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## Making Place for Waste: Governance Between the Formal and Informal by Casablancon Waste collection and Collectors

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## 6/ Making Place for Waste: Governance Between the Formal and Informal by Casablančan Waste collection and Collectors

Anna Karin GIANNOTTA

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**ABSTRACT:** *Despite a growing number of recent Discard Studies looking at waste circulation and its implications in urban contexts, they have not sufficiently addressed the links they have with State Governance and Informality. This article is aimed at providing a deeper gaze on waste flows between waste pickers and institutions in Casablanca (Morocco) by complicating the categories of subalternity and informality. The empirical part of the paper provides an analysis of the variety of strategies, which I explore ethnographically, through which waste pickers engage with perpetual tensions regarding their position in governance processes rather than the linearly subaltern, polluting and passive agents they are often presented as. Eventually, reflecting on the interdependence between urban governance and informal practices, I will propose a reinterpretation of the notions of justice and spatial mobility with respect to the circulation of waste.*

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**ABSTRACT:** *Sebbene un numero sempre maggiore di Discard Studies prenda in esame la circolazione dei rifiuti e le sue implicazioni nello spazio urbano, emerge una carenza di indagini sui possibili intrecci tra pratiche istituzionali e informali di governance dei rifiuti. Questo articolo si concentra sui legami esistenti tra i recuperatori di rifiuti e i dispositivi istituzionali a Casablanca (Marocco), interrogandosi sulle categorie di subalternità e informalità. La sezione empirica presenta un quadro dettagliato delle molteplici strategie, esplorate etnograficamente, attraverso le quali la posizione dei recuperatori spicca in una costante tensione rispetto alla filiera formale. In tal modo si segnala un quadro rappresentativo inverso rispetto a una narrazione dominante che li dipinge come attori subalterni, passivi e talvolta contamina(n)ti. Infine riflettendo sull'intreccio tra governance urbana e pratiche informali, si proporrà una rilettura delle nozioni di giustizia e mobilità spaziale rispetto alla circolazione dei rifiuti.*

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### 1. Theoretical framework

Urban waste and waste collectors offer a medium to analyse material and cultural relationships within institutional<sup>1</sup> and informal policies and practices related to waste

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<sup>1</sup> In this article the term institution will be used with reference to a particular institution or organization of government structures producing a dominant discourse in a specific area. Institution agents usually contribute to formalize their voice and the policy orientation on specific issues. According to the findings of my fieldwork by institution I mean the Monarchy, the Parliament and all its agents (Ministry of the Environment, security and military forces etc.), international organization such as the World Bank, all entities that together, through specific legal and normative policies and frameworks, dictate waste

governance. Places around the world show tensions and connections between marginalized wasted environments<sup>2</sup>, subaltern workers and top-down environmental policies. *Discard Studies* literature<sup>3</sup> draws upon multi-disciplinary approaches to investigate on waste, not just as «a rotten, broken, unwanted»<sup>4</sup> thing or as a «matter out of place»<sup>5</sup>, but as a process, category, mentality, judgment, an infrastructural and economic challenge, and as a site for power struggles. As Douglas illustrated in her seminal publication *Purity and Danger*<sup>6</sup>, the concept of dirt and its relationships to our understandings of *contaminant* or *purity* can offer great insights into our understandings of how waste is dealt with in urban environments. Reflecting on the contrast between contamination and purity and relating it both to social organization and the human body, Douglas recognizes the importance of boundaries and limits in defining what is to be deemed as repulsive for the construction of classification systems. Human societies are therefore constituted as a system that tends towards order; rituals relating to contamination and purity tend to solve and/or get round anomalies that undermine classification cultural systems. These themes have provided the underpinning for other works such as Tim Cresswell's elaboration on transgression and deviance<sup>7</sup>. In his *In place/out of place* the author stresses the key role of place in shifting perceptions embracing both materiality and ideology. He illustrates how notions of normality are rooted in place and how they happen to be de-naturalized only through relatively atypical transgression. According to Cresswell's view there is a strong link between transgressive behaviour and deviance when both take place in violation of norms and rules set by dominant

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management and recycling practices in Morocco. For a more profound gaze on the notion of institution I suggest: DOUGLAS, Mary, *How institutions think*, Syracuse (NY), Syracuse University Press, 1986; HERZFELD, Michael, *Antropologia. Pratica della teoria nella cultura e nella società*, Firenze, Seid, 2006.

<sup>2</sup> I use this expression with reference to the meaning that Kevin Lynch gives to the term. In his *Wasting away* there are not unused lands but places (such as dumps, spaces for trash collection, formal and informal waste markets) that mix with wastes and people, in a mutual conflictive and cooperative transformation: LYNCH, Kevin, *Wasting Away*, San Francisco, Sierra Club Books, 1990. On this topic I also suggest: ALLIEGRO, Vincenzo, «Simboli e processi di costruzione simbolica. La "Terra dei Fuochi" in Campania», in *EtnoAntropologia*, 5, 2/2018, pp. 175-240; ARMIERO, Marco, SGUEGLIA, Leandro, «Wasted Spaces, Resisting People: the politics of waste in Naples, Italy», in *Tempo e Argomento*, 11, 26, 2019, pp. 135-156; RENO, Joshua, «Waste and Waste Management», in *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 44, 1/2015, pp. 557-572.

<sup>3</sup> The term Discard Studies was used for the first time by Robin Nagle, a north-American anthropologist who decided to found a blog in 2010 with the collaboration of three colleagues, Max Liboiron, Josh Lepawsky and Alex Zaharae: DISCARD STUDIES, *Discard Studies.com*, URL:

< <https://discardstudies.com/> > [consulted on 2 april 2020]. The project involves the creation of a digital center where scholars, activists, environmentalists, students, artists and designers who wonder about waste, not only as an ecological problem, but as a process, category, mentality, judgment and as a socio-economic infrastructure.

<sup>4</sup> RENO, Joshua, «Our Trash Is Someone's Treasure The Politics of Value at a Michigan Landfill», in *Journal of Material Culture*, 14, 1/2009, pp. 29-46.

<sup>5</sup> DOUGLAS, Mary, *Purity and danger*, London, Routledge, 1966, p. 36.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>7</sup> CRESSWELL, Tim, *In Place/Out of Place*, Minneapolis - London, University of Minnesota Press, 1996.

groups, adding that very often dirt, waste, pollution, and obscenity themes are commonly used to designate activities that are *out of place* in a normative landscape<sup>8</sup>.

Studies on (perceived) contaminated and deviant people have dominated an important area of cultural studies since the nineteenth century. Indeed, it is worth mentioning the attention these studies have given to subaltern workers - *chiffonniers*, beggars, rag packs - and their housing and working practices through which these people interact with governments and the rest of society in a subordinate relationship<sup>9</sup>. Within these studies, many have questioned the ways through which they engage with State practices managing originally their top-down socioeconomic and spatial exclusion<sup>10</sup>.

The notion of transgressive behaviour discussed above leads me to introduce another strictly connected discussion on “in/out of places” activities and waste, that is to say waste recovery. It is an activity carried out by waste pickers that are often referred to as informal.

But what is informality? Recent research in the Global South and North has made an important effort towards defining what is meant by informality<sup>11</sup> in specific contexts<sup>12</sup>. In its immediate economic sense, it is the absence of government or state regulation and taxation. It is defined as

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<sup>8</sup> An example of out of place activity that the author reports is the Greenham Common women's peace camp (1981) appeared to protest the stationing of ninety-six nuclear-tipped cruise missiles. The Greenham peace women defined the air base as completely out of place in England. The women, in turn, were designated by the British media as out of place through a mainstream media discourse of dirt, smell, filth, not only with respect to the space they were occupying, but also because they were not “fulfilling” their domestic duties at home. Local residents also expressed their fear and sometimes rejection over the representation of the camp in that moment and how it would have affected local values. Cresswell shows the existence of a variety of representations of the camp through contested process of meaning construction and its relation to place, and in this case, gender.

<sup>9</sup> CHAKRAVORTY SPIVAK, Gayatri, *Can the Subaltern Speak?*, in NELSON, Cary, GROSSBERG, Lawrence (edited by), *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1988, pp. 271-313; DE SOTO, Hernando, *The Mystery of Capital: Why Capitalism Triumphs in the West and Fails Everywhere Else*, London, Bantam, 2001; MARX, Karl, *Das Kapital. Kritik der politischen Oekonomie*, Hamburg, Verlag von Otto Meisser, 1867; PIASERE, Leonardo, *I popoli delle discariche*, Roma, CISU, 1991; SANGA, Glauco, «La piazza. Ambulanti vagabondi malviventi fieranti. Studi sulla marginalità storica in memoria di Alberto Menarini», in *La Ricerca Folklorica*, 9, 1989, pp. 1-134.

