2008). These complaints alerted the municipality to the potential of black resistance and it prompted a process of land dispossession. In 1948, the Pretoria City Council agreed that conditions within Lady Selborne were unsatisfactory and should be improved. According to Kgari-Masondo (2008:131) the council planned to “improve” the following: overcrowding and slums; inadequate provision of sanitation and water supply; lack of facilities for prevention of disease and promotion of health; lack of amenities for recreation and the promotion of social welfare; lack of adequate supervision whereby public property is lost, stolen or destroyed; and criminal elements of the population engaging in anti-social activities.

Soon after this process of ‘development’ was initiated, the Group Areas Act of 1950 was promulgated. This piece of legislation provided the city with the means to dispossess Lady Selborne residents of their freehold land. Two of the reasons for municipal intervention listed above that need to be emphasised here is the reference to the township as posing a health hazard as well as the mention of criminal elements in need of adequate supervision and policing. These two aspects are particularly important as I will illustrate that the same arguments were made by waste-makers in the wealthy Pretoria East, recently, in their attempts to have the waste-pickers removed from Garstkloof Landfill (Christopher, 1994).

### **3.4 Post-Apartheid white flight**

In relation to other cities within the international context, Badenhorst (2002) notes that up until the 1970s, the City of Tshwane pursued the traditional Le Corbusierian model in its design and layout. However, after that the city followed a different trajectory and model. The borders were expanded significantly to the east and north, as farms were gradually bought out by private property developers and transformed into suburban residential areas. With the

implementation of Apartheid features, the city became manifestly segregated and the racial divide more starkly defined. Further ramifications of these socio-political transformations were the removal of informal settlements or black spots from white farms which in time forced black labourers to travel longer distances, as they commuted between surrounding townships and even further between the homelands and the work opportunities in industrial areas (Badenhorst, 2002).

The dismantling of Apartheid gained momentum in the late 1980s and by 1994 a large number of black households took part in a process of (re)claiming the inner city. In response, a considerable amount of white households took part in a city-to-suburb movement. White city-to-suburb movement was especially encouraged due to the wide publicity given to crime occurring in the city centre (Christopher, 1994). The phenomenon of the white city-to-suburb movement, which in most cases are triggered by infrastructure degradation and socio-economic changes within the city centre, and often exaggerated by the media, is termed 'white flight' (Christopher, 1994).

This white flight phenomenon expanded towards the northern and eastern parts of the city. The movement was characterized by the construction of large property developments such as security estates and gated communities. Over the course of the two decades that followed the late 1980s, these suburbanising areas developed to such an extent that they became economically independent of the CBD. Badenhorst (2002) marks the construction of an OK Hyperama retail development in Pretoria East in 1979 as the pivotal moment which marked the disintegration of a single CBD and the development of a sprawling suburban periphery. This meant that along with moving their residency to the suburban periphery, middle- and high-income clientele also moved their buying power to an emerging suburban business district. In her exploratory article Badenhorst (2002) considers the usefulness of Garreau's concept of 'edge cities' with reference to Pretoria and the City of Tshwane. Garreau (1991) defines the emergence of 'edge cities' as a process occurring in three waves; the development of residential suburbs as a result of urban sprawl, the movement of the marketplace to suburban development and lastly, the movement of the workplace in proximity to the suburban

residence. In her analysis Badenhorst (2002) concluded that Pretoria East could be classified as an evolving edge city.

To draw our discussion on the process and implications of 'white flight' to a close I point to more recent studies in order to elucidate on the current situation, which will help us understand the history and politics surrounding the closure of Garstkloof Landfill. In an attempt to establish the extent to which Apartheid (racial) residential patterns still dominate the cityscape after twenty years of democracy, Hamann and Horn (2014) use the most recent national census data to conclude that the City of Tshwane remains racially segregated and that it is being re-segregated according to class. In their analysis, Tshwane falls into a category they call 'disconnected-continuity'. This category describes the least integrated scenario within a continuum of other categories, the other two being 'connected-continuity' and 'discontinuity'. Disconnected-continuity captures the common phenomenon of gated communities that dominate the city's suburbs, hinting at re-segregation, albeit not strictly based on race, but also class. Where suburbanisation shifts from being determined by class rather than race, it points to a shift from state to market forms of re-segregation (Hamann, 2014). Du Plessis (2013) confirms this fact in stating that the everyday socio-spatial legacies of Apartheid are reproduced despite efforts to desegregate the (Apartheid) city. As you can see from the visual representation of the data used by Hamann (2014), Garstkloof Landfill is situated in the "hindered desegregation" classification. The implication is that the waste-makers, at least the white property-owning ones in the East, have succeeded in re-segregating themselves in gated communities and that the presence of black waste-pickers at a landfill site in their midst would pose a threat to their property values and their symbolic worlds.

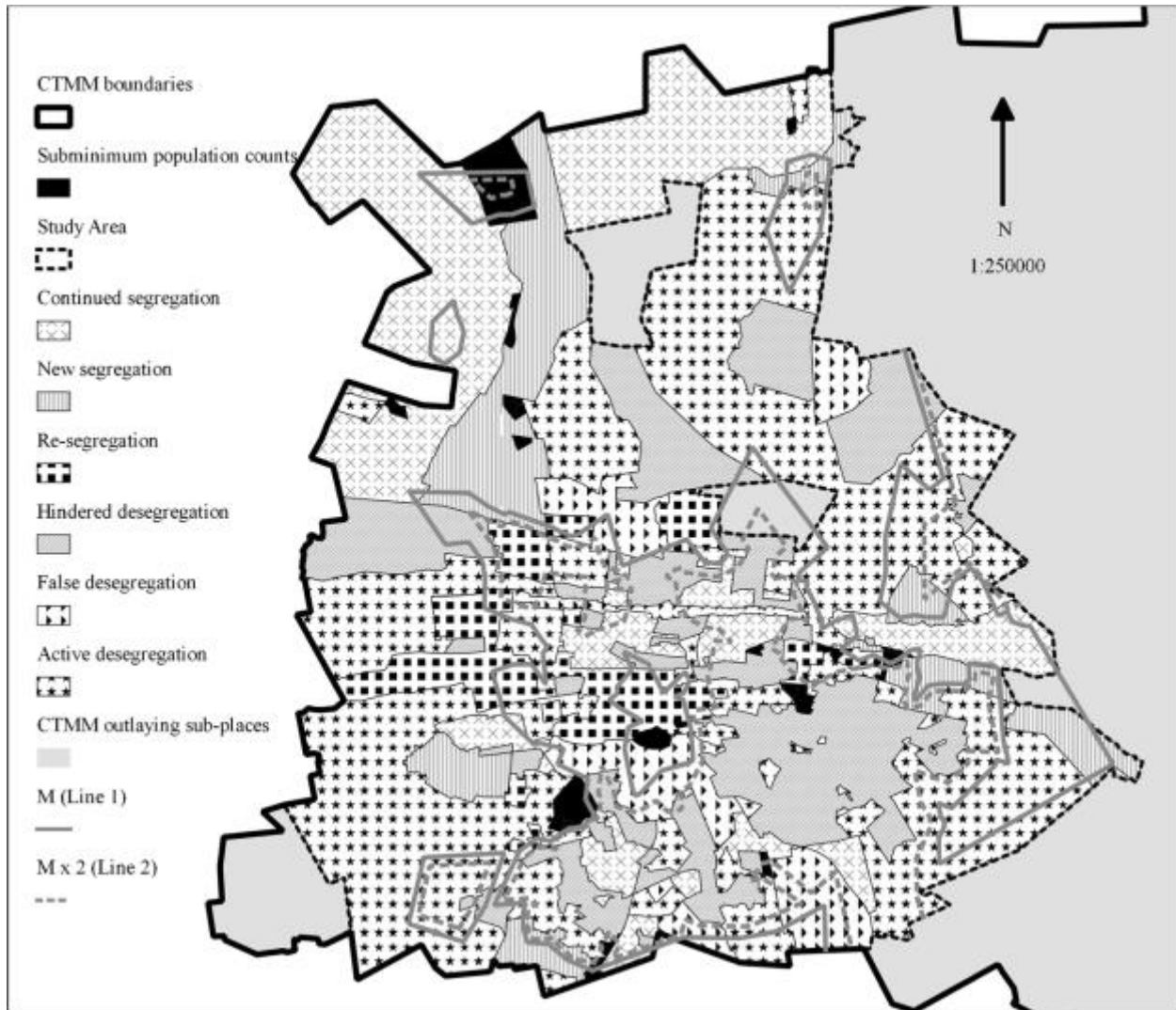


Figure 1 Segregation-desegregation in the City of Tshwane (Hamann, 2014)

### 3.5 Significance of Garstkloof’s geographical position

In mind of the brief history of the area known today as Pretoria East, and the processes which shaped this stratified setting, we now focus our attention on the area’s only public landfill. Garstkloof Landfill was until recently one of eight public landfills operated by the City of Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality. It is unique to the other landfills in two respects. Firstly, it is situated in the eastern part of the city, among Tshwane’s predominantly white middle-class suburbs. Chamane (2009) explains that it was a typical practice of the Apartheid municipalities to set up landfills in or close to black township areas (areas of low economic value). The term

used for this practice is ‘environmental racism’, as it places the burden of ineffective waste management, environmental pollution, and unsightly and poisonous waste dumps on black residents in township areas, while white suburban areas are left landfill free. Secondly, Garstkloof Landfill was open to the dumping of garden refuse and building rubble only, while all other landfills are open to industrial and domestic waste. This limitation became effective after numerous complaints regarding waste pollution from ‘waste-makers’ in the area started making their way to the local municipal office. Residents from the surrounding area, or the ‘waste-makers’, complained about smells emanating from the site. The south-eastern side of the landfill borders on Wingate Golf Course. Perhaps unsurprisingly some of the waste-makers who are members of the golf club objected that during windy seasons plastic bags are found on the course. This was a nuisance as they pursued their leisure time activity. After receiving formal complaints about the matter, the CTMM then limited the kinds of waste that could be dumped at Garstkloof Landfill (Reyneke, 2012).

The city’s various landfills — like landfills the world over — have in the recent past become the working space of a large number of people included in what I call the urban waste precariat. Such people who work with waste on these sites form part of the waste management process, even if they are not recognised by public authorities. Since Garstkloof Landfill was limited to organic waste and building rubble I did not expect to find a large number of the waste precariat on Garstkloof Landfill. However, the reality of the matter is that a conglomeration of between 200-400 individuals were reclaiming and recycling at Garstkloof, claiming to have done so over the last 10 years (Reyneke, 2012). The site is socially and geographically removed from other landfills, and Samson (2010) notes that the reclaimers of Garstkloof did not partake in the city-wide network formation between reclaimers, which might have added to the fact that it has been neglected by academics and developmental organisations. Another aspect which sets Garstkloof apart is the market value of the objects that are dumped on the site. Whereas other landfills situated in poorer neighbourhoods mostly receive soft waste (plastics, glass, cardboard), Garstkloof at times has fridges, television sets and furniture moving through its gate.



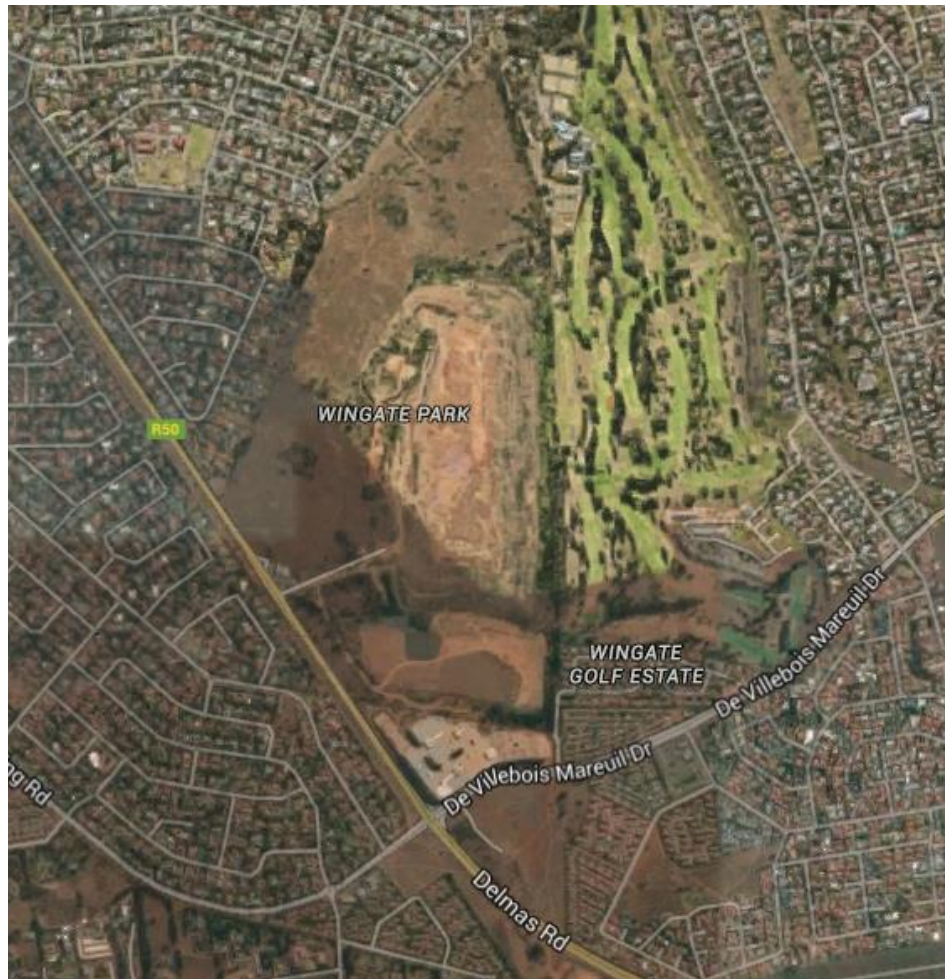


Figure 2 Garstkloof Landfill situated in Pretoria East (Google Earth Ver. 7.1, 2016)

The unique position of Garstkloof becomes evident when it is seen in relation to its immediate surrounding suburbs, the rest of the City and the larger context of the global economy. It is situated in a wealthy area and is located adjacent to a golf course where wealthy people engage in a costly leisure activity. While I am not able to do an analysis of the property relations between the private property owners and the urban waste precariat positioned on Garstkloof Landfill, I am able to examine aspects of the relationship between these two groups – the ‘waste-makers’ and the ‘waste-pickers’ – through their response to waste and the Landfill site. An analysis of the property relations would have been fascinating if we had approached property relations “not as relations between persons and things but as social relations between

persons with respect to things” (Hann, 2005:111). My use of the terms ‘waste-makers’ and ‘waste-pickers’ is exactly one way in which to approach the often hidden and obscured social relations between two categories of people. Again, this relationship cannot be reduced to poor and rich - or to white and black as there are also black property owners who have the same interests as white property owners and as ‘waste makers’ in relation to waste-pickers. So in this chapter I focus on statements made by ‘waste-makers’ as private property owners regarding the waste precariat’s position on the Landfill. This section illustrates that the ‘waste-makers’ who visit the landfill to dump their waste, see Garstkloof Landfill as a ‘cemetery’ where they end their claims to certain types of properties and where they bury their relationship with these objects. In other words, they see it as a cemetery. Most ‘waste-makers’ are oblivious to the fact that the Landfill is also a ‘factory’ of sorts where the waste precariat rework waste (dead objects) in order to generate an income. As Gieryn (2000) reminds us, place is more than just the backdrop or stage where we place our sociological focus. Everything studied is emplaced, and this is distinctly illustrated by the landfill where the waste precariat constantly interacts with the place and its objects in movement while adding meaning and value to it (Gieryn, 2000). Tracing the objects also reveal the social relationships that shape the paths, whether these be stratified according to race or class.

### **3.6 Garstkloof Landfill in the Press**

In the following section I analyse statements made by the private property owners and ‘waste-makers’ about the urban waste precariat working and living on the Landfill. I did not interview waste-makers, but sourced their views from two local newspapers, *The Record* and *Eastern Times*, as these newspapers documented the events and views for two years leading up to the closure of the Landfill.

In February 2012 *The Record Newspaper* published a series of articles discussing the problems which residents were expressing and experiencing in connection with the Garstkloof Landfill. The headings to these articles read: ‘*Dumpsite dangerous to visit*’, ‘*Problems at dumpsite escalate*’ and ‘*Dumpsite a threat*’. The articles stated that motorists entering the landfill were

being attacked, and that their vehicles were intentionally damaged by 'informal recyclers' in order to rob motorists of their valuables upon climbing out of their vehicles. Individuals working on the dumpsite were referred to as *illegal immigrants, foreign nationals, vagrants and the unemployed*, and it was stated that they were illegally squatting on the premises. In the final article prior to the closure, it was reported that the dumpsite had become a threat to those who follow the by-laws of the city (the suburban residents and waste-makers). On 22 August 2012 members of the Democratic Alliance political party lead a protest to the gate of the landfill, protesting against the municipality's inaction regarding the situation at Garstkloof. *The Eastern Times* stated that 1000 people were squatting on the landfill illegally and living in dire conditions. This statement was directly linked to the increase in crime in the area. The heading to this story read, '*Separate people and waste, residents demand*', and mention was made that the protest was organised by ward councillor Rita Aucamp (DA member) (Henwood, 2012). Another two articles were published in October the same year by *The Rekord*. The articles emphasised the fact that break-ins occurred at houses situated in the area surrounding Garstkloof, and once again a direct link was made between these incidents and the waste precariat, illegally living on the landfill. They were portrayed as unemployed, living in unsanitary conditions and as posing a health hazard to the surrounding area. One of the residents living adjacent to the site was interviewed and recorded as saying that "these people" (the 'waste-pickers') were watching her every move from the top of a hill on the landfill (Rekord, 2014; Joubert, 2014).