<sup>10</sup> SAITTA, Pietro, «Practices of subjectivity: the informal economies and the subaltern rebellion», in *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy*, 37, 7-8, 2017, pp. 400-416; ROY, Ananya, «Slumdog cities: Rethinking subaltern urbanism», in *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 35, 2/2011, pp. 223-238; SIMONE, AbdouMaliq, *For the city yet to come, changing African life in four cities*, Durham, Duke University Press, 2004.

<sup>11</sup> In the anthropological debate the term informal associated with economic science studies was introduced for the first time in the 1970s by a British anthropologist, Keith Hart. According to an ethnographic investigation he carried out in the Accra suburb in Ghana, he coined the expression informal income opportunity to describe all those activities that were embedded throughout the whole economic and social fabric of the city, but which escaped an administrative control. Jobs, therefore, capable of generating an income for certain social actors through practices that go beyond the tracks of the official economy. HART, Keith, «Informal Income Opportunities and Urban Employment in Ghana», in *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 11, 1/1973, pp. 61-89.

<sup>12</sup> On formality-informality and waste between North and Global South I should suggest: BERRUTI, Gilda, PALESTINO, Maria Federica, «Contested land and blurred rights in the Land of Fires (Italy)», in *International Planning Studies*, 25, 3/2020, pp. 277-288.

«a set of economic and commercial actions that escape legal, fiscal, social, juridical, or any type of statistical framework»<sup>13</sup>. Informality, as a disciplinary crossing category, is often applied within a setting in which certain groups secure livelihoods or commodities; or as a condition related to legal status. This tends to circumscribe the focus of urban informality to the urban poor: those people who commonly live, work, and access services and rights through informal channels and in informal sectors. Nevertheless urban informality includes all of these things, but also other often unexplored dynamics and relationships between different social actors. Artificial boundaries across economic, political, and spatial domains – as well as the over-simplistic formal-informal binary – have masked broader cross-cutting issues of political economy, by removing focus away from other groups and actors involved in urban informality<sup>14</sup>.

Vanesa Castán Broto's *Urban Energy Landscape*<sup>15</sup> illustrates this particularly well. By successfully connecting the macroscale of energy governance with the microscale of everyday practices in urban settings, dealing with a wide range of energy production, the author explores the modalities through which resource availability makes possible the creation of a «connective tissue» determined by urban energy governance, infrastructure, social practices and energy transition.

With regards to subalternity, there are a number of studies that have approached the subject. In this essay I find myself questioning Gayatri Spivak's line of thought<sup>16</sup>. According to the feminist scholar, the subaltern is a subject who does not have a voice, because speaking is itself a transaction between speaker and listener. Subaltern is not just a term representing *the oppressed*; everything that has limited or no access to cultural imperialism as subaltern. Authors such as Sarkar have emphasized the fundamental relationships of power, domination and subordination<sup>17</sup>, thus subalternity came to be seen as the condition of those who did not and could not belong to the elite classes, a «general attribute of subordination»<sup>18</sup>. Equally important as a theme in subaltern studies is the question of political agency. The scholar Asef Bayat<sup>19</sup> argues that in a urban space a marginalized and deinstitutionalized subaltern crafts a street politics best understood as a distinctive type of political agency: informal life. For Bayat informal life is

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<sup>13</sup> LAUTIER, Bruno, DE MIRAS, Claude, MORICE, Alain, *L'Etat et l'informel*, Paris, L'Harmanattan, 1991, p. 117.

<sup>14</sup> On this subject see: BANKS, Nicola, LOMBARD, Melanie, MITLIN, Diana, «Urban Informality as a Site of Critical Analysis», in *The Journal of Development Studies*, 56, 2/2020, pp. 223-238.

<sup>15</sup> CASTÁN BROTO, Vanesa, *Urban Energy Landscapes*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2019.

<sup>16</sup> CHAKRAVORTY SPIVAK, Gayatri, *Can the Subaltern Speak?*, cit.

<sup>17</sup> SARKAR, Sumit, *The conditions and nature of subaltern militancy: Bengal from Swadeshi to non-co-operation, c. 1905-22*, in GUHA, Ranajit (edited by), *Subaltern studies: writings on South Asian history and society*, vol. III, New York, Oxford University Press, 1984, pp. 271-320.

<sup>18</sup> CHAKRAVORTY SPIVAK, Gayatri, *Can the Subaltern Speak?*, cit., p. 35

<sup>19</sup> BAYAT, Asef, «From 'dangerous classes' to 'quiet rebels': the politics of the urban subaltern in the global South», in *International Sociology*, 15, 3/2000, pp. 533-557.

characterized by «flexibility, pragmatism, negotiation, as well as constant struggle for survival and self-development»<sup>20</sup>.

Through my ethnographic findings from fieldwork, I engage with subalternity and informality as categories by describing Moroccan waste pickers' daily practices and their work within a specific normative framework, investigating their (informal) relationships with different social actors such as governmental control groups and devices, wholesalers and local people. In doing so, I draw upon Spivak's critique of "itineraries of the subaltern". Writing against those studies that identify the subaltern as the subordinate classes, as the «demographic difference»<sup>21</sup>, I will argue that studying the subaltern means thinking about it as an object constituted of different representational and knowledge perspectives, in lieu of an ethnography that claims to speak for the authentic subaltern.

The concept of spatial justice emerged in contemporary debate thanks to the influential perspectives of scholars such as Harvey, Lefebvre, Sheller and Soja<sup>22</sup> who affirmed that the concept of spatial and mobility justice can be achieved visibly in contextual space<sup>23</sup>. In other words, they cannot be achieved in an abstract way, since the social relationships take place in certain places and temporalities. «Mobility justice is one of the crucial political and ethical issues of our days and focuses attention on the politics of unequal capabilities for movement, as well as on unequal rights to stay or to dwell in a place»<sup>24</sup>. It is a useful instrument that allows us to think more clearly about the existent interconnection between bodies, streets, transport systems, objects and (natural or not) resources. The term immobility is meant to signal that it is strictly connected with its "opposite". Both terms are not intended as binary opposites, but dynamic constellations of multiple practices and politics. Also, the macro category of (im)mobilities is thought of as comprehensive, not only people and mobilities processes, but also politics, things, resources, and last but not least waste mobilities. As Sheller suggests, behind the insurgence of (im)mobilities phenomena and crises, there is a part of a wider disturbance in prevailing

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<sup>20</sup> BAYAT, Asef, «Radical religion and the habitus of the dispossessed: does Islamic militancy have an urban ecology?», in *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 31, 3/2007, pp. 579-590, p. 579.

<sup>21</sup> CHAKRAVORTY SPIVAK, Gayatri, *A critique of postcolonial reason: toward a history of the vanishing present*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1999, p. 191.

<sup>22</sup> ALIER, Joan Martinez, *The environmentalism of the poor - a study of ecological conflicts and valuation*, Cheltenham, Edward Elgar, 2002; HARVEY, David, *Social Justice in the City*, Baltimore (MD), John Hopkins University Press, 1973; LEFEBVRE, Henri, *La Production de l'espace*, Paris, Anthropos, 1974; SHELLER, Mimi, *Mobility Justice: The Politics of Movement in an Age of Extremes*, London, Verso, 2018; SOJA, Edward, *Seeking spatial justice*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota press, 2010.

<sup>23</sup> The spatial element in the notion of justice was conceptualized mainly by Henri Lefebvre through the conceptual triad of conceived space (as a mental construction of space), perceived space (as an objective and concrete one) and lived space (as a combination of perceived and conceived space). The gap between the lived space of daily practices, the conceived space of programmers and planners and the space perceived by those who live in it, provides important information on the degree of injustice that characterizes it. LEFEBVRE, Henri, *La Production de l'espace*, cit.

<sup>24</sup> SHELLER, Mimi, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

institutions concerned with the management of mobilities and immobilities, both at locally and globally<sup>25</sup>.

Getting inspiration from Joan Martínez Alier, Lefebvre and Sheller's studies, I explore what can be learned from waste circulation on the mobility justice of waste collectors. By illustrating adaptation responses and tactics<sup>26</sup>, the article forces us to question categories represented as subaltern versus a dominant single narrative of reality established as normative<sup>27</sup>.

The paper is divided into five sections: the first section outlines the rapid growth Casablanca faced during the French colonial period and its still visible nowadays consequences (internal migration of rural dwellers, expansion of the bidonvilles in the south-eastern part of the city, saturation of the labour market and explosion of informal labour activities such as waste picking); this is followed by a brief overview of normative waste management frameworks which are followed by second stage empirical research focused on activities carried out by waste pickers, considering the relationships between the institutional and the informal. The final section argues that seeing these workers as passive and subaltern needs to be reviewed; in conclusion, I argue that daily practices of waste recovery and recycling, as an object and analytical tool for investigating a given reality, have the potential to produce knowledge on the intertwining of urban governance, urban transformations and the socio-relational infrastructures of Casablanca.

## 2. Colonial and post-colonial policies on waste and wasted environments in Casablanca

Casablanca, in Moroccan Arabic *ad-Dār al-Baiḍa*' (literally The White House), underwent a recent and quick transformation. At the beginning of the twentieth century it was a coastal settlement with a population of about 20.000 inhabitants. After the French Protectorate was established in 1912, Casablanca became a «real urban laboratory of modernity»<sup>28</sup>.

There were two significant changes in the city which are still visible today. The first refers to the consequences that building a marina, railway and road enhancement, had on producing a considerable internal migration of rural dwellers from the countryside to the city<sup>29</sup>. The second is

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<sup>25</sup> SELLER, Mimi, *op. cit.*, p. 100.

<sup>26</sup> DE CERTEAU, Michel, *L'invention du quotidien. Essai sur les nouvelles classes moyennes*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1980.

<sup>27</sup> CHAKRAVORTY SPIVAK, Gayatri, *Can the Subaltern Speak?*, cit., p. 25.

<sup>28</sup> Casablanca experienced an unprecedented economic and urban development thanks to the decisions of General Lyautey – the then Representative of the French State in Morocco – to build in 1913, the largest port in the country. This event had a relevant impact on the urban and social infrastructure of Casablanca. CHARTON, Albert, «Casablanca», in *Annales de Géographie*, XXXIII, 183, 1924, pp. 303-307; RACHIK, Abdelrahman, «Casablanca: politiques urbaines et pressions sociales», in *NAQD*, 16, 1/2002, pp. 55-65.

<sup>29</sup> AWAD, Hassan. «Morocco's Expanding Towns», in *The Geographical Journal*, 130, 1/1964, pp. 49-64.

the cumulative process of «hyper-urbanization»<sup>30</sup>, which definitively marked the organization of the urban space, including Casablanca's periphery extension to the south and south-east of the city. Colonial administrations encouraged mixed economy real estate companies by promoting flexible assistance for construction through loans, interest rate subsidies and tax exemptions. The result was a massive urban development and an uncontrolled and chaotic private housing market, due to frantic land and real estate speculation<sup>31</sup>. The hope for better living conditions brought many people from the surrounding rural areas to *Dār al-Baīda*. According to a census conducted at the end of the French protectorate, 75% of the city's population originated from the countryside<sup>32</sup>. The majority of waste pickers I met during my fieldwork working in Casablanca, come from the countryside and live in the suburbs that created in that period (one of which is the Lahraouine neighbourhood where I conducted part of my research). During the twentieth century, the labour market started to saturate. Many rural dwellers, who were now inhabiting the suburbs of the city, started to dedicate themselves to informal markets and activities such as rag and waste picking. Consequently, a significant housing shortage arose that inevitably led to a rapid increase in the unemployment rate and the subsequent formation of slums (the so-called *bidonvilles*<sup>33</sup>) in the periphery of the city<sup>34</sup>.

Moreover at the beginning of the twentieth century diseases like the plague, smallpox and typhus spread to Morocco. The colonial administration implemented a “strategy of urgency”<sup>35</sup>. This involved the repression and destruction of shanty houses and settlements considered unclean (such as those neighbourhoods located in close proximity to Derb Ghallef, a district originally intended to host European inhabited settlements) and the construction of New Medina (in French *nouvelle medina* and *Dārija medina al-jadīda*), a set of neighbourhoods built and designed to accommodate the Muslim Moroccan population<sup>36</sup>. The west central area, including the Maārīf and Bourgogne, populated mainly by Europeans and the south eastern area, populated mainly by locals. This ethnic spatial distinction is still recognizable today. If on the one hand the city was

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<sup>30</sup> PUSCHMANN, Paul, *Casablanca. A Demographic Miracle on Moroccan Soil?*, Leuven, Acco, 2011.

<sup>31</sup> CATTEDRA, Raffaele, «Nascita e primi sviluppi di una città coloniale: Casablanca 1907-1930», in *Storia Urbana*, 53, 1990, pp. 127-180.

<sup>32</sup> PUSCHMANN, Paul, *op. cit.*; SANTUCCI, Jean-Claude, «Casablanca», in CAMPS, Gabriel (ed. by), *Encyclopédie Berbère*, vol. 12, Aix-en-Provence, Edisud, 1993, pp. 1812-1822.

<sup>33</sup> The term now refers to any kind of settlement positioned in economically exploitable areas. For further accounts on the urban development of Casablanca and its peripheries see: RACHIK, Abdelrahman, *Casablanca: politiques urbaines et pressions sociales*, cit.; RACHIK, Abdelrahman, *Casablanca l'urbanisme de l'urgence*, Casablanca, Najah Al Jadida, 2002.

<sup>34</sup> RACHIK, Abdelrahman, «Périphérie, émeutes et politique urbaine : Le cas de Casablanca», in *Horizons Maghrébins - Le droit à la mémoire*, 25-26, 1994, pp. 224-235.

<sup>35</sup> RIVET, Daniel, *Lyautey et l'institution du protectorat français au Maroc (1912-1925)*, vol. I, Paris, L'Harmattan, 1988 ; RACHIK, Abdelrahman, *Casablanca l'urbanisme de l'urgence*, cit. p. 1.

<sup>36</sup> RACHIK, Abdelrahman, *Structure urbaine et politique coloniale au Maghreb*, in RIERA, Antoni, GUITART, Josep, GINER, Salvador (ed. by), *Ciutats mediterrànies. Civilització i desenvolupament. Seminari internacional*, Barcelona : Institut d'Estudis Catalans, 2015, pp. 16-18.



developing economically, attracting increasing numbers of Moroccans from rural areas, a movement exacerbated by a period of severe drought and famine, on the other, the *bidonvilles* located in peripheral areas continued to receive an increasing number of rural dwellers<sup>37</sup>.

The tensions those events created manifest today and the city is undergoing a massive gentrification process involving the demolition of *bidonvilles*. The project *Villes sans bidonvilles*, whose aim is to wipe out self-built dwellings in all Moroccan cities by 2020, has been promoted since 2004 by the Moroccan government as part of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme<sup>38</sup> - where the main funding bodies are the World Bank and the European Commission.

The Douar Wasti neighbourhood is an illustrative example of these tensions between institutional plans and dwellers' claims for the rights to the city<sup>39</sup>. On September 21<sup>st</sup>, 2018, a police operation cleared and demolished Douar Wasti; a district situated in the middle of the former industrial area of Aïn Sebaâ, on the northern shoreline of Casablanca. Its' approximately 1,500 residents were forced to collect their belongings and leave their houses at very short notice.

«Most residents had to find accommodation in the houses of parents and friends, while several others camped on the area to manifest their anger, surrounded by mountains of garbage and ruins, their personal belongings scattered around the demolition site»<sup>40</sup>. Douar Wasti demolitions were carried out before negotiation could be concluded and residents were offered plots of land 30 kilometres away from the city center, with no housing means<sup>41</sup>.

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<sup>37</sup> Tensions produced by demographic pressure and popular discontent nourished the Moroccan nationalist movement and the Moroccan Independence Party, the *Istiqlâl*, which changed his strategy in the 1950s by committing acts of violence: on 7th and 8th December 1952 in Casablanca there were bloody demonstrations and riots against colonial power that definitively marked the end of the Protectorate. The Moroccan declaration of independence was formally signed on March 2nd, 1956 in Paris. According to Puschmann the development of land property can be illustrative of the problematic land management situation in Morocco. With the French protectorate the agricultural sector faced an era of renewal that turned out to be a very uneven development. On one hand French colonials took control of the most fertile lands, on the other Moroccan farmers stayed with their barren soils which were constantly subdivided, as Islamic law grants heritage rights to the whole family's offspring. The result was the formation of a dual-economy that persisted even after decolonization. The Moroccan elite owned large parts of the lands that belonged to French colonials and the problems of smallholders grew worse as the partition of their lands continued. Consequently migration movement from the countryside to the city did not stop in the latter part of the twentieth century but rather increased. HOUSE, Jim, «L'impossible contrôle d'une ville coloniale? Casablanca, décembre 1952», in *Genèses*, 86, 1/2012, pp. 78-103; PUSCHMANN, Paul, *op. cit.*

<sup>38</sup> ONU HABITAT, Programme des Nations Unies pour les Etablissements Humains - ONU-HABITAT Mission d'appui, Rabat, 2011 URL: < [http://mirror.unhabitat.org/downloads/docs/11592\\_4\\_594598.pdf](http://mirror.unhabitat.org/downloads/docs/11592_4_594598.pdf) > [consulted on 30 November 2020].