In August the following year *The Rekord* produced a follow-up story about the situation in and around Garstkloof Landfill. This article made it clear that the residents around the landfill were frustrated with the municipality's inaction to the point that they threatened legal action against the CTMM. They demanded that the people who were illegally squatting on the landfill be removed, saying that these individuals were becoming increasingly threatening to residents who entered the landfill. It further stated that the civil rights organisation, Afriforum, would take legal action against CTMM if they did not respond to the residents' plea. This series of articles ended in December 2013 with an article that informed the public of the closure of Garstkloof Landfill at the end of the same month. It expressed residents' relief at the news of

the landfill closure (Roux, 2013). The waste-makers claimed a political victory, but the Executive Mayor denied them this 'victory' by stating that the closure of the site was the result of depleted landfill capacity.

*The Rekord (Pretoria East)* and *Eastern Times* newspapers are based in Pretoria East and they mostly cover events limited to the eastern suburbs of the city. The journalists at these newspapers produce articles with a specific audience in mind. Hamann and Horn (2014) point out that these south-eastern suburbs are predominantly occupied by white residents, and that the idea of socio-spatial integration has not yet had a visible effect in this area. Arguably, efforts at racial integration have been resisted. One can assume that the target audience of these newspapers are the predominantly white private property owners referred to as the waste-makers. Considering the statements mentioned above, and the specific phrases used, one might ask what social function the production and consumption of these articles perform. What connotative and denotative meanings are contained in the text? What ideologies underlie these texts, and what purpose do they serve?

From a discourse analysis perspective, it is understood that the production and consumption of texts involve processes that lead to discursive practices (Richardson, 2007). Writers draw on existing discourses and genres when producing texts and this is what is meant by discursive practices. Following Richardson (2007) one could argue that discourse contains ideology, and that ideology is not a true reflection of reality, but rather an illusion that is maintained by the elite class in order to uphold their social position (Richardson, 2007).

The statements made in these articles reflect similar sentiments contained in the discourse of the white residents who were situated around Lady Selborne prior to its destruction. But it can be traced back even further to white urban residents who resisted uncontrolled urbanisation and squatting by black people. The texts contain terms such as 'vagrant' and 'illegal immigrant', referring to the people living on Garstkloof Landfill, pointing to their 'out-of-placeness'. In this sense the articles further an exclusionary discourse which aims at perpetuating the private property owner's social position of relative privilege. It serves and represents the interests of the property owning elites, but gives no voice to the urban waste precariat.

In Ballard's study on informal settlements within suburban areas of Durban he asks the question, 'What does it do to the bourgeois sense of self to have its own antithesis on its doorstep?' (2004: 65). The urban waste precariat at Garstkloof Landfill poses a threat to waste-makers and their sense of safety, health, hygiene and morality. This has been illustrated in the newspaper articles mentioned above, with complaints about drunkenness, disorderly conduct, the increase of crime and the reference to lack of adequate sanitation. Ballard (2004) argues further that this multi-leveled threat culminates in the degradation of the white identity's perception of value, which materialises in the actual market value of their private property. The situation then becomes a politics of space, place and identity where the reaction of formal residents to transformation crystallises in the preservation of property value. The underlying ideology articulated by these newspaper articles contributes to the preservation of the private property owner's perceived value, through the stigmatisation and criminalisation of the urban waste precariat.

Now, these points highlight and explain the perceptions fostered by the property owners or waste-makers in relation to the spatial transformation of Garstkloof Landfill. In the following section I relate the actual transformation to its local and global context. The symbolic system of value upheld by private property owners clearly surfaces in their response to this transformation.

### **3.7 Purification rituals**

I have shown how Garstkloof Landfill was represented through the media as an ambiguous space that carried the potential danger to violently disrupt the order of life in the surrounding suburbs and leisure spaces. The order of things on the outside – the peaceful suburb free of waste - was threatened by the apparent pollution, disorder and violence on the inside, saturated by objects that refuse to die. Mary Douglas, in her seminal work *Purity and Danger* (1966), focuses on the perception that societies have of what is pure and impure, clean or taboo. Douglas argues from the assumption that there exists no such thing as absolute dirt, but rather that any society's perception of dirt is formed by socially constructed classifications

(Douglas, 1966:2). These classifications create a symbolic order within which a specific society functions, and in this order taboos serve as protecting devices. On the other hand, ambiguity often poses a threat to this order and Douglas argues that taboo confronts the ambiguous, and places or replaces it in the category of sacred (Douglas, 1966: xi). In the chapter Secular Defilement, she poses the view that not only “primitive” societies but also contemporary European society form their ideas of dirt based on symbolic systems. In this sense where the category ‘dirt’ exists there is a symbolic system, which presents the idea of dirt as ‘matter out of place’ (Douglas, 1966:44). Symbolic systems influence how society forms its perception of waste, and waste too could be seen as ‘matter out of place’. Once an object undergoes the ritual of being ‘dumped’ it is defiled and discarded into the category of ‘matter out of place’ when it is not placed in its proper place. The waste then needs to be removed, and is dumped on the landfill.



Figure 3 Democratic Alliance members protest (Fred Nel, “Protest outside Tshwane Garstkloof dumping site due to bad management”. 22 August 2012. Tweet.)

The title of the *Eastern Times* article demands ‘Separate people and waste’. It is the practice and privilege of the private property owners and ‘waste-makers’ to be separated from their sanitary and household waste. In a way, continuous consumption requires the proper alienation of some commodities (not just their depletion) before new commodities can be purchased. This ‘right to dispose’ stands in stark contrast to the waste precariat living within, and making a living from waste on the landfill. Their situation is in some respects the opposite of alienation or disposal of waste. They handle, inspect, smell and transform dead objects. They do not separate themselves from waste but become entangled with it. This is why, from the perspective of the ‘waste-makers’, those who make a living through handling waste carry the potential to disrupt the existing symbolic system and as such are dangerous.

Douglas refers to ‘purification rituals’ that are performed with the function of re-patterning objects or people according to symbolic systems. From the perspective of the waste-makers, the urban waste precariat are people ‘out of place’ who work with materials out of place. The above-mentioned articles and protest serve as examples where private property owners seek to re-pattern the urban waste precariat according to existing symbolic systems. The waste precariat on the landfill is stigmatised and criminalised. From the perspective of the ‘waste-pickers’ however, waste and the public landfill provide them with an opportunity for income generation. Perhaps this is exactly where the symbolic anomaly lies, in the fact that the waste precariat is able to generate a living from the objects and spaces which have been stigmatised as matter out of place – as dirt and as dead. In Douglas’s words, a person out of place is “a person in a marginal state, left out of the patterning of society, and therefore placeless” (Douglas, 1966:118). The term placeless here refers to the fact that the ‘outsiders’ to the landfill (‘waste-makers’) regard it as taboo to live on a landfill. Although the City of Tshwane’s solid waste bylaws clearly state that the separation and classification of recyclable material should be performed at the point of generation, Simon Mhlango (Municipal Manager at Garstkloof Landfill) explained that “the waste-pickers do not have legal permission to live on the site, but because they contribute to the recycling chain it is tolerated” (Reyneke, 2012).

I have mentioned earlier how the portrayal of the waste precariat by the newspapers serves to preserve the interest and social position of the private property owner and waste-makers. Furthermore, their perception of value crystallises in both the material value of property as well as moral values in a symbolic system. I view these portrayals as purification rituals that waste-makers perform in order to re-pattern the placeless individual, and maintain their symbolic system. However, the newspaper articles are but one of the re-patterning actions. The private property owners have also signed petitions, organised a march outside the gate of Garstkloof Landfill and held discussions at various community policing forums. These actions point to the fact that 'waste-makers' who live near the landfill where the 'waste-pickers' are situated appeal to the 'waste-governors' to intervene in a situation they deem threatening.

During Apartheid the complaints made by the white suburban residents were effective in raising the concern of the state and to prompt them to intervene as in the case of Garstfontein's informal settlement (1904) and the Lady Selborne Freehold Township (1950). But in the case of Garstkloof Landfill there is a noticeable transformation in the actions taken and arguments made by the private property owners. I have illustrated earlier how the Pretoria-eastern suburbs developed mostly as a result of major white flight during the 1980's and 1990's. The Democratic Alliance (DA) holds a strong constituency in the Pretoria East area and all these wards are run by DA councillors. On the other hand, CTMM is run by the ruling African National Congress (ANC) party (at the time of writing). This created a unique political situation in the Garstkloof Landfill case. The reluctance of the CTMM to take prompt action in response to the plea of the white property owners might be understood by the fact that the ANC's constituency lies with the poor marginalised black majority of the city, and closing the Landfill would be seen to be acting against the benefit of this group. Yet, CTMM has a legacy of aligning itself with white private property owners to the detriment of the poor, as in the case of Tswelopele (Brand, 2014). It would seem that the CTMM, in this case, attempted to appease both the property owners and the waste precariat by closing the Landfill to public use, without forcibly removing the waste precariat from the site.



### 3.8 Conclusion

The preceding chapter identified a number of changes that the CTMM commissioned for the waste management of the City. The closure of Garstkloof Landfill is aligned with these changes, and although this decision settled the frustrations of the surrounding property owners and waste-makers, it was also informed by a growing interest to insert local flows of waste into an emerging global waste economy. The concept of matter out of place provides a perceptive lens through which to understand the social process that has unfolded in and around Garstkloof Landfill and its eventual closure. It speaks to the cultural and symbolic dimensions of what is often regarded as economic struggles or material interests. The idea that perceptions of purity, danger, pollution and taboo are all evidence of a symbolic structure under threat, forces one to critically engage with one's own perception of these concepts and understand the purposes it might serve. The case of Garstkloof Landfill further demonstrates a specific political dynamic surfacing through the transformations of public and private spaces, where private property owning residents and waste-makers raise their concerns and outline the need for state assistance in the removal of unwanted threats such as waste-pickers. On the other side, a neoliberalising state seeks to lay hold of a growing economic waste sector which was not utilised prior to the closure of Garstkloof Landfill. Hann mentions in his discussion on property relations that ownership of private property is no longer a prerequisite for political citizenship, as was the case in Europe in the nineteenth century (2005). However, when looking at the transformation brought about over the course of 30 years in Pretoria East, one has to question whether this might be the case, locally. Certainly the ownership of private property and land mirrors the relationship that waste-makers and waste-pickers have toward waste. I argue that whereas the Apartheid government sought to remove 'black spots' from declared white areas, the current state and private sector seek to frame landfill sites as 'dirty spots' and to remove them and those waste-pickers who work on them from the context of clean, safe, and orderly suburban neighbourhoods. Clearly, the waste-makers have a greater right to Pretoria East than the 'waste-pickers'.

## **Chapter 4 – Hatherley Landfill: Solidarity initiatives in the face of formalisation and privatisation**

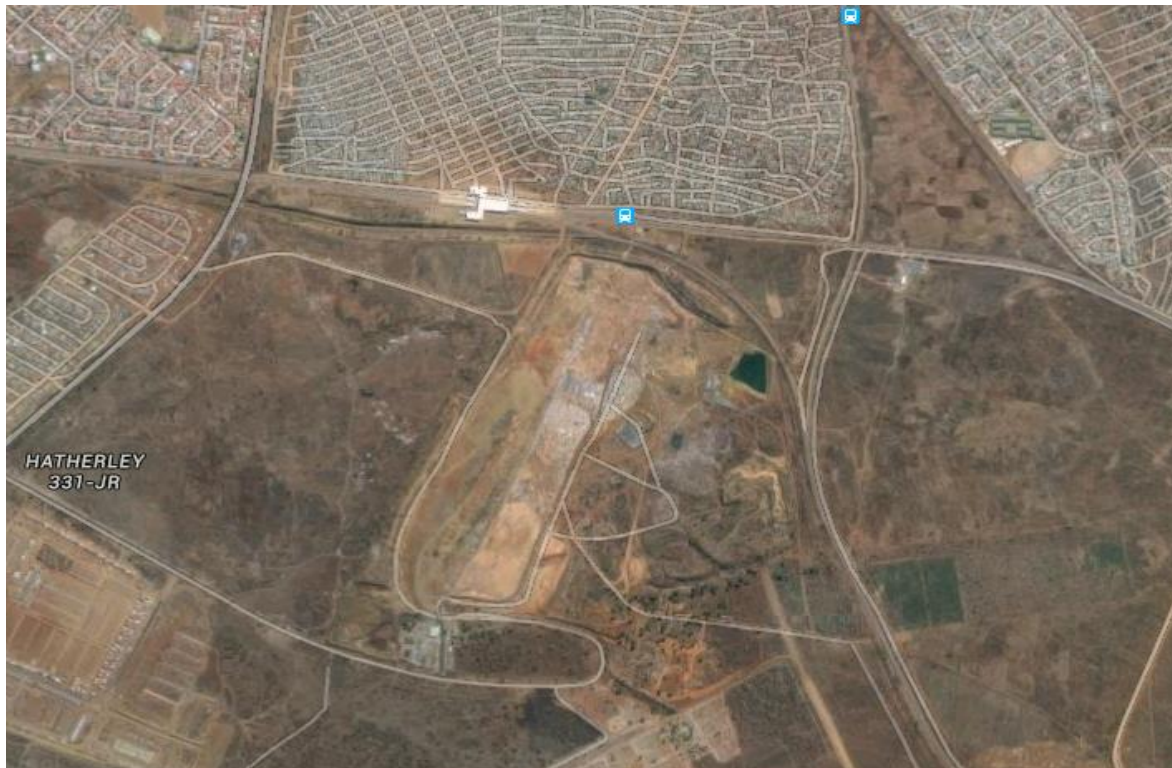
### **4.1 Introduction**

I concluded chapter three by analysing aspects of the relationship between waste-makers, waste-governors and the urban waste precariat within the context of the public closure of Garstkloof Landfill. The purpose of this chapter is to focus in greater detail on various responses of the waste precariat to this particular transformation of the waste management system in the City of Tshwane. I introduce the case of another public landfill site and I include in my analysis another social actor namely the third sector. In this chapter I use my ethnography to highlight some of the weaknesses of formalisation and privatisation of waste management efforts advocated by the third sector, activists and scholars. I do this by pointing out some of the destructive consequences of these efforts on the livelihoods of the urban waste precariat.

Hatherley Landfill is one of eight landfills situated in the City of Tshwane and, although it is owned by the CTMM, it has been managed by a private company from the onset. The management of Hatherley Landfill has therefore not been privatised in the sense that services performed by the public sector were transferred to the private sector. The management of Hatherley Landfill can rather be described in terms of a public-private partnership where the public sphere is privately expanded (Samson, 2009b). As I mentioned in my introduction, my field research alerted me to the existence of a variety of people who make a living from waste on landfills who should not, or do not want to be, classified as waste-pickers. I present data to this effect in this chapter. Most third sector initiatives focusing on waste treat waste-pickers as an undifferentiated group, preferring to ignore that there are various ways, other than soft-waste picking, in which members of the waste precariat are implicated within the waste management process. Also in my introduction, I offered an outline of the theoretical concepts deployed in this dissertation. One particular approach I discussed theorises objects as things in processes of constant change and movement, as opposed to the view that these objects have fixed forms, existing independently of time and space. In this chapter I apply a similar approach to the concept of 'place'. I appropriate the concept of 'non-place' (Rapport, 2000) to illustrate

the complex and multi-layered networks and patterns that are implicated in the waste management process that unfolded during data collection. These complexities are disregarded when the notion of ‘normative singularity of place’ is applied to spaces such as landfills (Rapport, 2000). Non-places, in this respect, refer to “palimpsests on which the scrambled game of identity and relations is ceaselessly rewritten” (Auge 1995:79 in Rapport, 2000:293). Here the concepts of place and non-place represent two contrasting modalities which play off simultaneously in the subjective experience of waste-pickers and the urban waste precariat. In this sense “no place is completely itself and separate, and no place is completely other” (Rapport, 2000:294). I use the ethnographic sections below to demonstrate these points.

The CTMM’s decision to close Garstkloof Landfill altered the focus of my research project from the social-organisation of people working on the site to the relocation of the waste precariat to a new landfill – Hatherley Landfill. This landfill borders in the northern section on Phumelong informal settlement and in the western section on Nellmapius. Both these areas form part of the larger Mamelodi Township. Hatherley Landfill is intricately enmeshed within this immediate social-economic sphere, and the concept ‘out of sight, out of mind’ does not apply to this particular landfill among local residents of Mamelodi. Through their daily actions of commuting, recycling and reclaiming, the waste precariat patterns their movements in and around the landfill. These movements and actions are part and parcel of other mundane processes daily unfolding in the township and surrounding areas (See Figure 5).



**Figure 4 Hatherley Landfill (Google Earth Ver. 7.1, 2016)**

The industrial area in Tshwane known as Silverton is situated approximately five kilometres west of Hatherley Landfill. A large number of recycling companies operate from this industrial area and municipalities have tended to situate landfills in the vicinity of industrial rather than residential areas. This creates the opportunity for ‘middlemen’ to render their transportation services to waste-pickers who are unable to transport reclaimed materials from the landfill to markets or recycling companies. This service offered by the independent ‘middlemen’ is done for a fee which is negotiated between the waste-pickers and ‘middlemen’ independent of recycling companies and the municipality.

Upon accessing the secondary road that turns off from Solomon Mahlangu Drive and leads to the main entrance of Hatherley Landfill, one comes across heaps of earth dumped on both sides of the road. These heaps were dumped here by the municipal trucks in order to ensure that no waste be dumped illegally on the roadside right in front of the Landfill entrance. Upon arrival at the main gate of the site, one is overwhelmed by the hustle and bustle of fast moving

trucks along with municipal officials and waste-pickers shouting as they navigate and negotiate with the drivers. At this main gate private security guards serve as the only apparent gatekeepers to the landfill. The main entrance is equipped with a weighing bridge where vehicles carrying large amounts of waste are weighed and charged according to the amount of waste they carry into the landfill. For the duration of my fieldwork the bridge was out of order and the municipal officials had to estimate the weight of the waste loads brought into the site by private companies and the public.

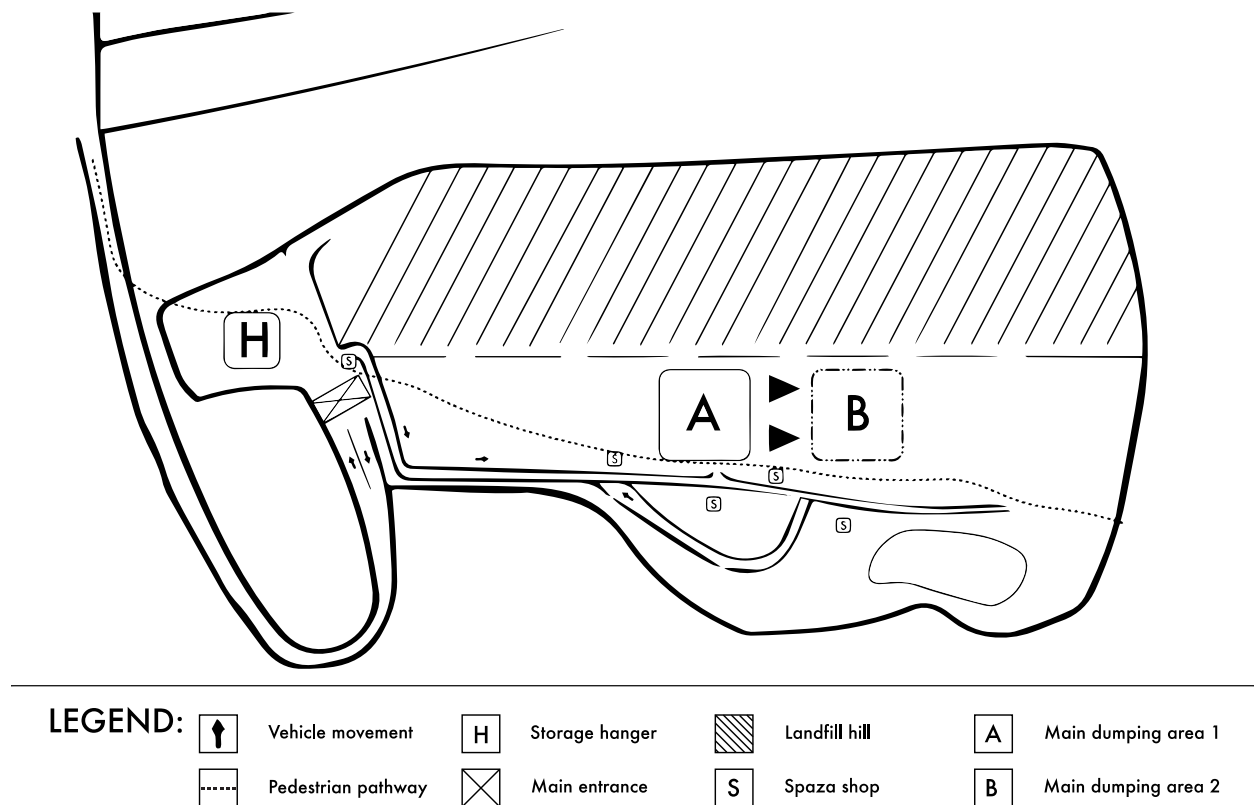


Figure 4 Field notes sketch illustrating the everyday movements in Hatherley

The municipal offices are situated close to the main entrance and adjacent to these offices a corrugated iron hanger is conspicuously placed (See Figure 5). This hanger serves as a storage space for reclaimed and sorted waste. Once individual waste-pickers have reclaimed and sorted their waste they take it to the hanger where it is stored until recycling companies make their collection. From this hanger the main road follows downwards into the allocated dumping area, and here the stench emanating from the accumulated waste overpowers one's senses, especially when visiting the site for the first time. Garstkloof Landfill was mainly set aside for the dumping of garden refuse and building rubble. However, it still received a reasonable amount of domestic waste from municipal trucks, but Garstkloof Landfill did not have this overwhelming sensory characteristic I came across at Hatherley Landfill. The allotted main dumping area at Hatherley Landfill is by far the most action filled space on the landfill site, teeming with waste-pickers, municipal officials and all kinds of waste removal vehicles.

One aspect of how the municipality manages the landfill takes the form of cyclical processes which entails constant movement of people and machinery. The movement of this cyclical process is particularly well visible at Hatherley Landfill where the dumping area consists of a longitudinal conduit that spans 500 metres in length and 100 metres in width. Within this conduit the dumping area is adjusted or rotated on a weekly basis according to the rate at which the space is filled out with new arrivals of waste loads. This longitudinal conduit forms the basis of the landfill, and through the influx of waste it is filled up layer after layer, each averaging about one to two metres in height. This process is illustrated by 'A' and 'B' in Figure 5.

Numerous spaza shops are set up around the dumping area and alongside the main road. Most of these shops supply small snacks and 'loose draw' cigarettes to the conglomeration of people who move daily through the landfill. Some of these spazas even supply freshly cooked meals to satisfy the sumptuary needs of those working on the landfill. In this way a micro economy exists on the landfill indicating that not only objects of waste but also sumptuary commodities are circulated in and out of the landfill. This illustrates but one of the landfill's connections to its surrounding milieu. Apart from this connection shaped by the consumption patterns of those

positioned on the landfill, Hatherley is further enmeshed within its immediate context through the movement of surrounding residents through the landfill space. A number of pedestrians daily walk through the landfill. They prefer to walk the shortened route through the landfill to their home, instead of following the longer route along the main tar road. Many of them reside in the neighbouring residential areas of Phumelong and Nellmapius. This simply illustrates that the landfill is directly connected to its immediate context by the commodities and bodies that move through it. The landfill is not simply an isolated cemetery where commodities go “to die”, even if that is the way in which many waste-makers and waste-governors might perceive the landfill.

#### **4.2 A history of Hatherley Landfill and the role of the third sector**

Hatherley Landfill was officially opened in 1998 to replace the previous landfill that accepted the waste of the north-eastern areas of the city (The City of Tshwane, 2014). From the onset the CTMM placed the landfill under private management and for the duration of the first year no waste-pickers operated on the site. A year later, according to Samson (2010), 104 waste-pickers relocated to Hatherley Landfill due to overcrowding at another municipal landfill. Hatherley Landfill seemed like a good site for many of the waste-pickers who stayed in the north-eastern part of the city. However, the CTMM officials in charge of Hatherley Landfill were reluctant to allow this group of waste-pickers to access the landfill. A number of these waste-pickers were active members of the African National Congress (ANC) and they convened with the political party’s local branch to request their support in gaining access (Samson, 2010). What followed was a two-week protest organised by this group of waste-pickers. They protested in front of the main entrance of the Landfill, blocking off all vehicle access until the CTMM and the private company negotiated with the waste-pickers and ANC representatives. The outcome of this negotiation was that the private company offered access to the waste-pickers on the precondition that they established a representative committee. The company wanted this committee to function as the enforcer of rules that were agreed upon by both the waste-pickers and the company itself. By taking these actions the private company impressed

the municipality to such an extent that they requested the company to train the waste-pickers regarding recycling. The aim was to give this approach a trail run as a possible solution to exercising control over waste-picker practices. If it proved to be effective, the same approach would then be replicated on all the other public landfills in the city (Samson, 2010).

In my view, the above-mentioned event played a significant role in the CTMM's acknowledgement of the contribution that waste-pickers were making and in accepting their presence on the city's landfills. For this reason alone, Hatherley Landfill is significant as it was the first instance in which waste-pickers organised themselves and petitioned the waste-governors in the City of Tshwane. Even if a private company played an important role in this process, it saw the establishment of waste-picker committees. It also initiated the first of many failed attempts by the CTMM to initiate and drive 'sustainable' and 'entrepreneurial' projects through waste-picker committees on the city's landfills. One such example was to get waste-pickers to produce handbags from waste materials. This project was unsuccessful due to the cost of labour being higher than the price for which the products could be sold (Samson, 2010).

This failed project was followed by the establishment of buy-back centres which Samson (2010) identifies as the second phase of local initiatives driven through the waste-picker committees. The National Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism (DEAT) allocated funds for the construction of three buy-back centres which were planned to be constructed by private companies managing Hatherley Landfill and Kwaggasrand Landfill. The private company intended to create an orderly and effective space where waste-pickers could clean and sort their materials. They believed this would support waste-pickers in establishing cooperatives in order to manage the buy-back centres independently. They had hoped that this would eliminate the middlemen and place them in a position to negotiate prices for reclaimed waste directly with the recycling companies. I will not go into detail on how this attempt failed at Hatherley Landfill as Samson (2010) offers a detailed description of this process. Suffice to say that, as it turned out, the corrugated iron hanger that was constructed to serve as a buy-back centre was repurposed (and recycled) by the waste-pickers into a storage space.



In 2004 the waste-pickers at Hatherley Landfill strengthened their negotiation position. They converted the landfill committee into a registered cooperative called the Yebo Mayibuye Cooperative. As I have mentioned above, the formation of the waste-picker committee was initiated by the private company managing Hatherley Landfill. I also explained that the establishment of buy-back centres was done with the intention of supporting waste-pickers in forming an independent cooperative. While the work of Samson (2009, 2010) has been crucial in documenting this history, I am of the opinion that she over-emphasised the autonomy and agency of waste-pickers in the establishment of Yebo Mayibuye Cooperative and the formation of the Tshwane Waste-picker Network. She downplayed the role that NGOs such as groundWork and the South African Waste-picker Network, played in educating and organising waste-pickers through workshops. Private companies played a role too, and the NGOs were keen to present the waste-pickers as an undifferentiated group. Since the important work done by Samson, the situation at Hatherley Landfill has changed. The closure of public landfills in the city resulted in a rapid influx of the urban waste precariat to Hatherley Landfill. The number of people working on the site daily increased to such a degree that the conventional ways of waste-picking and organising waste-pickers had become contested and complex.

In the following section I emphasise the actions and practices of the urban waste precariat which have enjoyed less attention in this existing literature. I show that the waste precariat at Garstkloof Landfill were able to re-establish themselves on Hatherley Landfill, not as a result of their alignment to waste-picker committees or cooperatives, but rather through utilising the potential which the material reality of Hatherley Landfill had to offer. This was accomplished not only through being organised as a collective, but also by relying on acquired skills and established social networks which were formed over years of exchanges and negotiations at Garstkloof Landfill. Yet, those who were forced to leave Garstkloof Landfill and moved to Hatherley Landfill were unable – at least during the first year of their relocation – to overcome the loss of livelihoods that their relocation occasioned.

### **4.3 Beyond ‘waste-pickers’ to the ‘the urban waste precariat’**

I have explained in chapter two how waste-pickers have been depicted as an undifferentiated group in the existing literature. This depiction typically adopts the term ‘waste-picker’ or ‘reclaimer’ to refer to individuals who reclaim and recycle waste materials from landfill sites and streets across the globe. Waste-pickers are described as intentionally claiming a position on the landfill where they reclaim, separate and sort numerous types of recyclable waste. They then sell sorted waste to private recycling companies. This practice of waste-picking involves the reclaiming of what is known as ‘soft waste’. Soft waste consists of materials such as white paper, numerous types of plastic, cardboard and glass. Another form of waste material that is not seen as soft waste, but which typically forms part of waste-picking, is scrap-metal recycling. Scrap metals include aluminium, copper, zinc, brass, steel and stainless steel. The events which I have briefly described in the section above concern the formation of waste-picker committees and cooperatives among individuals who practise the conventional forms of reclaiming and recycling. Much was happening outside of this process. My use of the term ‘urban waste precariat’ is an effort to include those individuals implicated in the waste management process who do not perform soft waste-picking, and are typically written out of academic accounts. In the next few pages I will offer ethnographic vignettes demonstrating the forms of reclaiming and recycling that occur on landfills but which are not included or represented by those ‘waste-pickers’ who join the committees and cooperatives.

### **4.4 Site’s operational description including all discrepancies**

By the end of 2013 the CTMM had closed three of the city’s eight landfills (Garstkloof, Kwaggasrand and Temba). The CTMM reasoned that these landfills had reached full capacity. The closures had several effects, one of which was that a large number of people who formed part of the urban waste precariat relocated to other landfills in the hope of continuing their provisioning through reclaiming and recycling. At that point Hatherley Landfill presented itself as an alternative to some of those individuals whose livelihoods were disrupted following the consecutive closures. However, the urban waste precariat positioned at Hatherley Landfill were

organised and dominated by the local waste-picker committee established by the private company. Although the CTMM regulated access to the landfill itself, this committee controlled access to recyclable waste, especially freshly dumped heaps in the main dumping area described earlier. Within these freshly dumped heaps, waste-pickers seek in earnest to pick and reclaim the kinds of soft waste described above. These are the kinds of waste on the landfill that generate the easiest and most consistent form of income generation through the market. The pamphlet illustrated in figure 6 shows the prices paid by a private recycling company for reclaimed soft waste on Hatherley Landfill. But, although soft waste constitutes the largest part of the waste that is reclaimed at the landfill, quite a few other types of waste are reclaimed and recycled on the fringe areas of the landfill, away from the main dumping area. Because access to soft waste is controlled by the committee on site, newcomers at Hatherley are relegated to reclaiming and recycling on the fringe area. Soft waste and scrap metal materials are usually found in dumped heaps in the main dumping area. This area, as I have mentioned, is constantly adjusted along the longitudinal conduit, as it is filled up layer after layer. Fringe reclaiming and recycling takes place at the areas allocated for organic waste and building rubble.



**remade** Hatherley  
21-Jan

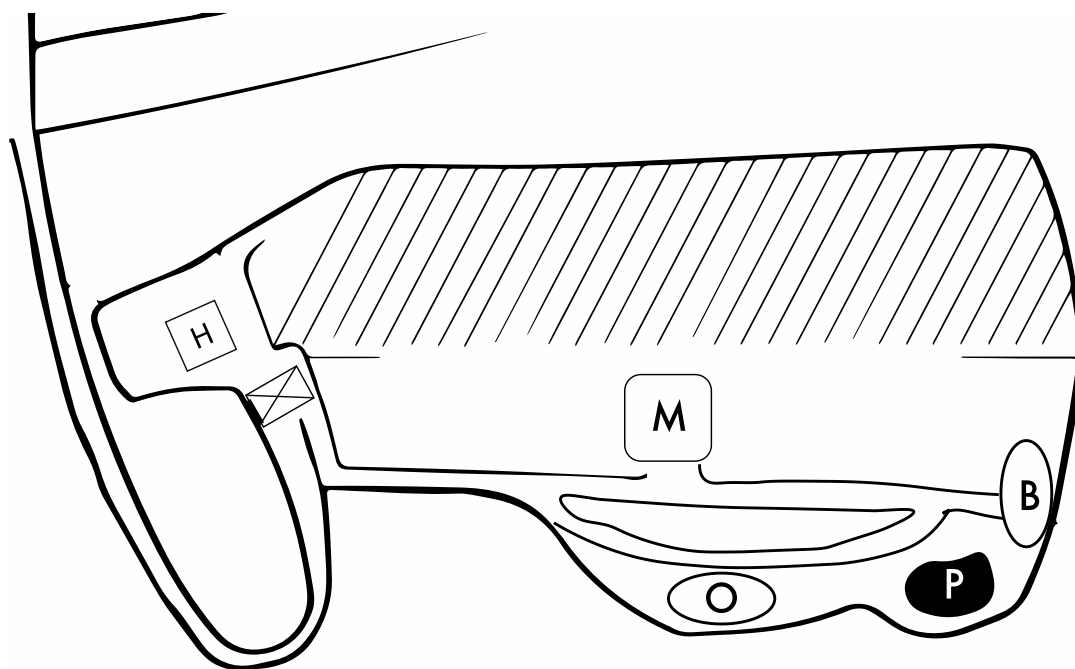
**Price List**

| Grade                    | Price Incl. |
|--------------------------|-------------|
| HL1 (white paper)        | R 1.50      |
| CMW (colour paper)       | R 0.40      |
| FN (news paper)          | R 0.60      |
| K4 (boxes)               | R 0.75      |
| PLC                      | R 2.00      |
| PLM                      | R 1.00      |
| HD (sta soft)            | R 2.20      |
| PP (khere khere)         | R 2.20      |
| PETC <sup>Δ</sup> (coke) |             |
| SW (chappies)            | R 0.80      |
| GLASS                    | R 0.35      |
|                          | PER KG      |







C/o Edison & Staal Str, Pretoria Industria  
Telephone: (012) 386 7039  
Facsimile: (012) 386 4360

Figure 5 Remade Recycling Company pricelist found at Hatherley Landfill (21 January 2015)

At Hatherley Landfill, these dumping areas are set apart from the main dumping area, and are situated behind the domestic waste section to the eastern side of the landfill. These areas are illustrated by 'O' and 'B' in Figure 7. When passing along the main road that leads through Hatherley Landfill, one comes across piles of bricks stacked and displayed along the sides. The men who sell these bricks refer to it as *mampara* bricks. *Mampara* is a colloquial term meaning an object that is deformed or warped, and also a person who is stupid. The bricks are recycled by chipping off residue cement, and as a result these bricks have not retained the perfect square shape of new ones. The *brick recyclers* spend most of their days carrying bricks from one point to the other or chipping away at the cement using a sharp hard rock.



**LEGEND:**

|   |                |   |                   |  |                 |
|---|----------------|---|-------------------|--|-----------------|
|  | Storage hanger |  | Main dumping area |  | Pond            |
|  | Main entrance  |  | Organic waste     |  | Building rubble |

**Figure 6** Field notes sketch showing fringe recycling areas

Brick recycling is a male dominated recycling practice and I did not find any woman performing it while conducting fieldwork. These mampara bricks are normally sold in stacks of hundreds to the public - the general selling rate at the time of fieldwork was 50 cents per brick. This is less than half of the then retail price of brand new bricks. Apart from bricks, discarded pieces of wood are also retrieved from waste heaps in the building rubble area. A small number of men utilise reclaimed wooden planks to construct dog kennels and garden benches. When conversing with these *wood recyclers* they emphasised the fact that all the materials used for producing these kennels, benches and crafts were to be found on the landfill, from the tools to the nails (the nails for example are pulled out of old planks and re-used). They have on occasion found half empty buckets of paint and varnish among the dumped heaps which they were able to use.