<sup>39</sup> LEFEBVRE, Henri, *Le Droit à la ville*, Paris, Anthropos, 1968.

<sup>40</sup> PORTELLI, Stefano, LEES Loretta, «Eviction and Displacement from the Neighbourhood of Douar Wasti in Casablanca, Morocco», in *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, URL: < <https://www.ijurr.org/news/eviction-and-displacement-from-the-neighbourhood-of-douar-wasti-in-casablanca-morocco/> > [consulted on 22 June 2020].

<sup>41</sup> *Ibidem*.

This long-lasting tendency towards the creation of social-spatial marginalities and injustices and the constant opposition between «Casablanca the rebel»<sup>42</sup> and its paternalist and colonial institutions leads me to introduce non inclusive dynamics related to waste urban management and decision-making processes.

In the light of these preliminary considerations on colonial and post-colonial urban planning in Casablanca, I will illustrate some specific economic aspects on waste management in the city. Studies in this field have revealed important details on the entire waste management system, such as the contemporary and exponential growth of waste produced in the city and the difficulty in its disposal operations which are due in part to some flaws resulting from the cooperation between municipalities and private recycling companies<sup>43</sup>.

Over the last twenty years of the twenty-first century, Casablanca has undergone a radical change that also affected visible and material aspects of the city: the production of goods and commodities, their consumption, and the consequent accumulation of waste. By definition, waste production is an effect of the radical transformation of the metabolic urban system<sup>44</sup> and socio-economic dynamics, the most visible, perceptible and fetid side effect<sup>45</sup>.

The potential economic value of waste has attracted the attention of far-sighted investors. In the last twenty years, public policies promoted by international organizations and funding bodies (such as the World Bank, European Union directives, bilateral partnerships, etc.) have tipped the balance towards a waste prevention and recycling logic rather than a simple removal logic, supporting the growing demand for secondary raw materials<sup>46</sup>.

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<sup>42</sup> NASSIRI, Said, «Politiques urbaines et recompositions sociales à Casablanca», in *Archimedia.it*, URL: < <http://www.archimedia.ma/avis-paroles-dexperts/urbanisme/1818-politique-urbaine-et-recompositions-sociales-a-casablanca> > [consulted on 28 August 2017].

<sup>43</sup> AJIR, Abdelkader, «Gestion des déchets solides au Maroc: Problématique et approche de développement», in *Proceedings of International Symposium on Environmental Pollution Control and Waste Management*, EPCOWM, Tunisi, 7/2002, pp. 740-747, URL: < <http://www.geocities.jp/epcowmjp/EPCOWM2002/740-747ajir.pdf> > [consulted on 30 November 2020]; MERZOUKI, Hasna et al., «A Study of Physico-chemical Traitement of Leachates Case of the Landfill of Fkih Ben Salah, Morocco», in *Journal of Environmental Science, Toxicology and Food Technology (IOSR-JESTFT)*, 10, 12/2016, pp. 41-50.

<sup>44</sup> Metabolism in urban political ecology is a key concept. Urban metabolisms are «exchange processes whereby cities transform raw materials, energy, and water into the built environment, human biomass, and waste». CASTÁN BROTO, Vanesa, ALLEN, Adriana, RAPAPORT, Elizabeth, «Interdisciplinary perspectives on urban metabolism», in *Journal of Industrial Ecology*, 16, 6/2012, pp. 851-861, p. 851. According to the scholars Demaria and Schindler, urban metabolisms can remain stable over long periods of time, but they are inherently subject to change according to resource availability, technological innovation and political contingency. DEMARIA, Federico, SCHINDLER, Seth, «Contesting Urban Metabolism: Struggles Over Waste-to-Energy in Delhi, India», in *Antipode*, 48, 2/2016, pp. 293-313. Please refer to the following authors for a more detailed conceptualization on the notion: HEYNEN, Nik, KAIKA, Maria, SWYNGEDOUW, Erik, *In the Nature of Cities: Urban Political Ecology and The Politics of Urban Metabolism*, London, Routledge, 2006.

<sup>45</sup> ERIKSEN, Thomas, *Fuori controllo. Un'antropologia del cambiamento accelerato*, Torino, Giulio Einaudi Editore, 2017, p. 138.

<sup>46</sup> Secondary raw material is a material obtained from a first waste-recycling step that can be used in partial or total replacement of a virgin raw material. It is in an intermediate state between waste and product intended as a commodity. CIRELLI, Claudia, FLORIN, Bénédicte, «Sociétés urbaines et déchets. Eclairages

In Morocco economic and institutional stakeholders became interested in waste when two important political and legislative actions were taken. The first action, in 2006, is the law 28.00<sup>47</sup>, whose goals were the economic valorisation of waste and the creation of a recycling chain through a meticulous distinction of waste objects according to their nature. Generic waste became categorised into domestic, industrial, medical, hospital and pharmaceutical, hazardous, inert, agricultural, final and biodegradable wastes, changing its ontological condition to a re-usable and recyclable product.

The second action was the approval and implementation of the *Programme National des Déchets Ménagers* (PNDM)<sup>48</sup>. Adopted in 2007, following an agreement between the Moroccan Ministry of the Environment and the Moroccan Ministry of the Interior (and financed by the World Bank), the PNDM aims to renew the waste management system through the so-called *Gestion déléguée*. This delegated management involved the outsourcing of waste from the state directed service organised by the municipality to private enterprise, in a characteristic Public Private Partnership (PPPs)<sup>49</sup>.

Based on the main points of the regulatory framework in force in Casablanca, since June 2019, 80% of garbage collection has been entrusted to two private entities: Derichebourg<sup>50</sup> (a French multinational) and Averda<sup>51</sup> (a Lebanese multinational), «while 20% of the city's surface is not covered by any waste collection service»<sup>52</sup>. Averda and Derichebourg are required to collect household waste during the night (from 10:00 PM to 6:00 AM to avoid traffic congestion during the day), garbage trucks and manual trailer trolleys are all equipped with electronic chips, more resistant containers have been placed in the busiest places, the service providers of both companies are paid on a flat-rate calculation rather than tonnage (as was the case prior to 2019). However, despite the good intentions and the alleged avant-garde tools implemented, the city continues to fight with problematic waste management and collection, and local discontent is growing day by day.

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internationaux», in FLORIN, Bénédicte (ed. by), *Villes et Territoires*, Presses Universitaires François Rabelais, 2015.

<sup>47</sup> Loi 28.00, «Loi n° 28-00 relative à la gestion des déchets et à leur élimination», in *Adala Justice.com*, URL: < <http://adala.justice.gov.ma/production/html/Fr/149395.htm> > [consulted on 14 June 2020].

<sup>48</sup> PNDM, «Programma National des déchets ménagers, in Ministère de l'énergie, des mines, de l'eau et de l'environnement», in *pndm.environnement.gov.ma*, URL: < <http://pndm.environnement.gov.ma/> > [Consulted on 28 June 2020].

<sup>49</sup> For a more profound gaze on PPP, I suggest ZINEB, Sitri, «Partenariats public-privé au Maroc: soubassement juridique d'un mode de gouvernance alternatif», in *Études et Essais du CJB*, 26, 2015, pp.1-25.

<sup>50</sup> Derichebourg, URL: < <https://www.derichebourg-maroc.com/fr/accueil> > [consulted on 24 October 2020].

<sup>51</sup> Averda, URL: < <https://www.averda.com/> > [consulted on 24 October 2020].

<sup>52</sup> CIRELLI, Claudia, FLORIN, Bénédicte, *Sociétés urbaines et déchets. Eclairages internationaux*, cit., p. 4; GHALLOUDI, Jalila, ZAHOUR, Ghalem, TALBI, Mohamed, «Evaluation de la première expérience de gestion déléguée des déchets ménagers à Casablanca», in *European Scientific Journal*, 11, 2015, pp. 237-263, p. 242.

During informal interviews with my interlocutors, the city has often been referred to as *casanegra*, the *ville poubelle* (the city-garbage) pointing to the constant presence in many parts of the city of overflowing garbage bins, acrid and nauseating smells, high concentrations of abandoned waste along main streets or the open spaces hosting uncontrolled dumping sites<sup>53</sup>. In this specific urban context, waste pickers' work stands out. Also called in Arabic *bouâara* (or *mikhala* in a strongly derogatory sense) and in French *chiffonnier*, they wander through the main streets of the metropolis, armed with a cart (*al-karoussa*), selecting and collecting materials from garbage containers that can be sold and recycled.

I will now introduce my fieldwork, shedding light on waste pickers' place in Casablanca and its urban spaces and their key position in the recycling social chain in the city.

### 3. Informal waste infrastructures in Bourgogne, Gauthier and Lahraouine districts

Waste becomes an everyday urban concern. In the Casablančan context, a wide range of relationships and social interaction can be observed between waste workers, neighbours, tourists, military and police forces and with their colleagues in the formal sphere (street cleaners and official waste collectors)<sup>54</sup>. Different mobility patterns appeared based on alternative vehicles – *karoussa*<sup>55</sup>, iron poles, motorcycles, etc. – and on tactics to speed up and skip the jams.

Informal waste pickers<sup>56</sup> move around the streets of the city with their cart which can weigh up to 500 kilograms of material<sup>57</sup>. Their main activities consist of selecting and collecting from

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<sup>53</sup> Numerous references on the 'dirtiness' of Casablanca can also be found on digital webpages such as the Yabiladi website, a web portal offering a series of online services (news, chat, forums, announcements): PAILLARD, Solène, «Les 10 plaies de Casablanca #5 : 'Poubelle la vie', un feuilleton à la Casanegra», in *Yabiladi.com*, URL: < <https://www.yabiladi.com/articles/details/82779/plaies-casablanca-poubelle-feuilleton-casanegra.html> > [consulted on 18 August 2020].

<sup>54</sup> This article is based on the findings of long fieldwork I carried out in Casablanca from September 2016 to July 2017. My research is still ongoing as I am now a PhD Student at the University of Padua (Italy). The main neighbourhoods in which I conducted research are Bourgogne, Gauthier and Lahraouine. In 2016 I carried out part of my field research accompanying Zakariya, the responsible of waste management, in activities in Salé, for the important private company *Ozone Environnement*. In parallel I also carried out my fieldwork into a *goulssa*, a waste stocking centre located in the Lahraouine district of Casablanca. For more information on *Ozone Environnement* please refer to its website: URL: < <http://ozone.ma/> > [Consulted on 18 August 2020].

<sup>55</sup> The *Karoussa* is the moroccan term to refer to the cart used by waste pickers use to collect garbage through the streets of the city.

<sup>56</sup> They are also called *chiffonniers* in french language or *bouâara* in *dārīja*. In this article I will use the term waste-picker to refer to them as the arabic term is strongly derogatory.

In *dārīja* the origin of the term *bouâara* (*bouâar* in the singular) is uncertain and subject to possible interpretations. According to the scholar Florin, the term used to designate informal waste collectors in Morocco derives from the french *éboueur* (waste collectors, scavengers). At the beginning of the eighteenth century, the term *éboueur* indicated those who were in charge of eliminating the mud (in French *boues*) from

garbage containers, all the material which can be sold to wholesalers and then recycled by private enterprise. The term “informal” associated to the recycling sector tends to refer to individuals (or a chain of individuals and enterprises) who dedicate themselves to the collection of wasted materials and similar practices that are not necessarily sponsored, financed, recognized, supported, organized, or acknowledged by the formal solid waste authorities<sup>58</sup>.

They explore certain areas of the city before garbage trucks pass, taking advantage of the availability of waste before it is collected. In most cases observed, they are male, with ages between the youngest, of around 13-15 year olds, to the older of the group at around 60. A relevant gender note emerges: according to what was stated by Florin and on the basis of the observations made during my fieldwork *bouâara* women generally deal with the selection in enclosed spaces, away from prying eyes. It is common to find them in the *goulssa* where they carry out further selection and sorting of materials<sup>59</sup>.

The *karoussa* carts and their uses were prohibited in 1975. Before this, their circulation was regulated by special control offices managed by municipal prefectures. Today, these vehicles are widely tolerated and rarely subject to controls despite the ban<sup>60</sup>. When this happens, police accusations of scattering waste material during the process of searching for valuable, re-sellable, materials in garbage bins, can result in the confiscation of *karoussa* carts. Waste picker activities are controlled, not only by police, but also by other institutional devices such as district managers working for private companies responsible of waste management in the city, because «their intervention is necessary to keep the activity of *bouâara* under control, who always leave waste all around the garbage bins»<sup>61</sup>. Also, informally, neighbours control waste pickers use of carts by tactics of ridicule and intimidating insults. Waste pickers have developed strategies to deal with these controls, such as a preference to work at night. Collection takes place discreetly, quickly

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the main streets of French cities. However, in this transition of meaning from the French language to the Moroccan dialect it is important to point out a significant change: now the term no longer designates a professional in the formal sphere, but rather it indicates the ragman, the one who seeks waste for himself. FLORIN, Bénédicte, *Les récupérateurs des déchets à Casablanca: l' "inclusion perverse" de travailleurs à la marge*, in *Sociologie et Sociétés*, 67, 1/2015, pp. 73-96.

<sup>57</sup> All these information come from the ethnography and data gathered from interviews and informal conversations with my interlocutors in Casablanca.

<sup>58</sup> Waste pickers generate their livelihoods and sustain themselves and their families by retrieving reusable and recyclable materials from the waste stream – typically from streets, open spaces, garbage bins and garbage dumps. Historically their work has been considered informal and often illegal. SCHEINBERG, Anne, NESIĆ, Jelena, SAVAIN, Rachel, LUPPI, Pietro, SINNOTT, Portia, PETEAN, Flaviu, POP, Flaviu, «From Collision to Collaboration – Integrating Informal Recyclers and Re-Use Operators in Europe: A Review», in *Waste Management & Research* 34, 9/2016, pp. 820-839; SAMSON, Melanie (ed. by), *Refusing to be cast aside: waste pickers organising around the world*, Cambridge (MA.), Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO), 2009.

<sup>59</sup> FLORIN, Bénédicte, «Rien ne se perd ! Récupérer les déchets au Caire, à Casablanca et à Istanbul», in *Techniques & Culture*, 65-66, 2016, URL: < <http://journals.openedition.org/tc/8020> > [consulted on 18 March 2020].

<sup>60</sup> GODARD, Xavier, FATANZOUN Innocent (eds.), *Urban Mobility for All*, Lisse, Swets & Zeitlinger, 2002.

<sup>61</sup> Field notes dated 26 November 2016, Zakariya, Salé.

and quietly, and interactions rarely occur with other urban dwellers. Both the controls and strategies of acceptance are all symptoms of balancing strong tensions between officially institutionalized norms and socially accepted practices<sup>62</sup>.

Moroccan waste pickers are not organized in communities and professional associations as they carry out their business individually. Their economic income is daily, and depends on the type and quantity of materials they collect and resell within a day. Unlike waste collectors who work for private companies, they do not have a uniform, treating waste barehanded.

The most visible of their practices corresponds to a very precise temporal and spatial dimension: stopping near the garbage containers throughout the city and the moment when they collect recyclable materials moving in the urban space and. Walking and dragging their *karoussa*, are activities through which they demonstrate an intimate knowledge of the urban space and the main waste deposits distributed within it, a true professional *savoir faire* for the recovery of materials: they know the neighbourhoods where the most profitable discards can be recovered, they avoid areas where they know that it is more likely to create unpleasant encounters with the police, they move easily through traffic jams during peak hours. In some cases, collectors make a fixed stop at the main stores and shops of the city (Carrefour, Acima, La belle vie), owners with whom they have interpersonal agreements, perfect suppliers of plastic and paper materials.