The organic waste area is situated adjacent to the building rubble area (See Figure 7). This is where I observed and identified two forms of fringe reclaiming and recycling. Those who dump organic waste in this section are mostly employees of private garden service companies as well as suburban residents. Around this organic waste area, a number of men offer their offloading services to the visitors who dump organic waste. These men anticipate the vehicles' entrance into the landfill and once they have identified a vehicle as potentially containing building rubble, organic waste or other objects of value that will escape the control of the committee, they immediately attempt to jump onto it. Once positioned on the vehicle they rummage through the load to acquire valuable objects or simply to direct the driver to the correct dumping area. At the dumping area, the men offer to offload the vehicle in the hope that the driver will then acknowledge their service by extending a small amount of money, which usually amounts to anything between one and twenty Rand. This offloading and directing service constitutes one of the fringe recycling practices identified.

The other fringe recycling practice I observed and identified was performed by men who sold firewood from Hatherley Landfill. These men extract large pieces of wood from chopped down trees which have been dumped in the organic waste section by garden service companies and the general public. They then chop the tree stumps into smaller pieces and sell it as firewood

along the main road that cuts through the landfill. All along this very same road a large number of spaza shop owners have positioned themselves as this is the area where most of the human and vehicle traffic navigates the landfill space. The following section will serve to illuminate the way some spaza owners are aligned to the waste management process, even though they do not feature in the formal representation of this process or are regarded as ‘waste-pickers’ per se.

#### **4.4.1 Leo’s liminal spaza as vantage point**

Following the closure of Garstkloof Landfill the urban waste precariat who had to relocate experienced a period of transition whereby individuals calculated their response to the closure. During this period of uncertainty and transition I followed one spaza shop owner called Leo in his relocation to Hatherley Landfill. Leo had become a key informant during the initial fieldwork and by following him I could reestablish my relations with others who had moved from Garstkloof Landfill to Hatherley Landfill. He was the owner of a well-established spaza shop on Garstkloof Landfill and its closure had a devastating effect on his reasonably viable spaza business. As many moved from Garstkloof Landfill to Hatherley Landfill, he had no choice but to follow his clientele.

When I met up with Leo at Hatherley Landfill for the first time, I was taken aback by the significantly downscaled set-up of his business. He was sitting under a shoddy piece of nylon netting with only one small crate displaying a humble supply of stock. This was only a fraction of his former business on Garstkloof Landfill and consisted of two shacks, two tables packed with stock and numerous solar panels which ensured that, at a price, noone’s cellular phone ran out of battery power. One of his business shacks on Garstkloof Landfill even contained a television where people paid to watch DVD’s. Leo explained that he gained access to the new site through befriending a member of the waste-picker committee, based at Hatherley Landfill.

Starting from a low base, Leo’s shop slowly grew and his clientele expanded as he gradually became familiar with the way Hatherley Landfill functioned. Soon, Leo’s spaza shop became an important space on the landfill, especially for those who knew Leo from Garstkloof Landfill. The

number of former Garstkloof Landfill reclaimers gathering around Leo's spaza increased daily as more and more individuals relocated to Hatherley Landfill. At this spaza they were re-establishing social ties that might have been disrupted as a result of the transition to Hatherley Landfill. Leo's spaza became the gathering place for newcomers from Garstkloof Landfill. From his spaza they could negotiate their acceptance into the new landfill to eventually continue with their practice of reclaiming and recycling. In the absence of a central regulatory authority, and in the context of a committee that controlled access to the main dumping area in favour of those who had been there for a long time, a spaza shop fulfilled the business and social needs of newcomers to Hatherley Landfill.

One morning as I arrived at Leo's spaza I noticed a larger crowd than usual gathered. It seemed that Leo's spaza was indeed growing into the size and popularity it had enjoyed at Garstkloof Landfill. I observed that Leo had transported his solar panels that were at Garstkloof Landfill to Hatherley Landfill and continued his service of charging cell phones for a reasonable fee. Upon greeting the group of men outside the spaza I was introduced to three unfamiliar faces. A man who presented himself as Lungile explained that he came to Hatherley Landfill to ask for permission from the committee leadership to continue his waste-picking work here. During a previous visit he was denied permission to waste-pick by some of the committee members who formed part of the Hatherley Landfill waste-picker committee. Those who denied him complained about the increasing number of waste-pickers at Hatherley Landfill. Lungile then informed me about a meeting between him and the leaders of these cooperatives that would be held on the following Monday. The aim of the meeting, he said, was to decide whether newcomers from Garstkloof Landfill would be given permission to pick waste at Hatherley Landfill. Through this conversation I learned about the two leaders, Mboweni and Nhlanhla, who represented the former Garstkloof Landfill group at these meetings. Leo's spaza did not only serve to provide essential consumer goods, it also functioned as a space for the novices arriving from Garstkloof Landfill to decide how they would go about establishing their new position on Hatherley Landfill and to reestablish social ties which includes a claim to have a legitimate presence at Hatherley Landfill.

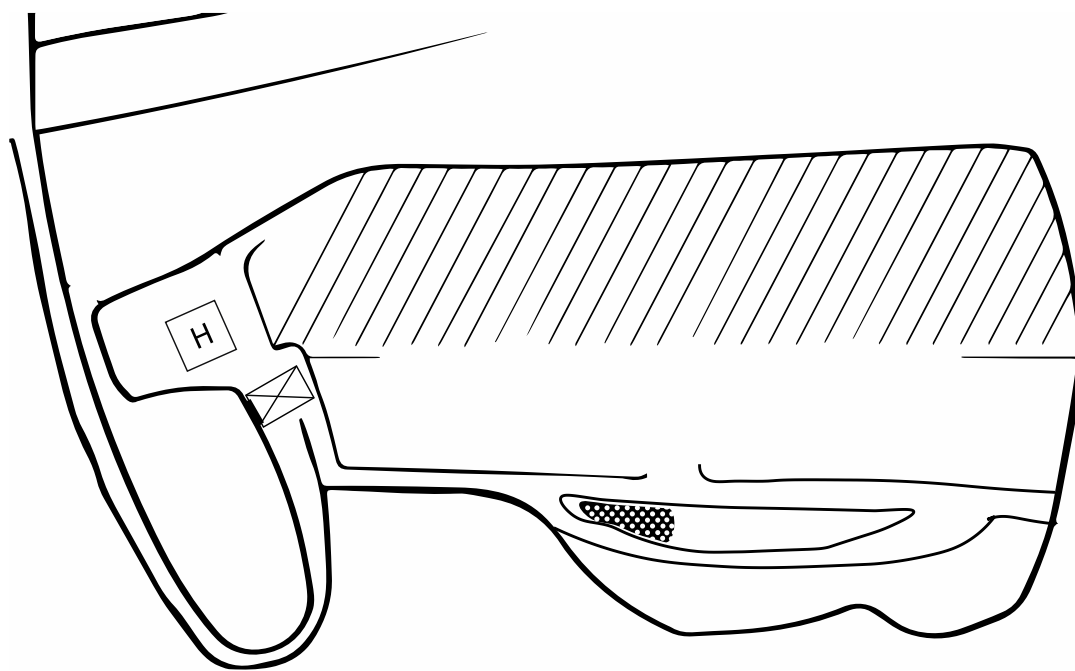
#### 4.4.2 Temporality, movement and makeshift houses

On one particular visit to Hatherley Landfill, as more and more people from Garstkloof Landfill arrived, I found an elderly man named Pasoppa whom I knew from Garstkloof Landfill. He was busy throwing plastic two litre bottles he had reclaimed onto the busiest road on the landfill site. He did this so that vehicles traveling on the road could assist his reclaiming by flattening out the plastic bottles. It is a common practice among waste-pickers on landfill sites to flatten out the bottles during the sorting phase of reclaiming. It also demonstrates the ways in which the urban waste precariat makes use of any objects and processes available in their environment to assist them in their practice of reclaiming and recycling. Pasoppa was excited to see me. He handed me a cigarette and led me to an open space, a short distance from the main road, where about ten makeshift houses (*mkhukhus*) had been erected. All of these dwellings were occupied by former Garstkloof Landfill waste-pickers.

The open space he took me to was situated in a fork in the road where the entrance and exit roads adjoined, and was slightly removed from the domestic waste dumping area. This open space is illustrated in Figure 8. These were not the only *mkhukhus* on the landfill site. These makeshift houses are used as temporary accommodation when individuals, who reside far away from the landfill, stay and waste-pick for long periods before going back to their place of permanent residence. The *mkhukhus* consist of four side panels serving as walls, and a roof. The inside leaves little space for anything other than a sleeping mattress and a few essentials such as clothes, food and cooking utensils. A number of materials, from corrugated iron sheets to wooden pallets, are used for the side panels of the dwellings. These dwellings are held tightly together using nails and straps cut out of any flexible material to form a box-like structure. Waterproofing the shack involves wrapping the box-figure in a discarded plastic swimming pool or any plastic sheet. The sheet is kept in place by knocking a few smaller nails through beer caps to function as large thumbnails. This ensures that the sheets stay in place even during the windiest seasons. The makeshift houses are exposed to the elements in all their intensity, and every change of season is experienced to its full extent. From my estimation I would say that



the majority of people who waste-pick at Hatherley Landfill reside in the bordering residential areas of Nellmaphius and Mamelodi. They have no need to sleep over on the landfill. It must also be mentioned that the construction of makeshift houses on the landfill does not comply with the municipality bylaws (City of Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality, 2005). But it has been tolerated for quite some time on this specific landfill, at least since waste-pickers were allowed to work on the site. Many of those who relocated from Garstkloof Landfill have their permanent residence in areas far removed from Hatherley Landfill and as a result sleeping where they work until they have accumulated enough money to travel back to their permanent residence, is a viable option.



**LEGEND:**



Storage hanger



Main entrance



Garstkloof waste pickers area

**Figure 7** Field note sketch showing Garstkloof waste-picker area

#### 4.4.3 New dynamic formed by ‘newcomers’

Newcomers to Hatherley Landfill arrived to find access to the most valuable forms of waste controlled by a committee of established waste-pickers who were not keen to share valuable waste with them. The committee limited the number of newcomers allowed to perform what I have referred to as ‘soft waste-picking’, and as a result newcomers were forced to practice fringe forms of reclaiming and recycling and to engage in other income-generating practices. This included deriving income from *bakkie jumping* and *diesel trading*.

During the fieldwork I spent some time observing the bakkie jumpers. This is a rather risky practice and a few individuals told me that they sustained serious injuries as they were jumping bakkies on landfills trying to get their hands on the valuable materials. They did not consider themselves to be waste-pickers and exhorted me to conduct my research at the main dumping area where the soft waste-pickers were stationed. According to them, those were the people who truly performed recycling. This point was later confirmed by Leo. He explained that bakkie jumpers did not partake in any of the meetings held by the waste-picker committee members. Their actions were not regarded as waste-picking or recycling, and they were therefore not represented by any committee or cooperative. The materials they obtained from the vehicles were mostly sold to clientele outside the landfill.

The waste-governors also had strong views about bakkie jumpers. They featured in the media reports on Garstkloof Landfill site and one of the officials from CTMM who was interviewed also discussed the bakkie jumpers at Hatherley Landfill. Frans Dekker was of the opinion that a group of bakkie jumping men was the main cause for the uncontrollable situation at Hatherley. Prior to the arrival of many people relocating from closed landfills, there had been a certain degree of order at the site. He referred to a group of men who positioned themselves in front of the main entrance of the landfill as the root cause of the disruption to the pre-existing order. These men would sit in anticipation of vehicles carrying valuable objects such as scrap metal and electric appliances. Once a vehicle approached through the main gate they would jump onto the back of it and hurriedly plunge through the heap of waste, intercepting any object deemed valuable before it was dumped at the main dumping area. Frans explained that

Hatherley and Onderstepoort were “model landfills” in terms of the way waste-picker committees exercised control over the reclaiming and recycling. But, after the arrival of a large number of newcomers, some of whom positioned themselves as bakkie jumpers, the measure of control and discipline at Hatherley Landfill was lost.

In addition to the bakkie jumpers, I met a man who told me that he used to do brick recycling on a landfill before arriving at Hatherley Landfill. He explained that he left the brick recycling for diesel trading. He does not live on Hatherley Landfill but rents a room nearby in Mamelodi. He has an arrangement with a few truck drivers. From time to time these drivers allow him to extract diesel from their trucks while they wait for the waste to be offloaded, in exchange for an amount of money. He then transports the diesel to his house, from where it is sold to clients. When I asked him whether he is afraid of being caught out by the landfill manager, he explained that the municipal officials are well aware of his dealings. He explained that brick recycling had become a competitive practice and diesel trading had presented a viable alternative, although it accompanied the risk of being caught out.

The ethnographic sections which I have presented above serve to illustrate firstly that the use of the generic term ‘waste-picker’ conceals an ensemble of fragmentations and social actors that exist within the collection of individuals implicated within the waste management process at Hatherley Landfill and other landfills in the city. Secondly, many of the individuals performing what I have referred to as ‘fringe reclaiming and recycling’ are not represented by any committee or decided not to join a committee or cooperative. The following section will assist in casting some light on the role and operation of the waste-picker committees in relation to the ‘waste-governors’ and those of the urban waste precariat who do not identify as ‘waste-pickers’.

#### **4.5 Meetings of the committees and cooperatives**

##### **4.5.1 Hatherley Waste-picker Committee**

The waste-picker committee at Hatherley Landfill was established to fulfil one of the requirements set by the private company in management, when the first group of waste-

pickers protested to the ‘waste-governors’ for access to the site. This process was discussed in an earlier section of this chapter. By the time I arrived at Hatherley Landfill site, a well-established committee was already formed. My first interaction with the committee leaders came about when I followed a former Garstkloof Landfill waste-picker in asking permission to perform soft waste-picking on the main dumping area of the landfill. Further interactions consisted of participating in some of their weekly committee meetings. What I gathered from these discussions was that the committee leaders felt they could exercise a strong measure of control over the reclaiming and recycling practices on the site. Since the influx of more and more people following the closure of some landfills, the leaders felt as if they were losing this control. They were able to control access to valuable waste and thus ensured their own income was never under threat of being shared with a larger number of waste-pickers.

However, the influx threatened their relative strength in relation to the waste-governors. The officials working for CTMM used the perceived influx of waste-pickers to the site to argue for stronger regulation. To some extent the committee leaders and the municipal officials shared this concern for stricter regulation of access. This is why the issue became the main point of discussion during the meetings held between the committee leaders. The pivotal question then was about the individuals on the site who did not belong to any committee or cooperative. What follows is a brief account of the three meetings which I attended. The first meeting was called for by the Hatherley waste-picker committee and a few outside representatives also attended. The second was a meeting organised by the former Garstkloof Landfill waste-pickers and the last, a meeting between the CTMM managing officials and Hatherley Landfill waste-picker cooperatives. Each of these meetings demonstrate some of the dynamics at play in the fluid and contested relations between the waste-governors on the one hand, and various groupings of the urban waste precariat on the other.

### ***Hatherley Committee meeting***

I arrive at the committee meeting a few minutes after 9h00. My presence goes almost unnoticed as I observe all those present caught-up in what appears to be an important conversation. Included in the meeting are all the members of the committee: the chairperson,

the vice-chairperson, the secretary and four others. The point of discussion is the former leader of the committee who started a rumour that Hatherley Landfill would soon be due for closure. Simon, the former Garstkloof Landfill manager currently working at Hatherley Landfill, interrupts the meeting by stating that this rumour is absolute nonsense. He explains that the municipality would never simply close a landfill without notifying the waste-pickers at least six months in advance. I notice the presence of Mboweni, a former Garstkloof Landfill waste-picker, who is here to represent the interests of the former Garstkloof waste-pickers. The meeting accepts the proposal that a letter addressed to the municipality be drafted, demanding to be informed about any changes that are planned for Hatherley Landfill. At this juncture, four former Garstkloof waste-pickers, one man and three women, arrive at the meeting. Not a word is said by the four and they simply take a seat on the outer circle of the meeting. With this addition there are thirteen people present at the meeting, including myself. The meeting is brought to a close and I am informed that we will all now go down to the dumping area where they will blow on the vuvuzela to gather the waste-pickers present on site. This is to officially introduce the newcomers who relocated from Garstkloof Landfill, including me, to the waste-pickers on Hatherley Landfill. One committee members then blows on a vuvuzela<sup>5</sup> and in the space of ten minutes approximately 800 waste-pickers gather around us. The next order of events is the introduction of the four newcomers to the site. These announcements are accepted without any drastic resistance or contention. After the meeting the crowd slowly disperses as most people return to working through the heaps of waste.

On that day four newcomers from Garstkloof Landfill are given permission to continue their waste-picking at Hatherley Landfill. However, one of the four waste-pickers explains to me that he had to wait at least a month before the committee granted him permission. In addition to the difficulties experienced in gaining permission, these waste-pickers would further experience additional restrictions.

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<sup>5</sup> A plastic horn blown by soccer fans during matches in South Africa.

### ***Garstkloof towards an independent committee***

On 16 July 2014 the newcomers from Garstkloof Landfill, now based at Hatherley Landfill, decided to call a meeting concerning the municipality's plans to implement sterner measures of access control to Hatherley Landfill. These measures included, amongst other things, that any individual wanting to work on the landfill would only be able to gain access to the landfill once he/she is registered with one of the committees. Furthermore, access would only be granted once he/she offered proof that they have received some form of training regarding recycling and once proof of an identification document has been submitted to the CTMM waste management office. Unsurprisingly, many were upset.

A group of about 30 waste-pickers gathered as the sun was about to set, a time when most have concluded their day's labour. Some were smoking a loose draw and others were exchanging a few words. The meeting was opened with prayer by a woman wearing her Zion Christian Church badge and matching head cover, draped over her murky waste-picking clothes. Nhlanhla, the spokesperson for the newcomers from Garstkloof Landfill, addressed the crowd after the opening prayer. She explained to all how they were planning to ensure that their right to access would be kept intact. She explained that they needed everyone to contribute R10 and not the usual R5 to cover the expense of sending committee leaders to the CTMM offices. She clarified that the extra R5 would be used to print certificates to prove that they had received training in recycling during their time at Garstkloof Landfill. It was decided that two members would go to the municipal office the following week in order to register the newcomers from Garstkloof Landfill as a separate committee. With a clear nod of the head it seemed most were in agreement. Leo explained to me afterwards that they did indeed receive such training on Garstkloof Landfill a few years back, but they never received any certificates and those pieces of paper had now become crucially important. Unsurprisingly, this is not exactly how the situation played itself out over the following week. The newcomers from Garstkloof Landfill were told by the managing officials of Hatherley Landfill to wait until the following week before making their way to the CTMM offices.