Once collected, waste is sold by collectors to the owners of *goulssa*, the sorting and storage centers located on the outskirts of the city. At the *goulssa* “waste” undergoes further processing to make it suitable for sale to private industries dealing with recycling, operating officially back within the city. Waste is the subject of a double process: it becomes the product, a commodity with specific value to be processed and sold, and it transforms to become the material on which to construct a means to make a living. «Everything here is built with different waste materials»<sup>63</sup>. Moustapha, who is the owner of a *goulssa*<sup>64</sup> located in the Lahraouine neighbourhood, defines

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<sup>62</sup> Clifford Geertz, who conducted a fieldwork as a part of his research in Sefrou (a small town in the province of Fez) in the second half of the 1960s, attributed the term *bazaar economy* (or otherwise called peasant market system) to the informal exchange methods reproduced in a *souk* (moroccan term to indicate moroccan markets). This definition represents a clear example of what the American anthropologist defined as an alternative modality of the current economic system based on a solid relationship of clientelization between sellers and buyers, which moreover attenuates social differences. For a more profound gaze on norms and practices, see GEERTZ, Clifford, «The Bazaar Economy: Information and Search in Peasant Marketing», in *The American Economic Review*, 68, 2/1978, pp. 28-32.

<sup>63</sup> Fieldnotes 28 April, 2017, Moustapha, Lahraouine *Goulssa*, Casablanca.

<sup>64</sup> Moustapha is the owner of the *goulssa* where I conducted part of my fieldwork. I met him for the first time during a conference in Rabat on “Urban waste governance: territorial and social challenges” (Urban waste governance, territorial and social challenges), held on 12 and 13 April 2017. The *Goulssa* activity is formally recognized by the Moroccan state under the name of Home Plast S.A.R.L. (The House of Plastic). When Moustapha told me how his company was born, he took from a desk drawer where he was sitting a plastic bag containing documents. Actually they were the documents that attested the declaration of existence (the documents were both in French and Arabic) of his *goulssa* and his mini-company, on a formal level, recognized as a S.A.R.L (Limited Liability Company). Moustapha's name and surname appeared on these documents designating him as the sole owner of the enterprise.

himself as the *spécialiste dial plastique* (the businessman of plastic materials) and has decided to work exclusively with plastic material. Five waste pickers work and live in his *goulssa*, but all around the area there are about 500 of them working within an indefinite number of *goulssa*.

*Karoussa* carts, motorcycles and vans that arrive daily, unloading the material. The owner (the wholesaler), in this case Moustapha, with the help of the *bouâara* who work for him, assesses the value and weight, creating the first form of commercial transaction. In the second phase, the materials are selected more carefully, by colour and material, and piled up until they reach several meters in height. Generally, women can fill this role, as I saw in an adjacent *goulssa*, where two women were dedicated to this type of activity.

Cleaning, shredding and pressing occur in a separate space, transforming waste objects into a material suitable for sale to private companies dealing with recycling. «This process serves to save space and facilitate storage for better yield and better sales<sup>65</sup>». Once the volume is reduced, the shredded material is collected in huge plastic bags. These will then be loaded onto trucks, owned by the *goulssa* wholesalers, and transported to private enterprises, mostly located in the Sidi Maârouf district of Casablanca (where the main commercial and financial activities of the metropolis are concentrated). The entire waste recovery and recycling chain thus stands up and from the periphery to return back to the city center as a product.

It should be mentioned that the Moustapha's *goulssa* is located in a valley within the Lahraouine soil, which makes it «almost invisible from the outside»<sup>66</sup>. Moreover its peri-centric position (near the periphery) «can be understood by its very proximity to the ex- Sidi Moumen open landfill, currently closed»<sup>67</sup>. The area is one of the poorest neighbourhoods in the metropolis, it is a space «that must not be crossed, since there is nothing but waste»<sup>68</sup>. Moustapha himself once told me that: «Lahraouine is a land forgotten by the Moroccan government»<sup>69</sup>. Basic water, electricity and sewage services are often non-existent and there is a high percentage of informal employment.

There is another relevant element to highlight. Although Moustapha's *goulssa* officially exists and occupies on government-owned land, it is subject to a change of ownership which usually takes place from father to son (otherwise, it can be sold to the best buyer)<sup>70</sup>. It emerged from fieldwork that government control policies take place in the *goulssa* through the assigned role of

<sup>65</sup> Fieldnotes 28 April, 2017, Moustapha, Lahraouine *Goulssa*, Casablanca.

<sup>66</sup> Fieldnotes 28, April, 2017, Moustapha, Lahraouine *Goulssa*, Casablanca.

<sup>67</sup> FLORIN, Bénédicte, *Les récupérateurs des déchets à Casablanca: l'“inclusion perverse” de travailleurs à la marge*, cit., p.80.

<sup>68</sup> Fieldnotes 16, April, 2017, Hamid, Bourgogne, Casablanca. These words were pronounced by one of my interlocutor and neighbour Hamid, once I told him I would have visited a *goulssa* situated in Lahraouine.

<sup>69</sup> Fieldnotes 09, October, 2019, Moustapha, Lahraouine *Goulssa*, Casablanca.

<sup>70</sup> Even the waste pickers can take possession of the *goulssa* where they work, becoming semi-wholesalers, as in the case of Moustapha. FLORIN, Bénédicte, *Les récupérateurs des déchets à Casablanca: l'“inclusion perverse” de travailleurs à la marge*, cit., p. 87.

the *moqaddem*<sup>71</sup> within the *Makhzen*<sup>72</sup> government. Referring to the *caïd*<sup>73</sup>, he is responsible for the control of a district of a municipality. He observes everything that happens and report facts and events, even the most irrelevant or of little importance to the *caïd*<sup>74</sup>. Both Moustapha and other interlocutors have also confirmed a thought that often crossed my mind: the *moqaddem* often and willingly abuse their power, imposing certain rules of behaviour on the owners of the *goulssa* and on waste pickers near the garbage cans, sometimes even requesting forms of bribes to compensate for their un-official occupation of the territory.

«We are at war with them because both us and they own this piece of land»<sup>75</sup>.

In the next section, I explore another relevant feature of waste pickers work and their connection to environmental issues as tactics to impose themselves in contemporary public debate.

#### 4. (Im)mobilities and spatial justice

In the last thirty years, a local and transnational analysis approach has set waste and its use as the object of policies aimed at limiting their impact on the environment, through either recycling

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<sup>71</sup> The term *moqaddem* derives from the Arabic root (قَدَّمَ) qa-dda-ma and indicates the one who announces. This figure represents an ancient royal institution of *Makhzen* prior to French Protectorate period. Originally he assumed the function of social representative and administration auxiliary within the *Makhzen* services. Later the Protectorate decided to enlist him within the territorial administration to better monitor Moroccan inhabitants and report main information back to him. The *moqaddem* is an individual who has a good knowledge of the territory where he moves and enjoys a certain symbolic and social notoriety that allows him easy access to every kind of information. His recruitment takes place in the absence of legal regulations, on the basis of a co-optation process. No academic level is required for them. They just need to pledge allegiance and loyalty to the *Makhzen* and to prove they will be good informants. On *moqaddem* please refer to: MOUHIEDDINE, «Abdessamad, Mokaddems et chioukhs: Rationaliser leur statut ou le bannir !», in *Maghress*, URL: < <https://www.maghress.com/fr/lagazette/16514> > [consulted on 15 December 2017].

<sup>72</sup> In contemporary Morocco the *Makhzen* represents a multifaceted and soft-edged political entity. It is a kind of shadow government that includes the entire elite political class, centred on the king and consisting of royal notables, military and security service forces, civil servants and other members strictly linked to the establishment. The term *Makhzen* is also popularly used in Morocco as a word meaning State or Government. Through arbitrage, patronage and conditioning mechanisms, it prevents Monarchy from being hindered by any interest contrary to itself. Definitions of the *Makhzen* flack a precise sense of the notion, for most Moroccans it is an apparatus of state violence and domination and at the same time a system of representation of traditional royal power. *Makhzen* is also a system of conflict resolution controlled by the king, who dominates all fields of the social universe. It evokes fear, awe, and respect in the Moroccan political culture and refers to a patrimonial institution that has managed to adapt to the realities of modern Moroccan politics.

For a more detailed account please refer to: EMILIANI, Marcella, *Medio Oriente. Una storia dal 1991 a oggi*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 2011; DAADAOU, Mohamed, «The Makhzen and State Formation in Morocco», in *Moroccan Monarchy and the Islamist Challenge*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2011; BANHADDU, Ali, *Maroc, Les élites du royaume: essai sur l'organisation du pouvoir au Maroc*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 1997.

<sup>73</sup> The *caïd* is a senior official in charge of the *caïdat* control and supervision, corresponding to the rural municipalities.

<sup>74</sup> FLORIN, Bénédicte, *Les récupérateurs des déchets à Casablanca*, cit., p. 11.