### ***The meeting between the CTMM and the cooperatives***

A week after the meeting between the newcomers from Garstkloof Landfill and the members at Hatherley Landfill, some of the CTMM managing officials made their way to Hatherley Landfill to discuss the urgent matter of stricter control over access to the public landfill. By the time I arrived at the gathering, held underneath a large tree, and slightly removed from the main dumping area, the meeting had already started. The municipal officials had taken their seats around a table and the waste-picker representatives were standing around those seated. Present were about thirty waste-pickers. I went over to stand nearby the familiar faces of some former Garstkloof Landfill waste-pickers I've come to know well. Upon my arrival a municipal official was busy outlining the purpose of the meeting. This was followed by a motion to restrict participation in the meeting to municipal officials and recognised leaders of the registered cooperatives - all others were asked to leave. Fortunately, I was granted permission to stay. This motion caused quite a stir among the waste-pickers as a number of them who had hoped to voice their concerns were now asked to leave. Some decided to simply stand by a leader's side, acting as a deputy leader of sorts. But the CTMM officials were adamant about decreasing the size of the meeting and quickly identified the unrecognised 'leaders', asking them to leave. Seven of us, including myself, stayed behind. The officials then stated that, from now on, only three cooperatives would be allowed to work on the Hatherley Landfill site. This means that the six cooperatives needed to merge into three; these three would then be recognised as representatives of the waste-pickers of Hatherley Landfill. By this time the newcomers from Garstkloof Landfill had left the meeting and it was unclear which of the three newly merged cooperatives would incorporate and represent the grouping I was closest to.

The announcement of the merging was followed by a detailed explanation of how the municipality plans to go about controlling access to the site in order to stem the 'influx'. Leaders of the cooperatives would be expected to draw up lists of their members on a weekly basis and inform the manager of the site, employed by the municipality, about any new additions to this list. Leaders were further required to obtain a certified copy of each member's identification document to initiate the process of printing out access cards for the 'registered' waste-pickers; registered means being a member of a co-operative.

The leaders of the waste-picker cooperatives present at the meeting did not accept this plan. One woman was particularly vocal in voicing her disapproval. She asked how it would be possible for about 400-500 waste-pickers to acquire ID books when she, as one of the cooperative's leader did not even own one. One of the municipal officials then stood up from his chair to address this issue. He asked the woman where she was born and how it was possible for her, in this day and age, not to have an ID book. He explained that the municipality were dealing with problems such as drug trading, violence, damage to public vehicles and the presence of children on Hatherley Landfill. He continued his outburst by stating that the municipality wants to 'improve' their control over the landfill, saying, "If you don't have an ID you are a criminal." Towards the end of his sermon he noted that foreign nationals working as waste-pickers will not be exempted from this process; they too need to submit identification documentation. Foreign nationals without papers, he said, need to go to Home Affairs in Marabastad (Pretoria) to obtain legal documentation. "Go to Marabastad or go home!" he concluded.

These abrasive statements left most the waste-picker leaders with an expression of disgust on their faces. One of the women dared to raise a question. "Most of us do not have ID books, now seeing that we've been working on the landfill for years, would we at least get some time to obtain ID books?" To this the municipal official replied that waste-pickers have three weeks to attain certified copies of identification documents. These statements reflect the intention of the waste-governors to initiate a new measure of control and regulation over aspects of the waste management processes, specifically those who make a living from waste on public landfill sites. This new measure of control involved adding another bureaucratic layer to the way in which waste-pickers have to be organised. Waste-pickers could no longer speak directly to municipal officials but could only raise issues through representatives. These leaders or representatives were now tasked with formalising the membership of their respective cooperatives. Instead of this process being done by municipal officials themselves, it was pushed onto leaders of the waste-picker cooperatives who were not paid salaries for being leaders but had to make money, like other waste-pickers, by picking waste. Whereas cooperatives are typically thought to be an important aspect of the solidarity economy



(Gutberlet, 2009; Laville, 2010), and based on mutuality and co-operation between members, here cooperatives were used by the municipality to limit access to the landfill site and to expel anyone who could not produce an identification document and who was not a member of a recognised co-operative. Official papers were now required to recycle papers and other forms of waste.

#### **4.6 Rumours of change and actual changes made to Hatherley landfill**

Following the meeting between the leaders of the cooperatives and the municipal officials, those of the urban waste precariat I spoke to were eager to see whether the CTMM would actually implement the new stern measures. On my next visit to Hatherley Landfill, a month after that meeting, little had changed in terms of accessing the public landfill. The only noticeable change was that of the construction of a new main gate by a contracted company. The new gate included two booms which in theory would allow for stricter regulation of access to the main entrance of the landfill.

##### ***Hatherley Committee Leaders: in response to changes***

As I mentioned in the previous section, the committees and cooperatives served as the bureaucratic mechanisms through which the municipal management negotiated with and regulated the urban waste precariat at Hatherley Landfill. In order to understand the function of this bureaucratic mechanism I began spending more time with the leadership of the Hatherley Committee. Ali, one of the leaders who holds the office of chairman of the committee, was a well-informed man and always willing to share his views with me. One day, while waste-picking next to Ali in the main dumping area, I followed him back to the place where he stores and separates his accumulated waste. During our conversation Ali confirmed that the municipality wants to issue permits and access cards to everybody operating on the landfill. According to him the municipality also planned on erecting a fence around the landfill in order to have better control over the movement of people in and out of the landfill. He claimed that the primary reason for these actions was to prevent the buying and selling of drugs on the site. The municipality was also concerned about unattended children on the

landfill. He confirmed that it was true that all members of the committees and cooperatives who want to obtain permits and access cards have to submit copies of identification documents and proof that they had received some training in recycling.

I raised the issue of foreign nationals being able to obtain permits and access cards. Ali explained that foreign nationals would have to submit their passport numbers to the committee leadership. Once the leadership has approved their addition as committee member, a foreign national would then be given permission to reclaim and recycle on the site.

But Ali then revealed his personal position by stating that newcomers to Hatherley Landfill need to establish committees of their own. There are limited resources (waste) on Hatherley Landfill and the established waste-pickers are concerned that an ever-growing number of waste-pickers would threaten their income. The established waste-pickers, some of whom were in fact ANC members, were supportive of the move by the waste-governors to restrict access to the site in order to limit the number of waste-pickers, even if they used that argument under the guise of the problem of drugs, children and criminality. This situation created a certain affinity between the established waste-pickers and the waste governors. The existence of this affinity caused further fragmentation within the waste precariat as a whole. However, in this instance it was not based on the type of waste-picking performed, but rather on the waste-pickers' relation to the waste-governors.

For this reason, it was not surprising that some of the leaders of established committees and cooperatives were supportive of these moves by the 'waste-governors'. Alice and Patience, leaders of a cooperative named Hlanganani, were both supportive of the new moves. They explained to me that these changes were exactly what the landfill needed in order to address the problems they, as leaders of their cooperative, were facing. They explained that they have good relations with the municipal staff of the site. As long as the waste management process runs smoothly, and a constant influx of waste is added to the landfill, they are ensured of a reliable income. Patience no longer picks on the main dumping site, but manages a container for a private company. Alice explained to me how the container system works. Patience does not own the container but acts as a mediator between the private company that owns the

container stationed on the Landfill and the waste-pickers who bring certain types of waste to the container for sale. The company gives Patience the responsibility of weighing the waste on a provided scale, and for paying the waste-pickers in cash which she receives from the private company. She in turn earns a salary from the private company as an employee (but most probably without additional benefits) and in all likelihood she earns more than what she earned as a waste-picker. Patience has to maintain good relations with the municipal officials on Hatherley Landfill as they give or deny permission to private recycling companies to set up containers on the landfill.

In summary the changes communicated during the meeting at Hatherley Landfill were two-fold. On the one hand the CTMM waste management officials communicated their aim of introducing a new rigid system of access control to the landfill. This was implemented by the installation of a new main entrance boom gate, operated by private security guards, and plans to build a fence around Hatherley Landfill. The aim of these actions was to fence-off and restrict access to common resources through raising social problems as a 'smoke screen'. On the other hand, they sought to transform the nature of the relationship between the waste-governors and the waste-pickers. The waste-governors added a new bureaucratic layer to the way in which waste-pickers have to be organised so that waste-pickers could no longer speak directly to municipal officials but only through representatives. These leaders or representatives were now tasked with formalising membership of cooperatives. During one of the meetings I described, a municipal official encouraged the leaders of waste-pickers to perceive their relation to the waste-governors as similar to the way a company negotiates with another company, pointing once again to the way in which neoliberal discourse and practices pervade the way in which 'waste-governors' seek to relate to 'waste' and 'waste-pickers'.

#### **4.7 Conclusion**

The third sector has punted the privatisation of the waste management system and the formalisation of waste-pickers as a silver bullet to address the issues faced by both 'waste-governors' and 'waste-pickers'. They argue that formalisation promises waste-pickers a

stronger position from which to negotiate market prices for reclaimed materials and accessibility to landfill sites. This position has been embraced and supported by NGOs as they assisted waste-pickers in the formation of waste-picker cooperatives. While there are certainly benefits in being organised in cooperatives, and there is strong evidence that cooperatives can provide workers and the precariat with both income and greater social security, there may also be a negative side to formalisation. Firstly, cooperatives may become bureaucratic mechanisms through which waste-governors seek to limit access to a common good. Secondly, formalisation may provide a cover for the waste-governors to expel those they deem dangerous and problematic, including foreign nationals, from making a living from waste. Thirdly, waste-governors may use the formalisation process in order to strengthen the hand of certain sectors of the urban waste precariat, such as established cooperatives or cooperatives who have formed an alliance with the waste-governors. Fourthly, when the formalisation process is framed as the formalisation of waste-pickers only, an important section of the waste precariat who are positioned on landfills are excluded from the process and have to engage in, amongst other things, fringe recycling, brick recycling and diesel trading.

It is often the case that livelihoods are superseded by bureaucratic agendas. The closure of Garstkloof Landfill offers such an example, where the state failed in providing a viable alternative to a large segment of the waste precariat before the landfill reached its full capacity and had to be closed down. Hart and Padayachee (2010) note that in situations where the state introduces transformation that does not accommodate the interests and practices of the poor, the state is by-passed as corrupt and ineffective, leaving room for NGOs to take its place. However, they state that NGOs, at times, operate on even stronger bureaucratic imperatives that are more alien to the people concerned than government agencies (2010:57). Alexander (2009) elaborates on this point by arguing that the name 'third sector' refers to those groups and actions that are positioned outside the state and the market. She argues that organisations within the third sector carry the illusion of operating free from the market and the state, but in fact these sectors are intricately entangled. The same applies to the situation on Hatherley Landfill. As I have mentioned above, the NGO groundWork, was crucial in creating a more resilient position for waste-pickers on Hatherley Landfill through the formation of cooperatives.

But, in hindsight we can see that this involved setting up another layer of bureaucracy that eventually enabled a specific group of waste-pickers to control access to waste and exclude the newcomers from Hatherley Landfill.

## Chapter 5 - 'No time to wait!' – the responses of the waste precariat to change within the waste management system in the City of Tshwane

### 5.1 Introduction

Some scholars have emphasised the autonomy of waste-pickers who make a living from waste. They argue that waste-pickers are able to determine their own working hours and relations, posing this as one of the key reasons why people engage in waste picking and why some waste-pickers express a reluctance to having their practices formalised (Gidwani, 2008; Millar, 2008; Samson, 2009, 2009b, 2012). However, Birkbeck had earlier disagreed with this position when he argued that waste-pickers are “little more than casual industrial outworkers, yet with the illusion of being self-employed” (1987:1174). He argued that although waste-pickers might decide on their own working hours, recycling companies ultimately control the prices paid for reclaimed waste, whereas industrial consumers control consumption. Apart from controlling their working hours and considering themselves as ‘self-employed’, waste-pickers controlled very little. That is why he referred to waste-pickers as ‘self-employed proletarians’. In relation to my data, Birkbeck’s argument might hold water when analysing the position of *soft waste-pickers*. But, as I have said, one aim of this dissertation is to broaden our understanding of the kinds of income-generating activities that occur on public landfills beyond soft waste-picking (hence my development of the concept ‘urban waste precariat’).

Thus, when we consider the actions performed by the *brick recyclers*, *wood recyclers*, *craftsmen* and the *spaza owners*, those scholars who emphasise the autonomy of people making a living from waste, become more relevant. These sections of the urban waste precariat are self-employed and are able to negotiate prices when selling the commodities they make from waste to customers on the market. This does not mean that they are not marginalised and that their earnings and existence is not precarious, only that in some respects they are less like wage workers and soft waste-pickers. As someone who works with leather and other materials to make handicrafts and art, I do see in the kinds of work they do something different from what the soft waste-pickers do, and this relates to the value transformation of material in addition to recycling, sorting and reclaiming. There is an element of improvisation in their work to which I

am attuned. That is why I find it fitting to describe these four forms of ‘recycling’ other than soft waste picking by using the concept of bricolage as theorised by Levi-Strauss (1966). According to Levi-Strauss the bricoleur is a person who works with his/her hands and his/her practice is expressed by means of a heterogeneous repertoire to perform the immediate work. In comparison to the engineer, the bricoleur does not subordinate his/her work to the availability of raw material, but rather works with whatever is at hand. This includes making use of previous constructions or deconstructions (1966:16-17). I will illustrate this concept through the ethnographic pieces I include below which deals with the spaza owners, the craftsmen, brick recyclers and wood recyclers.

In the previous chapter I briefly mentioned how some of the urban waste precariat who had positioned themselves on Hatherley Landfill, following their removal from Garstkloof Landfill, resorted to ‘fringe recycling’ in response to having had their access to soft waste-picking curtailed by the established waste-pickers. I described these actions of fringe recycling in passing as the focus of that chapter was on the changing relationship between the waste-governors and waste-pickers. However, in this chapter I will analyse these actions in greater depth in order to contribute to our understanding of the urban waste precariat who make a living on public landfills by engaging in work other than soft waste-picking. The following sections offer ethnographic accounts of the various ways in which the newcomers from Garstkloof Landfill positioned themselves in relation to the waste management system on Hatherley Landfill. I have already discussed the closure of Garstkloof Landfill. Here I focus on the position of the waste precariat in relation to the ‘waste-governors’ and to the flows of waste. I make use of and demonstrate the analytical distinction between the ‘waste precariat’ and the ‘waste-pickers’. The ethnographic sections shed light on how the responses of both the waste precariat and waste-pickers were shaped by the materiality of the landfill as well as their political consciousness.

Thus far, I have described the different reclaiming and recycling practices only in brief. In order to describe this more fully I provide a description of various individuals who practise a different kind of recycling or relate to the waste economy on the landfill in different ways. Some had a

direct relationship to waste. Others offered services and goods to those who directly worked with waste and thus had an indirect relationship to waste and the flows of waste. But all these individuals had in common the fact that they formed an intricate part of the socio-economic networks that existed on Garstkloof Landfill site before its closure. As I mentioned in my introduction, most extant research on waste-picking focuses on ‘soft waste-pickers’ and one aim of this chapter is to illustrate the numerous other forms of reclaiming and recycling that are performed on public landfills, in addition to underreported provisioning of goods and services by people not directly related to the waste economy. The material I present in this chapter is drawn from the research I conducted at Garstkloof Landfill site during the months that followed the closure of the landfill. As such it consists of descriptions of those who waited as long as possible before moving on to Hatherley Landfill or elsewhere.

The manager of Garstkloof Landfill notified the waste precariat six months in advance that the landfill would officially be brought to closure on the last day of 2013. The manager was employed by the municipality and formed part of the waste-governors. The waste-pickers referred to him as Solomon. Although the majority of those who worked directly or indirectly within the waste economy at the landfill site immediately started searching for alternative income opportunities, a group of approximately 50 people decided to ‘stick it out’ before moving on to other opportunities. In the section below I analyse the reasons why these 50 people decided to wait it out.

## **5.2 The original soft waste-pickers**

An important segment of this group of about 50 people consisted of soft waste-pickers. These soft waste-pickers decided not to relocate immediately following the announcement by the manager of the Landfill. One of the pickers, a man known as Paulosh, became my key research informant in this group. I had gotten to know Paulosh as a solitary and dedicated waste-picker, never socialising much during the day. He kept himself busy collecting and separating waste into his own collection. He also formed part of the leadership of the Garstkloof Landfill waste-picker committee. Perhaps it was for this reason that I did not expect to find him still working



on Garstkloof Landfill after the announcement had been made. I had learned on a previous visit that most committee leaders relocated to other landfills.

My conversations with Paulosh, which were held over the months that followed the announcement of the closure, revolved around the situation at the Garstkloof Landfill. In the process he informed that he had no intention of leaving Garstkloof Landfill as he believed that the landfill would be closed only temporarily. He reasoned that the closure was announced in order to get rid of most of those who the waste governors considered to be ‘troublemakers’. These are the waste-pickers of whom the surrounding private property owners had been complaining about, which I discussed in chapter 3. Paulosh was convinced that once a proper measure of control was re-established on the site, the waste governors would reopen it.

Paulosh further argued that a number of the waste-pickers who remained connected to the site no longer performed waste-picking as their primary source of generating income, but had found contract work or ‘piece jobs’ in the suburbs close to the landfill. Those ‘pickers’ utilise the landfill as a sleepover site because of its proximity to their newly found workspace. There were others like him, soft waste-pickers, who continued with their reclaiming. There were also a few others who had moved to Hatherley Landfill site to work there during the day while retaining the temporary accommodation structures they had constructed on the Garstkloof Landfill site. To those, commuting between the two landfills had become an integral part of their daily undertakings.

Three months after the announcement of the closure of Garstkloof Landfill the small amounts of waste it received from mini-dumpsites in the eastern suburbs were finally discontinued. At that point only a small group of about ten soft waste-pickers remained on the site. They had been working waste that had been dumped on the site over the past year and were running out of new waste material to sort and reclaim.

On one visit to the site I was surprised to find two spaza shops which remained open for business as they not only served the waste-pickers but also those working on the site on behalf of the waste governors. Paulosh, one of the last ones to remain working at the site, explained to me that Solomon had given an order to the last group of waste-pickers to gather up their

remaining bags of waste and to load it onto a truck making its way around the site. Yet no explicit instruction was given for them to vacate the landfill. Perhaps realising that his reading of the situation had turned out to be incorrect, Paulosh expressed his disappointment with the way events had played out over the last few months. He was unsure of what he would do next and finally considered relocating to another landfill site in the city.



**Figure 8 Photo showing Garstkloof Landfill after closure (Photo by Pierre Reyneke)**

As I mentioned, Paulosh formed part of the leadership committee established by the waste-pickers who operated on Garstkloof Landfill some years ago. Paulosh kept on repeating to me that he was part of the ‘original group’ of waste-pickers who started their recycling activities at Garstkloof Landfill. This was one of the reasons it had been difficult for him to simply move on and leave Garstkloof Landfill. According to Paulosh the majority of waste-pickers, including himself, who used to reside at Garstkloof Landfill, were not originally from the immediate area of Tshwane. He said: “I am from the Eastern Cape, others from Leandra<sup>6</sup> and many people are from neighbouring countries” Paulosh stated.<sup>7</sup> The significance of Garstkloof Landfill to those who do not have accommodation of kin in Pretoria or Gauteng should be obvious. For them Garstkloof Landfill had become a working space as well as a temporary home in the city. The closure of the landfill did not merely shut down their place of work; it meant having to find accommodation in a city where it is difficult for poor people to find a home. Relocating meant

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<sup>6</sup> Leandra is a small town situated in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa

<sup>7</sup> Interview with Paulosh, Garstkloof Landfill Waste-picker, 30 May 2014

having to re-establish a livelihood in a new space, all over again, as well as re-establishing a place to sleep. As one of the original ‘waste-pickers’ of a larger group of about 400 pickers who first moved to the site nearly a decade ago, Paulosh was understandably upset. It meant giving up also on the relatively strong position they had secured themselves in relation to the waste economy; a position they would have to surrender to other waste-pickers who occupied that position at other landfill sites in the city. After six months of ‘sticking it out’ at Garstkloof Landfill, Paulosh accepted defeat and decided to move on to Hatherley Landfill, accompanied by about ten other waste-pickers.

How do we understand this process? It seems to confirm Birkbeck’s (1987) argument that soft waste-pickers are in reality self-employed proletarians. The soft waste-pickers at Garstkloof Landfill were not able to set the prices at which they could sell their reclaimed material. More importantly, they were not employed by the waste governors or by private recycling companies which would have provided them with a position from which to contest or influence the closure of Garstkloof Landfill. Also, no political party represented their interests. They were vulnerable and could not influence the process, unlike the waste makers who played an important role in swaying the waste governors to close down the site. All the waste governors had to do in order to get rid of the waste-pickers, who the waste makers experienced as a threat, was to cut off the supply of waste to Garstkloof Landfill. There was no need for evictions or removals. The same is not true, however, of the other segments of the urban waste precariat who had positioned themselves on Garstkloof Landfill, notably the wood recyclers, spaza owners and craftsmen. The following sections deal with them.

### **5.3 The Spaza owners: The Case of Leo and Shaun**

In the previous chapter on Hatherley Landfill site I briefly introduced a spaza owner known as Leo. When I met Leo he was 34 years old and was running a spaza shop on Garstkloof Landfill, together with his partner Shaun. When I met them, Leo stated that the shop had been running for a period of eight years. He did not consider himself to be a waste-picker, but preferred to be

called a ‘businessman’. Yet, their business was indirectly related to the waste economy that had prevailed on the landfill site.

Their spaza shop catered for most of the waste-pickers’ and waste governors’ food and tobacco needs on Garstkloof Landfill. Furthermore, they offered a variety of services to the same clientele for small cash payments. These included charging cell phones and allowing people to watch DVDs on a television, set-up inside one of the makeshift structures that formed the spaza. The electricity required for these services was generated from solar panels, picked up and fixed on the landfill. A small crowd of individuals were always hanging out around Leo and Shaun’s spaza.

In my analysis, Leo and Shaun drew upon what Levi-Strauss called bricolage strategies in making use of waste materials to set up their shop infrastructure and to establish the services they provided. They were able to do this with reduced capital input, and setting up the spaza was not a labour intensive process. The possibility of being removed from Garstkloof Landfill by the waste governors presented a risk to their business. During one interview Leo informed me that the closure of Garstkloof Landfill had negatively impacted his business and he found himself forced to move to another landfill. Still, Leo decided to hang on and wait, perhaps also influenced by the reasoning of Paulosh. Given the nature of his business, he was in a better position than the soft waste-pickers. As long as people remained on the site – whether soft waste-pickers, wood recyclers, or waste governors - he would still be able to sell goods and services and would therefore not be completely cut off from an income. He had also formed a reliable clientele of regular marijuana customers in and around the landfill, including the children of waste makers who wanted to shut down the landfill site. As more and more of the soft waste-pickers decided to leave Garstkloof Landfill, the selling of marijuana became his main source of income. Eventually, Leo too had to accept defeat. His decision took a good measure of consideration and self-encouragement. It was difficult to let go of the set-up he had erected. Approximately four months after the closure of Garstkloof Landfill, Leo relocated to Hatherley Landfill. At the same time, he decided to keep the spaza on Garstkloof landfill

running for as long as possible, leaving it in the capable hands of his business partner Shaun, while he established a new business on Hatherley Landfill.

Spaza owners are dependent on a regular customer base to ensure consistent income. For spaza owners who operate on landfill sites, this customer base consists mainly of waste-pickers and waste governors who work on the site. Apart from providing goods and services to these customers, the spaza also serves as a social and recreational space – a luxury on a landfill site surrounded by discarded objects. Spaza owners differ from soft waste-pickers in the fact that they are not primarily dependant on the waste economy. They do not sell waste, even though they use waste materials for input on infrastructure and technology. In addition to this, they are able to determine the prices for the goods and services they sell to those who have a direct relationship with the waste economy.

#### **5.4 The craftsmen: The case of Elvis and Basta**

Garstkloof Landfill, when it was in full operation, was formally limited to the dumping of garden refuse and building rubble. As such it created the opportunity for a few men to reclaim the bricks found in the building rubble and restore it to such a state that it could be sold again. There are good reasons as to why so much building rubble was being dumped at Garstkloof Landfill. It relates to the continued expansion of Pretoria East after the white flight in the 1990s which I discussed in Chapter 3. The expansion of the eastern suburbs was also linked to a growing middle class in the city. In October 2012 (approximately a year before the closure of Garstkloof Landfill), the *Financial Mail* reported that the suburb Woodhill, situated in Pretoria East, surpassed the age old reserve of wealth namely Waterkloof, as the most affluent suburb in the city (Muller, 2012). This was in turn closely related to the ongoing processes of private property development in the east of the city. It also explains the influx of building rubble into Garstkloof Landfill. Two individuals who I became acquainted with during the field research - Elvis and Basta – had positioned themselves at Garstkloof Landfill in relation to the building rubble. On Garstkloof Landfill the bricks they reclaimed were referred to as *mampara bricks*. When I first met Elvis and Basta in 2012 they were both in the brick recycling and selling

business, but once Garstkloof Landfill had closed down the supply of building rubble had drastically declined. In reaction to this Elvis and Basta focused less on gathering, cleaning and selling *mampara* bricks and moved on to wire craftsmanship.

Elvis was inspired to develop his wire crafting skill while paging through a gardening magazine found on Garstkloof Landfill. During one conversation, he pointed out to me some of the designs he started out with while paging through a copy of the glossy magazine, *Garden & Home*. After spending a few months developing his skill based on those designs, he started to practise his own designs. He was convinced that the same person who purchased magazines such as *Garden & Home* would also be interested in his crafts, in other words, the waste makers who lived in the surrounding suburban area. It was from their waste after all that he acquired the magazines. Their waste would show him what their consumer needs are. In other words, much like a bricoleur, Elvis made use of the immediately available material, skill and knowledge to construct craft pieces and to sell reworked waste, discarded by the waste makers, back to the waste makers. Five months after the closure of Garstkloof Landfill, Elvis and Basta were still able to continue their reclaiming and crafting on the site. I gathered that the waste governors simply wanted to remove the remaining bit of waste from the site in order to initiate the process of ground rehabilitation. But, they left the issue of informal settlement untouched. The waste governors assumed that once the influx of waste was discontinued all waste-pickers would be cut-off from their source material and would move on. But Elvis and Basta had alternative sources of material and were able to perform more than one form of reclaiming, unlike the soft waste-pickers. Paulosh and the other soft waste-pickers were in a different position to Elvis and Basta, and logically responded differently to the closure of the landfill.

An open space right next to Shaun's spaza shop served as a crafting area for Elvis and Basta. They utilised Garstkloof Landfill as a space for reclaiming and shaping their art works, but they were not dependent on the landfill to provide them with material. They also collected waste outside of Garstkloof Landfill. As a result, Elvis and Basta were relatively speaking, in control of the supply of their materials and operating hours, unlike the soft waste-pickers and brick

recyclers. They also did not carry the burden of paying rent. On Garstkloof Landfill they were able to smoke marijuana freely without the threat of a run-in with the police.

Elvis explained to me how these factors enabled him to work harder than he would under normal conditions of formal employment. The hours were not spent with unfamiliar individuals placed together by chance, such as the case might be in a position of formal employment. Working as wire craftsman entailed working alongside individuals who had become friends on the landfill over an extended period of time. Secondly, Garstkloof Landfill provided them with the opportunity of residing and crafting in proximity of their customer base, the waste makers situated in the eastern part of the city who would buy art made from waste. In this way they saved on accommodation costs and daily transport, enabling their small business to grow steadily with minimal overheads. Garstkloof Landfill had an open tap at the main entrance, providing them with access to clean water, free of cost.

While conducting fieldwork I documented Elvis from the point of waste reclaiming to the moment of exchange with a customer, when waste objects reworked as artworks were reinserted into a commodity phase. In one instance I observed that the waste material was not found on Garstkloof Landfill. Elvis had salvaged remnants of wire from discarded electrical cables. These cables had been stripped of their copper parts and discarded in an open field, a short distance from Garstkloof Landfill. He then applied his newly acquired skill to bend this heap of wire into 11 baobab<sup>8</sup> shaped trees. Elvis crafted these 11 wire trees for a woman who said the trees were to serve as decorations for her upcoming wedding. She drove a large white *bakkie* and resided in the suburban area adjacent to the landfill. Her request was for the trees to be painted silver. Elvis used some silver spray paint he had found on Garstkloof Landfill for the first few pieces but this soon ran out. He then had to borrow some money to buy more silver paint in order to complete the order. Elvis was able to make three trees per day and usually sold them at R300 a piece. But, due to the relatively large order he decided to charge the woman R180 per piece.

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<sup>8</sup> Baobabs are large succulent trees indigenous to Africa and Australia.

Interviewing Elvis about this transaction and his business, he explained that his social circle consisted mainly of workers who work in the surrounding suburbs at the homes of waste makers. Such domestic workers, gardeners and construction workers earn about R120 for a day's labour. This amount is slightly above the sectoral determinations provided by the Department of Labour, South Africa, which was at R11.44 per hour at the time (Department of Labour , 2015). Elvis's friends commuted daily to their place of work from homes mostly situated quite far away. Most of his friends were not property owners and thus had costs relating to rent in addition to the transport costs. Unlike their friends who found themselves in that situation, Elvis and Basta did not have any of these expenses. Moreover, they did not have to work for a boss. In addition, their work entailed making "works of art" and Elvis enjoyed the fact that it offered him the opportunity to give expression to his artistic ability.

Now, if we were to perceive this process through the methodological approach suggested by Appadurai (1986), it serves to illuminate *the social life of the waste things* mentioned. Appadurai offers this approach with the intent to break away from the strong Marxian understanding of commodities seen as existing in a static state, and objects as one kind of thing. In this particular process the objects are analysed in their total trajectory, from commodity to its post-consumption phase, back into a commodity phase. In this social life of wire, electric cables were taken out of their commodity phase, stripped off their apparent exchange-value and discarded as waste. By salvaging the cables, Elvis now had a material resource to give expression to his artistic ability. His creative action and labour serves to reshape the wire into craft pieces and through the exchange with his customer it was placed back into a commodity phase. The use of Appadurai's approach here is purely methodological, and the aim is not to make use of it as a theory of value. Appadurai predicates his argument on the basis that value is created through exchange and that things move through different 'regimes of value' in their social life. Graeber (2001) offers his critique of Appadurai's approach by stating that it was idiosyncratic of the intellectual trends of the mid 1980s, which were greatly influenced by neoliberalism. Herein Graeber points to its rejection of Marxism, an emphasis on self-interest strategies and the glorification of consumption as creative self-expression (2001:32-33). The risk in these tendencies is that commerce is assumed to be a



universal human urge which is constantly attempted to be controlled and inhibited by the state, aristocratic hierarchies and cultural elites (2001:33). This neglects to identify the instrumental role of the state ('waste governors' in this case) in fashioning existing economies. Graeber's (2001) own theory of value emphasises creative human action and its complex connection to the material medium in constant flux. The process in discussion conveys an appropriate example of this, where Elvis positions himself within the flow of waste objects and applies creative human action to shape the object in its course of constant transformation. But, how do Graeber and Appadurai's theories differ in their view of state power? This will be explained in the concluding section.

### **5.5 The wood recyclers: The case of Onesimo and Kossam**

Apart from bricks and wire, the building rubble section at Garstkloof Landfill received a significant amount of wood which could be salvaged from the heaps of construction waste. These pieces of wood formed a material resource for men who employed their carpentry skills in making wooden dog kennels and garden benches. The landfill closure had a drastic impact on those who recycled wood. Two men, Onesimo and Kossam, made a joint decision to migrate from Zimbabwe to South Africa in the hope of improving their personal economic situation. At the point of Garstkloof Landfill's closure they had been on the site for a period of four years. Three months after the closure they were still running their business, crafting and selling wooden benches and dog kennels, but their reliable wood supply had dried up and they resorted to buying wood instead of salvaging it freely, like they used to.

Onesimo and Kossam had occupied a small space next to Solomon Mahlangu Drive, a busy road, situated about three kilometres from the landfill. Numerous informal traders operated on this section of road, exhibiting their handcrafted curios to capture the interest of passer-by motorists. Much like the landfill itself, this section of Solomon Mahlangu Drive is centrally situated within the wealthy middle-class suburbs that constitute Pretoria East. Residents from these suburbs showed interest in the benches and dog kennels and became Onesimo and Kossam's regular craft buyers. Although Onesimo and Kossam could no longer rely on a free-of-

charge wood supply, previously sourced from the landfill, they were still on the lookout for discarded wood. They especially salvaged wood from building demolition sites. I provided them with transport during one of these salvaging excursions. They had reserved a stack of planks five kilometres away down the R21 highway. A friend had stored the planks which were extracted from a small building after it was demolished. This small building was situated right next to the Waterkloof Golf Course, and I am unsure of its previous use. In this instance they were salvaging material from a state of deconstruction and transforming it into a newly constructed commodity, similar to Levi-Strauss's (1966) description of a bricoleur.

Onesimo and Kossam were Zimbabwean citizens without South African residency permits. They had migrated from Masvingo, situated in the south-eastern part of Zimbabwe to the City of Tshwane. Their trusted partnership of constructing these wooden products was built and cemented on a friendship which spanned back more than a decade. They established this informal business over a period of four years to the point that it could provide them with a low, but consistent, income. In order to protect this income, they ensured that their legal paperwork was always in order. The maximum amount of days they were able to obtain on their visa was 30 and they were therefore forced to travel back to Zimbabwe every month to renew their visas. Onesimo explained that they did not always have enough money to travel all the way back to Zimbabwe. They therefore, at times renewed their visas at the borders of closer situated countries like Lesotho or Swaziland, which proved a more viable option. However, this meant that they could not visit their families. They operated under precarious circumstances and could not afford to lose a day in crafting, as their business functioned on an order basis for which meeting deadlines were pivotal. An arrest and deportation would be a serious blow to their business; therefore, they faithfully performed all the necessary requirements to avoid extensive police interrogation.

When Onesimo and Kossam were able to obtain wood from Garstkloof Landfill freely, they accumulated a substantial amount of savings, to the point where they could purchase wood on the market. The landfill therefore served as a platform from which to start up their informal business, with no capital input. In my observation on Garstkloof Landfill I found that craft

making and brick recycling were predominantly performed by Zimbabwean men, and this made me question the accessibility to conventional soft waste-picking for these men. They further tended not hold membership of the waste-picker committee formed on the landfill, and were thus not represented by it. Samson (2010) noted that she only found a foreign national on the committee of Ga-Rankuwa Landfill, during the period of forming a city-wide alliance to represent the city's waste-pickers. This fact correlates with the events that unfolded on Hatherley Landfill, described in Chapter 4, where the waste precariat from Garstkloof, mostly consisting of foreign nationals, were denied access to soft waste-picking and had to take refuge in fringe recycling.

## **5.6 Conclusion: Sam's politics**

In this chapter I portrayed the waste precariat's various responses to the Garstkloof Landfill closure. I emphasised the materiality of the landfill, the conceptual relationality and the political position of the waste precariat in relation to the state and the market. The closing vignette offers insight into the waste precariat's expression of autonomy in relation to the state.