<sup>75</sup> Fieldnotes 26 May 2017, Moustapha, Lahraouine, Casablanca.



or disposal<sup>76</sup>. Thus, new actors involved in this process emerged: on the one hand the private sector (multinational companies specialized in waste management and materials recycling) and on the other civil society, organized in structures specialized in the field of social and solidarity economy (e.g. WIEGO or the Global Alliance of Waste Pickers<sup>77</sup>). In all cases, garbage recovery activity has been analysed in its relationship with the institutionalized sector since the latter has not been able to absorb informal activities within its system.

Socio-economic inequalities also refer to environmental inequalities; those at the bottom of the socio-economic pyramid hardly avoid the consequences of motor vehicle exhausts, polluting industry and energy plants or the poor distribution of essential facilities. This unequal distribution of environmental threats is compounded by the fact that globally and nationally the poor are not the major polluters<sup>78</sup>.

Poorest citizens, and those most affected by socio-environmental injustices (such waste pickers operating in the Dour Wasti region of Casablanca described in this article) are often low-income workers and communities of colour or belonging to religious and ethnic minorities. Lahraouine neighbourhood in Casablanca represents a clear example: people living and working there face the greatest exposure to harmful waste because their less-privileged neighbourhoods are characterized by a greater concentration of polluting industrial facilities, power plants, hazardous waste sites and disposal facilities, and by a lack of environmental enforcement or clean-up facilities<sup>79</sup>.

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<sup>76</sup> CAVÉ, Jérémie, *La ruée vers l'ordure. Conflits dans les mines urbaines de déchets*, Rennes, Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2015 ; GILBERT, Claude, HENRY, Emmanuel, «La définition des problèmes publics: entre publicité et discrétion», in *Revue française de sociologie*, 53, 1/2012, pp. 35-59.

<sup>77</sup> Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO) is a global network focused on empowering the working poor, especially women, in the informal economy to secure their livelihoods. The WIEGO Network comprises membership-based organizations of informal workers, researchers engaged in analysis of the informal economy, development practitioners concerned with poverty and informality. For more information about its mission and work, please see WIEGO website, URL: < <https://www.wiego.org/> > [consulted on 2 May 2020]; The Global Alliance of Waste Pickers (GLOBALREC) is a network supported by WIEGO, connecting thousands of waste picker organizations with groups in more than 28 countries covering mainly Latin America, Asia and Africa. See Global rec webpage for further details on this network, URL: < <https://globalrec.org/> > [consulted on 30 avril 2020].

<sup>78</sup> To give some examples, in Mexico rubbish dumps are placed within poorest areas and the country's *maquiladora* region (along the Mexico-U.S. border) is also receiving millions of tonnes of unregulated e-waste from the U.S. This is a clear example of the ways in which, «waste flows downhill in the social structural sense, while benefits flow up». ROBERTS, Timmons, PARKS, Bradley, *Climate of injustice: global inequality, north-south politics, and climate policy*, Cambridge (MA.), MIT Press, 2007, p. 33. World Bank figures from 2012 suggest that, while in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OCSE), waste generation varies between an average 1.1 and 3.7 kilograms pro capita per day, in Latin America and the Caribbean, the variation is between 0.11 (the lowest in the world apart from in Africa) and 5.5 (the highest in the world with the exception of the Middle East and North Africa). On this subject I suggest: HOORNWEG, Daniel, BHADA-TATA, Perinaz, *What a Waste: A Global Review of Solid Waste Management*, in WORLD BANK, *Urban development series*, vol. 15, Washington DC, World Bank, 2012.

<sup>79</sup> Recent protests from the movement Black lives Matter that has spread globally from North America have also highlighted this. The Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement is perhaps best known for attempting to open a national conversation in the US around police brutality. But some BLM activists are now connecting

However in more recent studies scholars such as Davis, Gille, Gregson and Crang<sup>80</sup> are questioning the notion of waste – and waste pickers – trying to subvert that dominant narration that depicts both of them as passive or subaltern. They are doing so by listening to their stories, their projects, their aims, and by connecting those stories to dynamic and flexible representations.

They play an important role in urban waste management systems, work in complex relationships to official waste collection and disposal agents. They collect from the streets, dumpsites, or landfills re-usable and recyclable discards materials that can be reincorporated into the economy's production process<sup>81</sup>. Despite the benefits that they generate to society, waste-pickers are ignored when waste management policies are formulated.

Bearing in mind these notions, space and the environment represent categories of perception for garbage collectors and their body is configured as an instrument of conscious choices and intentions. Their movement through a specific knowledge of urban space, is an action that reinforces their connection with the surrounding space. The spatial impact of waste and the place of waste pickers in Casablanca should not be understood in terms of morality, nor as passive recipients to positions of injustice. By cleaning, making spaces for “hiding” contaminated/contaminating physical bodies and objects to avoid conflict, they create practices and social conditions for the development of work even if they exist in environmentally unsustainable economies. Starting from these reflections, the use of the umbrella category of spatial justice is useful for exploring the ways in which space is reproduced through the circulation of waste.

Spaces used as waste dumping grounds, such as municipal or wild landfills, or the regions that host polluting industries have a common feature: they are places designed to host those materials that must be moved spatially and conceptually “away”; perceived as unwanted they are to be

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the dots between the inequities in how police interact with communities of colour versus white neighbourhoods, and inequities in how communities of colour are protected from the effects of climate change—as they are often hardest hit by them because of a very Environmental racism. For a detailed discussion about BLM movement and its reflection on environmental racism I suggest Pellow analysis: PELLOW, David Naguib, «Toward a Critical Environmental Justice Studies: Black Lives Matter as an Environmental Justice Challenge», in *Du Bois Review*, 13, 2/2016, pp. 1-16; FABER, Daniel, MCCARTHY, Debora, *Neo-liberalism, globalization and the struggle for ecological democracy: linking sustainability and environmental justice*, in AGYEMAN, Julian, BULLARD, Robert, EVANS, Bob (ed. by), *Just sustainabilities: development in an unequal world*, Cambridge (MA.), MIT Press, 2003, pp. 38-63; BULLARD, Robert, *Dumping In Dixie*, New York, Routledge, 2000; ARMIERO, Marco, DE ANGELIS, Massimo, «Anthropocene: Victims, Narrators, and Revolutionaries», in *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 116, 2/2017, pp. 345-362.

<sup>80</sup> DAVIES, Anna, «Geography and the matter of waste mobilities», in *Transactions of the institute of British geographers*, 37, 2/2012, pp. 191-196; GILLE, Zsuzsa, «Actor networks, modes of production, and waste regimes: reassembling the macro-social», in *Environment and planning A*, 42, 5/2010, pp. 1049-1064; GREGSON, Nicky, CRANG, Mike, «Materiality and waste: inorganic vitality in a networked world», in *Environment and planning A*, 42, 5/2010, pp. 1026-1032.

<sup>81</sup> GUTBERLET, Jutta, «Cooperative urban mining in Brazil: Collective practices in selective household waste collection and recycling», in *Waste Management*, 45, 2015, pp. 22-31.

taken from our sight,, they have been used and become “waste”. From the second half of the twentieth century, waste began to grow in terms of tonnage and toxicity, becoming increasingly heterogeneous<sup>82</sup> and giving life to what has been defined as a “throw-away society”<sup>83</sup>. Among the processes that contributed in important ways to define a throw-away society, there is certainly the production of “distant” spaces; distant «from the places where the main economic and cultural activities take place»<sup>84</sup>.

At this point, however, a question arises. On what basis and conditions are spaces used to host waste materials? What characterizes them from other spaces?

The anthropologist Reno helps us with the answer, speaking of «political removal and emptying»: spaces where waste arrives and then remains are “empty” because they have enough space to be filled with discarded materials and because they lack the necessary means to resist and cope with the arrival of unclean material. Polluting industries are often positioned in areas that provide, for a variety of reasons, «less political resistance»<sup>85</sup>.

The common denominator of waste mobilities is an unjust power relation of uneven mobilities.

The examples of waste flows and garbage collectors and the use of *karoussa* in Casablanca, exemplify these concepts. Waste worker mobility and justice are strictly connected to resource extraction and urban resilience, the normative use of “public” space and the resulting everyday bodily movement of represented and perceived nonconforming - out of place - people. They show a particular preparedness in the face of risks and hazardous infrastructures that brings specific groups of people (in this case waste pickers) to build forms of resilience into urban systems.

## 5. Conclusions

This article locates the possibilities for rethinking and researching urban informality, subalternity and mobility justice through the analytical frame of waste management and recycling activities drawing from ethnographic work conducted in Casablanca.