Shortly after South Africa's 2014 elections, I was busy doing soft waste-picking alongside a Hatherley Landfill committee member, Sam. We were standing on a fresh pile of waste when a Rastafarian man with short dreadlocks approached us. He greeted us and struck up a conversation around Bob Marley's music and revolutionary ideas. Sam joined in and directed the conversation towards South Africa's current political situation, offering his concise criticism of both the African National Congress (ANC) and the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF). The detail of his criticism is not of great importance here, but it echoed a strong disenchantment with the current government's policies under neoliberal democracy and the overt self-interest that underlies party campaigning. Sam seems to pose this disenchantment with the mentioned political parties as the exact reason why he has positioned himself on the landfill, waste-picking every day. He explained that the ANC had been selling their promises of transformation and development, but after 20 years of being in power, he can testify to no significant change in his

personal circumstances. He referred specifically to the fact that since 1994 the government made promises of job creation in order to tackle unemployment, but unemployment has been increasing. He pointed to the landfill and the waste around us, and said: “Look at this. Look around you. They can’t even manage this landfill properly how are we supposed to expect them to create jobs for us.” Sam then explained that he is on the landfill, working every day, because he cannot afford to wait for the government to provide jobs. He and all the people present on the landfill are creating their own jobs, every day.

What is the nature of autonomy here? It does not lie in the fact that they are working for themselves on their own terms and hours. It rather lies in the fact that they have created their position on the landfill, without expectancy of assistance from the state or market for job provision. In the above section Sam relates his waste-picking directly to his critique of the state.

I did not set out to investigate the political consciousness of my research participants or to explore waste picking as a political act. Yet I was confronted with this aspect regularly during my field work. Samson (2012) argues, as I have mentioned earlier, that the way accumulation by dispossession plays out in developing countries entails attempts by the state to seize control of spheres of accumulation opened up by informal actors. She makes this argument concerning the privatisation of landfill waste management, where reclaimers opened up spheres of value creation through inserting waste back into a commodity phase and flow. Samson refers to this action as ‘bringing waste back to life’ (2012:113). There seems to be an open time frame in these invisible spaces (the landfill) where the waste precariat is able to open up an informal market for reclaimed waste, in making use of bricolage approaches. Herein they receive a low, but consistent, income due to the market’s demand for raw materials, through placing waste in a position of potential exchange value. These spheres and spaces, as Samson explains, are then seized by the state or the private sector. In the case of Garstkloof it took the form of privatisation and formalisation of the waste management system.

On Garstkloof Landfill the responses of the waste precariat can be categorised as follows:

- Relocation to another landfill (the soft waste-pickers and spaza owners)

- Continuity in bricolage approaches to establish consistent income generation (the wire craftsmen)
- A movement from bricolage to a small informal business enterprise (the carpenters)

I make a distinction between those segments of the waste precariat who incorporated bricolage into their income generation approach (the soft waste-pickers and spaza owners), and those who do not. The bricolage aspect, I argue, enables social actors to form a more resilient position when being cut-off from their waste supply. But all these segments of the waste precariat also share a similar characteristic in their recuperating actions. The waste precariat's responses were shaped by the materiality of the landfill and its relation to the public authorities. In Chapter Three it was discussed how the act of 'dumping' places waste objects in the category of defilement, and then become categorised in Douglas's (1966) terms, as 'matter out of place'. I want to expand on this point in order to further illuminate the reclaiming actions of the waste precariat.

In an essay on 'wealth and power' Graeber (1996) argues that contrary to the general consensus that money is a quantitative mark of distinction, money rather serves as a mark of distinctiveness identified with the holder's generic capacities for action (1996:6). Graeber distinguishes between visible and invisible power. He applies the aspect of visibly displayed power to 'coinage', and the invisible, generic power is attributed to 'money'. Graeber then argues that money is understood as 'coinage' when it is an object of desire, and becomes 'money' when it serves as a means to an end in order to procure the desired object. If we apply the same concepts of 'visible' and 'invisible' power to waste it serves to place the creative actions of the waste precariat in a different perspective. Once the waste objects are dumped by the consumer, it becomes generic, abstracted and invisible, like 'money'. It then carries the power to disrupt 'visible' spaces predicated on, and patterned by concrete forms, as have been illustrated in numerous protests around waste (Moore, 2009; Fredericks, 2013). Graeber differs from Appadurai in how he theorises the state and cultural elites. In Appadurai's (1986) view the state is the control harnessing element in exchanges. In Graeber's (2001) approach this harnessing power is exercised by the state, market or even the waste-pickers in a visible or

invisible manner. Through their actions of reclaiming and transforming, the waste precariat repatterns the waste objects from abstraction back to concrete form, from an invisible phase back into a visible commodity phase. These waste objects then transform 'invisible' power carrying the potential for action or disruption, into 'visibly' displayed power as an object of desire. It therefore then, carries the power to be exchanged in the market as a commodity or raw material. But, how do we make sense of these categorising actions performed by the waste precariat in relation to the state and the market on an epistemological level? What do these actions say about the waste precariat's position within the flows and movements of the waste management system? These questions form the crux of the discussions formulated in the following chapter.

## **Chapter 6 – Bringing bricolage to life: Negotiations, waste things and entanglements**

In this chapter I continue the conversation and build on the conceptual approach detailed in the previous chapter on the waste precariat's agency. Here, I push away from a theoretical position which separates humans and objects, viewing them as separate entities. Instead I build on an approach that emphasises flows, flux and processes of humans and objects in constant transformation. Such an approach is critical of a priori assumptions which separate the biological and sociological and seeks to investigate the biosocial entanglement between ideas and material, between humans and their waste materials. In this dissertation the approach illuminates the complex processes that unfold daily on the landfill site, placing emphasis on the relations and exchanges between public and private spheres, recycling company employees, municipal officials, the waste precariat, waste managing machines and all manner of waste.

### **6.1 Introduction: From social to biosocial entanglements**

In the preceding chapters I described the entanglements identified in the waste management system by placing emphasis on social processes. In these processes the material dimension was neglected. Here I analyse the waste management processes with a biosocial approach. In the dissertation thus far, I have made distance from the social a priori assumptions allowing for perceptual social categorisations, now we will in addition distance ourselves from the a priori division of the social from its environment (Laterza, 2013).

Ingold (2010) argues that the development of the hylomorphic model, fashioned by Aristotle, created the predication whereupon the logic of this disjuncture, between the social and the material, rests. Aristotle reasoned that the creation of anything occasions the bringing together of form and matter, and since Aristotle's writings the hylomorphic model has significantly influenced Western philosophy and sciences. In response to this fact, Ingold deems to replace the hylomorphic ontology in his own work, by highlighting the processes of formation, flows and the transformation of materials (Ingold, 2010). He refers to entanglements not as a network of connections, but rather as a meshwork of interwoven lines in growth and

movement. In this way Ingold disregards the existence of objects and suggests the use of the term ‘things’ in his construct of an *Environment without Objects* (EWO). He defines a thing as “a gathering together of the threads of life” (Ingold, 2010:2-3). This definition questions the role of human agency in the sense that a thing’s existence hinges on the threading together of numerous life processes, which leaves little space for autonomous action. Ingold replaces the concept of agency with what he refers to as ‘life’, arguing that the idea of agency is a direct product of the reductive logic rooted within the hylomorphic model; the so-called connection of the dots in retrospect. The following paragraph might cast some light on what is meant by Ingold’s use of the term ‘life’.

“Modern society, of course, is averse to such chaos. Yet however much it has tried, through feats of engineering, to construct a material world that matches its expectations – that is, a world of discrete, well-ordered objects – its aspirations are thwarted by life’s refusal to be contained.” (Ingold, 2010:9)

Within reductionist logic is embedded the assumption that objects contain static surfaces. But, in reality the *life of a thing* is captured in, and depends on continual exchanges of materials across these surfaces. With this fact in mind, Ingold completely renounces the existence of objects in his own work, and refers to empirical reality as an *Environment Without Objects* (EWO). When considering waste materials as *things*, as Ingold defines them, rather than as *objects*, the perceptual lense seems to align with the methodological approach suggested by Appadurai (1986). However, Ingold extends this line of thought even further. He does not speak of ‘regimes of value’ or ‘tournaments of value’, but perceives things as lines in a meshwork where exchanges are not only taking place between humans, but between humans and non-humans alike. Once the waste-things are dumped in what Samson (2012) calls the ‘the commodity cemetery’, which is the landfill, it is only taken out of a certain process or flow; that of commodity flows. But it remains in constant movement within other flows such as the waste system, recycling processes, reclaiming and reconstructions. At times things even end up being placed back into a commodity flow. This is what is meant by ‘the life of a thing’ and ‘bringing things to life’.



The concept of meshwork, as suggested by Ingold (2010) and Laterza (2013) clearly poses analytical implications for the bricolage approach discussed in the previous sections. But what are these implications? Does the approach annul the bricolage concept or does it build on, and offer further nuance? And lastly, what are the implications for theorising the waste precariat's agency within the waste management process when their actions are seen as forming part of the 'meshwork'?

## **6.2 Dumping area as *a thing***

### **6.2.1 Waste factory or waste meshwork**

I developed the theoretical angle of this chapter during the final phase of conducting fieldwork. During this phase my methodology shifted from participating in group discussions, such as waste-picker committee meetings, to participating in the actual practice of waste-picking alongside waste-pickers. This shift forced me to observe and reflect on the lines and flows of the meshwork that unfolded daily on Hatherley Landfill, while also, physically handling the waste materials.

A striking aspect of working on landfills is the unyielding exposure to sunlight. There are no trees or structures to cast shadows on the site. It is almost noon as I cycle into Hatherley Landfill on a winter morning with a good measure of sweat running down my forehead. I lock my bicycle by the main gate and start making my way on foot over to the dumping area where most of the waste-pickers are retrieving recyclable waste. As I walk over to this area, I furnish myself with the necessary waste-picking gear; a pair of rubber gloves, a wide brimmed straw hat and a fresh layer of sun-screen. Through the thick cloud of dust caused by a municipal waste-truck that just made its way to the dumping site, I recognise Ali's face. He is busy rummaging through a pile of waste crowded by other waste-pickers. Earlier that month Ali introduced himself to me as the chairman of Hatherley's waste-picker committee, and we agreed to work together for a few days.

It is about twelve o'clock midday and Ali has already filled-up two bags containing a mix of different kinds of plastic and white paper. Ali tells me that he started waste-picking at 8h00 that morning. This is his second filled-up load for the day which means it takes him about two hours to fill up a bag. Ali explains that three loads will be enough to fill up one of the large white bags which he sells to the recycling company. They do not accept half empty bags; it needs to be filled up to the brim. The large white nylon bags are provided by the waste recycling companies, but at times the waste-pickers sell them amongst each other as these are not always easily attainable.

I begin to work alongside Ali, assisting him in filling up another bag. Another truck approaches and a number of people rush to acquire a position around the spot where a new heap of waste is about to be dumped (illustrated by 'W/T' in figure 10). As the truck slowly backs up to this spot, clearly outlined by the collection of waste-pickers, the truck-driver slowly raises the back door of the waste container, and a large spinning mechanism forces the waste out onto the landfill. At times, some of the young men take the risk of jumping onto the back door as it opens and climb into the container before the waste is dumped. This is an extremely hazardous action. The driver has no view of the back and could at any time close or move this rather large steel door, crushing or severing a limb of the waste-picker. Ali and I go to join this group, hoping to attain a place to work. Suddenly, he grabs me by the chest and pulls me out of the way of an oncoming compactor. This particular landfill compactor does not have the typical features of other bulldozers. It is much larger, and where bulldozers have a chain around its wheels, these compactors have four large metal wheels with pointy edges on their outer surface. This ensures easy compacting and manoeuvrability on the site. Ali breaks into a smile of relief and I shudder at the thought of ending up under those wheels. As we busy ourselves with filling up the bag, Ali and I continue in conversation.

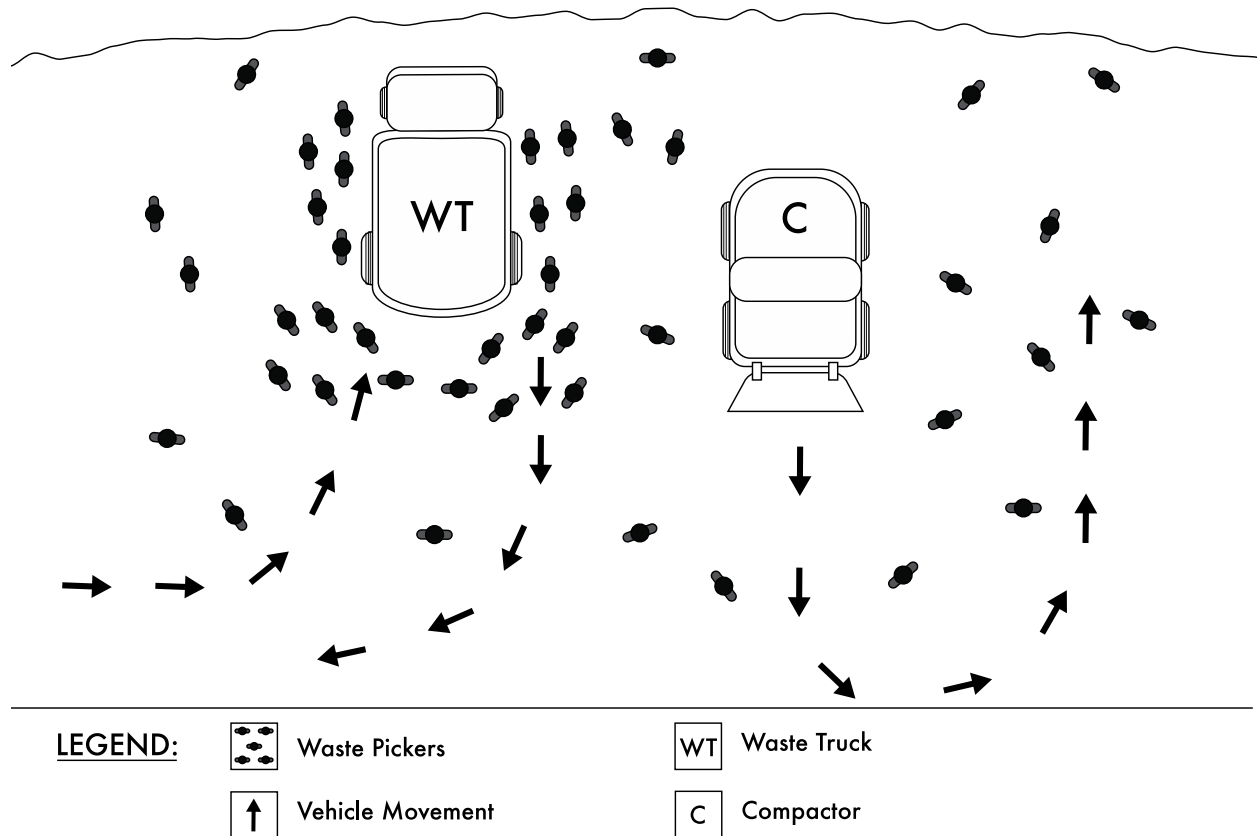


Figure 9 Field notes sketch illustrating the movements and flux of people and waste vehicles

We each find a place among the pickers and the truck slowly starts pushing the waste out from the back container. The waste heap starts dropping to the ground and a few of the waste pieces are taken out by the pickers before it hits the ground. Some pieces are kept and others are passed on or discarded. From this it's clear that each waste-picker knows exactly what type of waste they and those around them are looking for. It is simultaneously an individual and a group effort in the picking up and passing around. Ali and I are the only ones who work together in filling up one bag, and this is frowned upon, as people keep on asking Ali why this *mlungu*<sup>9</sup> is helping him today. I witnessed two other ways in which pickers perform collective actions. While working their way through a pile of waste some individuals throw pieces of clothing found in the waste, backwards to the outer perimeter of the circle where a few women

<sup>9</sup> 'Mlungu' means white person in isiZulu.

stand waiting to collect it. Upon asking the women what they do with the clothes, they explain that it is taken back to their homes in Mamelodi, and sold within the community. While picking through the heap Ali finds two aluminium cans, turns around and then drops it into a young man's bag working right beside me. Ali is not collecting cans today, but he is well aware that this man is, and therefore performs this simple action, saving the young man the trouble of having to pick it himself. As we continue I notice the same gesture performed by others, and I decide to do the same. This is welcomed and acknowledged with a quick nod or a smile from the receiving picker. With the two of us working together the bag fills up fast and Ali indicates that it's time to take the bag to his sorting area, a short distance away from the dumping zone.



**Figure 10** Vantage point view of the dumping area (Photo by Pierre Reyneke)

The details captured in the image of Figure 11 serve to illustrate the theoretical concepts I have explained in this chapter. Notice the amalgamation of compactors, containers, municipal

officials, waste-pickers, waste-trucks and waste materials in the image. From this view, it is difficult to distinguish concrete objects from one another. The flows of things are indicated by the roads and pathways that cross the imagery. This illustrates the lines which form passages for the constant giving and taking.

Ali's sorting area offers an ideal vantage point to observe the rhythms and flows of the dumping area. This rather small space of about 20mx50mx20mx50m contains the highest concentration of people, trucks, compactors and waste, which forces every thing's movement to be negotiated in relation to and awareness of everything else within this space. The waste truck enters the space, making its way towards the awaiting waste-pickers. The waste is dumped and one of the waste-pickers signals to the truck driver that the container is empty. Hereafter, the truck moves out of the dumping area. The waste-pickers now have an open window of opportunity to plunge through the heap for a short period of time before it is spread out by one of the compactors. Not all of the waste that ends up on the landfill is worthwhile to the waste-pickers. This first opportunity to work through the pile tends to be the most lucrative in terms of reclaiming the most valuable materials. However, once the compactor spreads out the pile there remains a good amount of recyclable waste to be reclaimed, but a picker then has to cover a larger area to attain it. After the compactor works down a line for the second time, the remaining valuable waste is buried underneath layers of unrecyclable materials and dirt, by the large pointy compactor wheels. When picking through the flattened heaps a picker has to be in constant mindfulness of the compactor's movement, as it works through the dumping area in the same way a harvester would move through a crop of maize, working it line after line, from left to right. This is illustrated by the arrows in Figure 10 which shows the movement of the compactor represented by the 'C' figure. As the compactor approaches to flatten out the line you are working in, waste-pickers are forced to move over to the next line until this action is repeated.