Linking literature on informality and subalternity to a reflection on mobilities in a specific urban space, waste pickers and their practices offer a way to capture the everyday material and social infrastructure that inform formal and informal waste flows in the city.

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<sup>82</sup> LIBOIRON, Max, *Plasticizers: A twenty-first-century miasma*, in GABRYS, Jennifer (ed. by), *Accumulation: The Material Politics of Plastic*, London, Routledge, 2013, pp. 22-44.

<sup>83</sup> VIALE, Guido, *Un mondo usa e getta. La civiltà dei rifiuti e i rifiuti della civiltà*, Milano, Feltrinelli, 1994.

<sup>84</sup> CALAFATE-FARIA, Francisco, *Marginal Attachment and Countercycling in the Age of Recycling*, in LANCIONE, Michele (ed. by) *Rethinking Life at the Margins: The Assemblage of Contexts, Subjects, and Politics*, London, Routledge, 2016, p. 138.

<sup>85</sup> ALEXANDER, Catherine, RENO, Joshua (edited by), *Economies of Recycling: The Global Transformation of Materials, Values and Social Relations*, London, New York, Zed Books Ltd, 2012; RENO, Joshua, *Waste Away: Working and Living with a North American Landfill*, Berkeley (CA.), University of California Press, 2016.

Before starting my fieldwork, I thought waste pickers were highly marginalized and stigmatized because of the non-official channels through which they work. Methodology such as field research has the potential to introduce the ethnographer into vibrant dynamics that otherwise solely historiographic research would not allow. In fact, there is little reference literature on waste recovery and recycling practices in Morocco, which results the essentiality of field investigation.

Indeed, it is necessary to mention the preliminary difficulties to get access to the field - partly because of the predominance of male gender in this cultural scenario, partly because of the peculiarity of the activities I wanted to observe and study - but once I "accessed the field" I understood the possibility of a different narration on waste and waste pickers. After deepening my knowledge on the topic mainly through the fieldwork, I realized that their work constitutes itself a critical link in the waste management system chain in Casablanca. Methodologically, investigating waste circulation and un-official and non-institutionalized practises can be illuminating, because they illustrate the boundaries of acceptable behaviour where the very existence of boundaries may not previously have been acknowledged. Whether intentional or not, physical bodies and ideologies (such as waste, waste collectors and recovery activities from the streets or garbage bins) can be seen as deviant and out of place because of their violation of the rules and norms set by dominant groups. However, as the article argues, there is a strict interdependence between institutional control devices and the informal and deviant behaviour appears as altering normalized and dominant norms in ways that can rarely be re-naturalized. With reference to the category of subalternity that Spivak questions in her *Can the Subaltern speak?* I argue that Moroccan waste pickers experience a form of subalternity derived from a variety of elements. First of all they show a close proximity with waste (that is already in itself culturally and historically defined as out-of-place); their activity results as peculiar because there is still not any tentative regulation of their work from the Moroccan government; finally it's worth mentioning the fact that institutions maintain their dominance over them, avoiding any form of symmetrical dialogue. Nevertheless, Moroccan waste pickers prove to be skilful in identifying any interstice of "possible agency" by imposing their body in the urban space and by political tactics to demonstrate the relevance of their work. One of the most important shared characteristics of informal employment is its paradoxical relationship with government control. Informal practices increase as state regulation leaves them a margin of action. Faced with stigmatizing conceptions of their work, waste pickers overcome that form of physical and spatial marginalization that comes from above, by taking advantage of these interstices of possible agency.

The need for recoverable and recyclable materials allows them a professional and social positioning within the waste management chain in Casablanca and in Morocco in general, through interpersonal agreements between administrations, traders and large commercial

chains, as excellent suppliers of quality waste. Douar Wasti clearance and demolition events can be interpreted as a clear example of the relationship between institutions, their urban policies and the dynamic perception of a space (that can be interpreted as conceived, perceived and lived, according to Lefebvre theory<sup>86</sup>) from different social actors' perspectives. On the one hand Moroccan government, following the guidelines of the *Ville sans bidonville*, implements an urban regeneration policy by dismantling entire semi-informal settlements and relocating their inhabitants to peripheral areas, away from the economic and decision-making centers of the city. In this case we find the purity and out of place Douglas' notions applied. Informal settlements such as that of Douar Wasti are conceived by local and international institutions as impure, as out of place in relation to the position and space they occupy in a specific period of time. For this reason, evacuation and displacement practices are aimed at resolving a contrast that characterizes these spaces and that refers to how they are conceived and lived: the institutions make them fall into the category of *bidonville* for being in a space that is not suitable for informal or irregular settlements, and act on its inhabitants with threats of demolition and eviction. Nevertheless, these spaces are experienced by the people who inhabit them as their home, in which the bond between people and the space they inhabit is being constituted daily.

To finish I make three points with regards to waste as a not only a culturally significant element usually related to notions of dirty, clean, and hygiene in anthropological common discourse, but also a material product that has tangible effects on the world at several levels, including juridical and spatial ones (its location, distribution and industry). Firstly the article has shown the tendency to associate irregular settlements such as *bidonvilles* with waste accumulation places such as garbage camps (as in the case of Douar Wasti or the *goulssa* where I carried out my fieldwork). This consideration leads me to state that through waste circulation objects and people mix within specific spaces and one affects the other in a mutual process that can be conflictive or cooperative.

Secondly, this article demonstrated that waste hazards intersect with newly generated forms of social vulnerability where the institutions cooperate with non and semi institutionalized social actors – waste pickers, wholesalers, *goulssa*'s owners – generating original and collective forms of political agency that explore those interstices where represented subaltern workers express their actions. Their affiliation to the social and community infrastructure of the urban space,

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<sup>86</sup> Lefebvre elaborates a conceptual triad to explain how space is actually produced: spatial practice, representations of space, and representational spaces. The first one is lived and consists of the combination of individual, economic, and government interests in the production and reproduction of structures, infrastructures, and spaces in particular localisation. The second, representations of space, are design plans conceived by spatial experts - city planners, engineers, architects. Finally, representational spaces are those perceived through images, myths, and symbols. They include such forms as churches, houses, and town squares. These representational forms and spaces become icons (LEFEBVRE, Henri, *La Production de l'espace*, cit.).

sometimes in contrast with the hegemonic rules of waste management, tends to produce discourses focused on the transgression of these norms, as Douglas states: «when people break social norms [...] they violate the boundaries of the community, becoming exiles or aliens from that community»<sup>87</sup>.

The construction and perception of the group of people who collect waste on the street is not immune from moral aspects, and is therefore perceived as deviant, dangerous, polluting, messy and from time to time associated with crime, with a generic impurity that pays attention to the symbolic, social and political order. However, streets are ambiguous and controversial. They are not only a danger area, but also a place of action and planning where the recuperators express their possibility of social and political agency. They try to improve their condition and often that of their families, placing their activities on the street within a future professional project and exploiting strategic interstices of possibility and action.

Thirdly, despite authors such as De Soto's claim that the poor<sup>88</sup> engage in informal activity because their only chance to survive and have an income is to work outside the official law, I argue that waste pickers and their activity is not separate and distinct from the formal governmental sector<sup>89</sup>.

Indeed in a city, where there is the possibility for people to engage daily in both sectors, the formal-informal distinction becomes increasingly hard to separate as the two grow inseparably. This is the case of Moustapha's *goulssa* that, if on the one hand it has an official status (Home Plast S.A.R.L) recognized by Moroccan state institutions, on another hand, it occupies government-owned land and works with private enterprises and with un-official waste workers, namely Moroccan *bouâara*.

In conclusion limiting informality to a mere need to survive is inaccurate. Informality in this case comes to compliment and indeed aliment the formal economy (and vice versa) and form numerous forward, backward, and ancillary linkages in several urban elements. Waste pickers know they can move through the city because they are socially accepted, they know their goal well and the ways they have to reach it. Compared to the "logic of abandonment" that generally affects those who manifest a physical proximity to waste, also being *out of place*, the Moroccan waste picker consciously goes beyond this type of subaltern representation, finding a place for himself and for waste.

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<sup>87</sup> DOUGLAS, Mary, *Purity and Danger*, cit., p. 173.

<sup>88</sup> DE SOTO, Hernando, *The Mystery of Capital: Why Capitalism Triumphs in the West and Fails Everywhere Else*, London, Bantam, 2001.

<sup>89</sup> ROY, Ananya, «The Potency of the State: Logics of Informality and Subalternity», in *The Journal of Development Studies*, 54, 12/2018, pp. 2243-2246; SCOTT, James, *Seeing like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*, Yale, Yale University Press, 1998.

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