The waste-pickers and municipal officials appear to act, not out of fixed positions common in bureaucratic structures, but rather from positions of constant negotiation. Some assist in directing vehicles while others open and close the back doors of trucks. The positions and roles

of the waste-pickers and municipal workers aren't fixed according statute or regulation, as the vignette clearly indicates. Positions and actions are constantly re-negotiated. The flows and lines of the meshwork play out simultaneously alongside the categorising and separating actions of the waste-pickers. At first the categorising and separating actions of waste-pickers seem to be motivated by commonsensical intuition, but after repeatedly picking the wrong type of waste for our bag, I realised that Ali's picking actions draws on years of training and learning to separate and categorise. This awareness is something that developed through countless repetitive actions of handling waste materials. The practical action is never separated from the material in movement, and in flux. The following section continues the conversation on the separating and categorising actions of the waste-pickers within the flows and movements of the landfill and specifically places emphasis on the naming of things.

### **6.2.2 Separating, categorising and naming things**

I am once again working alongside Ali on a weekday, with the landfill actions taking place in all earnest. Today, Ali is collecting khere-khere (a high density plastic also referred to as PP or poli-prop) and white paper, which are two of the most valuable types of 'soft waste'. White paper normally sells at R1,50/kg and Khere-khere at R2,20/kg (at the time of writing). We are busy digging through new arrivals of waste piles and Ali picks up some of the waste pieces to teach me their names. As he picks them up he calls out the name. "HD, PP, PT, Khere-khere, Sta-soft, Ndondsela". These are a mixture of industrial material terms and colloquial waste-picker terms. 'Ndondsela' is used to refer to plastic grocery and refuse bags. The industrial term used for this type of plastic is High Density Polyethylene or HD-PE in short. Ali explained that *ndondsela* means to shake something when cleaning it, in the same way you would shake out your washed clothes before hanging it up to dry. The industrial term is derived from the scientific process involved in producing the plastic material. The waste-picker term on the other hand is informed by the action performed in the reclaiming and recycling process.

The gloves and protective clothing that Ali uses for waste-picking were found in the piles of waste. The waste-picker committee members have in the past requested the CTMM to provide

them with overalls, gloves and safety shoes, but according to Samson (2010), the Head of Landfill Operations disapproved this request. The waste governors refused the request because waste-pickers are not city council employees. Waste-pickers source their own working means and materials and are fortunate that many of these tools and materials are found in the waste piles. Likewise, a number of waste-pickers reside on the landfill and have erected makeshift structures using reclaimed waste, such as wooden pallets, plastic sheets and cardboard boxes. As I stand still for a moment, watching Ali separate his collected waste, I notice the exchanges taking place around us. Two waste-pickers are sharing a loose draw, and another hands them a 'stick' (safety match). One of the men in the frontline of the waste-picking crowd throws a piece of clothing to a woman standing in the back. As one of the trucks pull in to dump a load, a crowd of pickers rush to secure a spot at the back of it.

Ali has now finished separating the waste and as he sits down to take a break, he informs me about some of the business opportunities he has been thinking about since he started waste-picking. Some of the larger glass bottles are worth a lot if returned in one piece, he says. He can buy a whole container filled with glass from other waste-pickers at about R5000 and resell it for about R12000 to a recycling company. Alternatively, he could purchase a container, place it on the landfill and appoint someone to manage the role of filling up the container with whichever type of waste he chooses to sell to a recycling company. That entails transforming himself from a waste-picker to a *middleman* who mediates between recycling companies and waste-pickers. One of the cooperative leaders manages three containers for a recycling company. She has a contract with one of the recycling companies who has a presence on the landfill. Once the containers are filled up the company deploys one of their truck drivers to collect the accumulated recyclable waste. The recycling company pays the middlemen<sup>10</sup> a fixed amount per kilogram of waste.

As I make my way back to the main entrance of Hatherley Landfill, after a day of waste-picking, I notice Leo, the spaza owner, in an unusual location. He has moved his spaza to the garden

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<sup>10</sup> *Middleman* is the term used by the waste-pickers on the landfill. It is a highly gendered term and its use is problematic in the sense that a number of these middlemen are in fact women. I make use of the term simply because it is the generally accepted term used on the landfill.

refuse area. After greeting him he informs me that the city's manager of landfills visited the site. He ordered all waste-pickers situated in the organic waste section to relocate to a different area. He accused them of being responsible for starting a fire during the previous weekend which burnt down the organic waste section. Kleinbooi, a waste-picker who had relocated from Garstkloof Landfill, had been forced to move his stock of firewood which he sells to the public. These are large piles of firewood and Kleinbooi uses a wheelbarrow to move the pieces around. These regulatory actions exercised by the waste governors form a central part of the waste-picking reality and experience at Hatherley Landfill. In this instance Leo and Kleinbooi simply responded by relocating to a different area.

The vignettes presented in the above sections reflect the idiosyncratic processes that unfold daily on Hatherley Landfill. My intention with the portrayal of these events is not to structure them according to an argument of causality: the aim of these vignettes is to experiment with the approach suggested by Ingold (2010) and Laterza (2013) which chooses to 'follow' the unfolding processes, rather than 'connecting the dots' in retrospect. The adoption of this approach allows for the following of these processes in a forward motion which in effect portrays the actions of things as improvisation, contrary to the idea of agents imposing ideas on matter. Improvisation, in this sense, describes the creativity embedded within the actions of the waste-pickers and leaves the trajectory of things open-ended, in constant motion.

### **6.3 Conclusion: Bringing bricolage to life**

The ethnographic vignettes pointed to the biosocial entanglements unfolding on the landfill, which emphasises the intricate relationship that exists between creative action and material medium. In this process I wanted to do away with employing static and concrete concepts to commodities, typical of a Marxist framework of analysis, as pointed out by Laterza (2013:165).

In this chapter I have sought to break away from the use of these static concepts in the analysis of waste-picker actions. However, for analysis, elements of this approach were adopted in the previous chapter with the combined use of the concepts 'bricolage' and 'the social life of things'



(Levi-Strauss, 1966) (Appadurai, 1986). These concepts seem congruent with the meshwork approach, as I will explain in the section below.

In his seminal essay titled *The Social Life of Things*, Appadurai argues that the commodity state is simply a phase in the biographic trajectory of a thing, and therefore the possibility exists for a thing to move through numerous different phases in this trajectory. This argument is a critique of both the acceptance of commodity form as a static state, and of human labour as the only source of value creation. I see in the bricolage concept, even though it predates the resurgence of Marxist approaches in the 1970's, a similar intention to break away from static, concrete attributes to human actions and the social roles they fulfill. Levi-Strauss (1966) differentiates the actions of a bricoleur from those of an engineer. An engineer's work is determined by the availability of raw material. The bricoleur conversely, works with whatever is at hand, making use of previous constructions and deconstructions. The actions of the bricoleur are therefore fittingly described as improvisation, which allows for the following of the process in a forward motion, rather than connecting the dots in retrospect.

Herein the approach of a bricoleur is congruent with the meshwork paradigm in highlighting the creative characteristic of the waste-picker's actions as improvisation. However, what I have described as the waste-picker's agency gives way to what Ingold has termed the 'life' or 'coming to life' process, situated within the meshwork of the landfill. In other words creative human actions can never be separated from material medium, and this is what is meant by a biosocial entanglement. The improvising bricoleur is followed as a line in movement, entangled within the meshwork of the landfill site. However, these lines do not entangle to form an isolated meshwork namely the landfill. The meshwork of the landfill is further enmeshed within the larger regional context of the city, and more vastly in the global processes of waste material flows. These are some of the conceptual possibilities which are opened up through the lens of an Environment without Objects (EWO) (Ingold, 2010:8). How do we go about understanding the current CTMM Waste Management System through the lens of an EWO? In the waste management process, the state, market and waste-picker entities become obscured as each social actor is woven into the meshwork in multiple ways at various moments. In this sense we

cannot perceive the actions of the waste-pickers as isolated and autonomous, but should be in awareness of its multiplicities. It is at the same time dependant on, and integral to the state and market. Ingold suggests that . . .

“What is crucial is that we start from the fluid character of the life process wherein boundaries are sustained only thanks to the flow of materials across them” (Ingold, 2010:12).

Laterza complements this suggestion by stating . . .

“It is the meshwork that sustains the organism in its perceptually concrete existence” (Laterza, 2013:166).

It has been the aim of this chapter to illuminate the complex role and position of the waste-pickers within the waste management process. In view of the above statement it is reasonable to say that, it is through the creative actions of waste-pickers, enmeshed with the material medium of waste things in movement, that the discrete and concrete notion of formal waste management is sustained.

## Chapter 7 – Conclusion

This dissertation presented the unpacking of privatisation and formalisation in the CTMM waste management system. In making use of ethnographic analyses, I placed emphasis on the responses of the urban waste precariat to these transformations. In these analyses I identified a section of the urban waste precariat which has not been represented in literature on waste and waste picking on landfills, thus far. What followed this realisation, was an inquiry into the reasons, and an unmasking of the social forces behind this neglect.

I began by arguing that within the urban context, a disconnect exists between waste makers and the processes that manage their disposed waste. Although disconnected, waste makers are aware of the formal waste management processes, usually orchestrated by public authorities or private companies. I referred to this as the ‘visible’ waste process. However, the focus of the dissertation was placed on the ‘invisible’ waste processes, more specifically the invisible waste processes which play out on the landfill sites of the City of Tshwane, where waste-pickers position themselves within the formal waste management system. Here I showed that, a nexus exists in the urban landfill context between waste makers, waste governors and waste-pickers, however, the term ‘waste-picker’ did not encapsulate all of the informal reclaiming and recycling processes and for this reason I developed the term ‘urban waste precariat’. I referred to the processes neglected in the use of the term ‘waste-picker’ as fringe recycling practices, and in this sense my conceptualisation of the waste management process is wider than how it is typically conceived of by city managers, politicians and legislators. The reason for the neglect of fringe recycling in literature produced up to now, can largely be accredited to the way waste-pickers have been represented in the media and literature as an undifferentiated group. For this reason, I adopted a theoretical framework which emphasises processes, rather than categorisation. This theoretical framework perceives society as constituted primarily by human action, and it enabled me to show how the actions performed by the urban waste precariat pointed to a biosocial entanglement between creative human action and material medium.

The process of privatisation of the City of Tshwane landfills caused transformation in the waste management processes. This had a disruptive effect on the livelihoods of a large part of

Tshwane's waste precariat. As Samson argues, in developing countries the phenomenon of accumulation by dispossession involves attempts by the state to take control over spheres of accumulation opened up by informal social actors in order to transfer them to formal private enterprises (2012:113). This argument was made in reference to the state's privatisation of waste management systems on landfill sites in developing countries, as well as the informal recycling practices performed by the urban waste precariat. In no other city in South Africa was this more applicable than in Tshwane, where the CTMM closed down three of its eight public landfills, secured to be transformed into privately run multiple-sorting facilities that entailed minimal waste-picker participation and job creation. In a wider sense, waste material flows had become an integral part of global commodity flows, which further explained the interest of a neoliberalising state in the waste economy.

But, apart from the material value of waste, which significantly increased in the last decade (Samson, 2012), I also examined its cultural and symbolic dimension. Through conducting a critical discourse analysis of local newspaper articles, I investigated the perception that private property owning waste makers fostered regarding waste and waste-pickers located in their midst. My analysis of the newspaper articles show how waste makers voiced their need and mobilised for state assistance in removing the unwanted threat of waste-pickers from their doorstep. On the other hand, a neoliberalising state sought to lay hold of a growing waste economy which created a particular political dynamic. This political dynamic resonated with the clearing of 'black spots' and African freehold suburbs during the Apartheid era, where white residents requested state assistance in the removal of unwanted black residents. But, in the case of Garstkloof Landfill, the state simply discontinued the flow of waste to the landfill, cutting off most waste-pickers from their resource material. Formalisation and privatisation achieved what forced removals did under Apartheid.

In response to the process of the privatisation of public landfills, I described how the third sector played a prominent role in forming initiatives to create a more resilient position for waste-pickers within the waste management process. The most significant was the encouragement and facilitation by NGOs to establish waste-picker cooperatives. But, although

cooperative membership might have presented the benefit of price negotiations and greater social security, there were also negative aspects to it. This negative side of waste-picker cooperatives surfaced at Hatherley Landfill during a period where a large number of waste-pickers attempted to relocate from their recently closed down landfill site, to Hatherley Landfill. The ethnographic vignettes in chapter four depicted how cooperatives became bureaucratic mechanisms through which waste governors could limit access to a common good. Here, formalisation offered an avenue for waste governors to expel those whom they deemed dangerous and problematic, from making a living off waste. Most of the excluded individuals were foreign nationals, and in this process of formalisation waste governors strengthened the positions of cooperative members, especially those who had established an alliance with the waste governors. The process of formalisation at Hatherley Landfill had the outcome of excluding a section of the urban waste precariat from access to soft waste picking. These individuals were pushed to resort to what I call fringe recycling.

The risk here was to revert to ‘impact models’ in the portrayal of how policies of privatisation and formalisation forced a section of the waste precariat into fringe recycling. Samson (2012) argued that impact models neglect to interrogate actual processes of value production by waste-pickers, or how waste-pickers actively shape the ways in which waste materials are re-infused with value (2012:15). Hereby, impact model approaches have the outcome of portraying waste-pickers as passive recipients in the transformative processes of privatisation and formalisation. For this reason, I investigated the role of autonomy in synthesising the subjectivities of those who performed fringe recycling practices. I found that there seemed to be an open time frame in ‘invisible spaces’ such as landfill sites, where the waste precariat was able to open up an informal market through fringe recycling, before it is seized by the state or private sector. The concept of bricolage (Levi-Strauss, 1966) offered a fitting description for the reclaiming and transforming actions performed by the fringe recycling, waste precariat. Through bricolage, reclaiming and transforming, the waste precariat were actively re-patterning waste materials from an invisible, abstract state to a visible, concrete state in being infused with exchange value as a commodity. In using the terms ‘visible’ and ‘invisible’ I pointed out that these processes were invisible to waste makers and waste governors, but not to the waste

precariat itself, who initiated the actual invisible process. These bricolage actions stood in contrast to a Marxian conception of human labour, which stipulates that the result of labour exists in the imagination before it is realised in reality (Marx, 1906). Conversely, the outcome of the bricoleur's actions are determined by the materials that are reclaimed. Bricolage actions were driven by improvisation, and not purely by premeditation. In this way the waste precariat's responses were significantly shaped by the materiality of the landfill site.

By examining the fringe recycling processes on the landfill through the theoretical lens of bricolage, I could bring to light the role that autonomy played in the improvised actions of the waste precariat. But, in order to show that this analysis has wider applicability for actions of improvisation, other than in waste material processes, it was necessary to situate these actions within the waste management system, in relation to the state and the market. For this purpose, I applied Ingold (2010) and Laterza's (2013) concepts of 'meshwork' and 'life'. This entailed the writing of an exploratory chapter where, to my knowledge, these concepts were applied to waste management processes for the first time. However, in perceiving the waste processes on the landfill as a meshwork of life processes, the concept of autonomy was replaced by 'life' or 'coming to life', as the waste precariat actions were entangled with a conglomeration of life processes. Hereby, I made the argument that the reclaiming, transforming, separating and recycling actions of the waste precariat were both dependant and integral to the state and the market. In keeping with Ingold and Laterza's approach, I contended that waste makers and waste governors maintain a notion of formal, concrete waste management, which in fact is sustained by fluid life processes, such as fringe recycling.

Now, although this perspective illustrates a specificity to landfills, I assert that it carries a wider applicability. These processes can be identified wherever the harnessing power of states and the market attempts to contain the fluidity of life processes. Scott does well to point out how, *"We encounter it in various guises in colonial development schemes, planned urban centers in both the East and the West, collectivized farms, the large development plans of the World Bank, the resettlement of nomadic populations, and the management of workers on factory floors"* (Scott, 1998:342). However, this dissertation should not be misinterpreted as a manifesto for

the complete abolishment of states and bureaucratic structures. I simply adopt a definite position against situations where livelihoods of the poor are superseded by bureaucratic agendas. Therefore, I make a few recommendations for a more inclusive waste management system.

Chapter Two of this dissertation included an extended discussion of the City of Tshwane's Integrated Waste Management Plan (2014). This strategy, adopted by the CTMM, contains numerous initiatives developed to improve the waste management of the city. The CTMM makes a clear statement in this document about the intention to discontinue the flow of waste to landfills. Related to this point, the document makes a distinction between street waste-pickers and waste-pickers positioned on landfills. The CTMM communicates the intention to provide training and sorting facilities for street waste-pickers, but the practice of landfill waste-picking will be discontinued. In replacement of waste-picker practices the CTMM aims to provide Material Recovery Facilities (MRF), which will be constructed at significant cost. Considering this issue, I suggest that a cost-benefit analysis be made of the fringe recycling practices in comparison to the alternative approaches conveyed by the CTMM.

Brick recycling, for example, is one of the fringe recycling practices that I have discussed in Chapter Five, where brick recyclers reclaim *mampara bricks* from the building rubble dumped on landfills. The construction industry is the largest contributor to waste materials transferred to landfills, followed by industrial waste generation (Graeber, 2012). However, the IWMP does not seem to acknowledge the contribution that brick recyclers have made in attempts at formulating an alternative strategy to address the issue of surmounting construction rubble. Quantitative data in this regard might serve to illustrate the benefit of improving and enhancing the recycling practices of the urban waste precariat. A recent report compiled by the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) illustrated the value of such quantitative data collecting, regarding waste-picker livelihoods (Godfrey, 2016).

Due to the constraints of this research project I was unable to conduct a thorough study of the private recycling companies present on the landfill. This dissertation raises further questions

concerning the relationships existing between the private companies, the waste governors and the waste-pickers. Such research should determine how private companies gain access to landfills, as well as establish how prices paid for waste materials are determined, negotiated and contested.

The position of the urban waste precariat on landfill sites in the City of Tshwane is currently threatened by the local municipality policies that encourage particular forms of privatisation. It is my hope that this dissertation contributes towards a more inclusive waste management system for the urban waste precariat, in the City of Tshwane.



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