

From Marginalisation to Injustice, from Injustice to Resistance.
When waste pickers resist and claim Rights
Cairo - Istanbul - Casablanca - Paris



With the Reclaimers of Casablanca, 2015, © P. Garret

***Reclaiming Waste Exploring social
and environmental challenges
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Bénédicte Florin
Associate Professor in Geography
University of Tours / CITERES - France
Photographs by Pascal Garret

The marginalization and the superposition of stigmas

They belong to minorities :
Christians (Cairo)
Kurds & migrants (Istanbul)
Roma & migrants (Paris)

They live in the margins
peripheral or central (as in
Istanbul)

They have to face with the
authorities, the police, the
inhabitants

A « *dirty work* » : they work with//inside the waste (garbage
dump as in Casablanca)

Paradoxically :

- **Extraordinary urban dwellers**
- **know-how to access to the resource**
- **knowledge of the city, of the urban modes of operation and social composition**



Istanbul, Down-town, 2015, © P. Garret

The margins : protective space which offer invisibility, discretion
Marginalization does not necessarily mean revolt, resistance or claiming rights

Perception and experience of the injustice, rather than marginalization itself, explain the “*small tactics of weak people*” (De Certeau, 1990), and sometimes resistance, protest, or even revolt, to limit the effects of injustice.

I will focus here on the claims to the right to work developed by the reclaimers



The Man with the Ice-cream, Casablanca, 2016, © P. Garret

Methodology on the 4 fields :

- life stories of the individuals and the communities
 - professional practices
 - political dimension of the reforms ; the tensions and their effects
- ==> mobilizations, strategies, discourse and arguments, emergence of leaders, etc

I- Context : a spatial, social, religious and ethnic marginalization but an economic perverse inclusion

CAIRO - one of the reclaimers neighborhood established in the old slaughterhouse organic-waste dump : a « hole » in the city named « The Belly of the Cow »



**No running water, no electricity,
no sanitation,
no waste collection
no public services ...**

But taxes ...

**Their neighborhood
is threatened by
real estate
development**

Batn el Baqara, « The Belly of the Cow », Photo B. Florin, 2012.

In Istanbul, the degradation of the buildings results from a strategy of voluntary abandonment by the authorities to better justify the projects of urban and touristic renovation.



Mustapha, 2016, © P. Garret

« Here, it is the poorest district of Istanbul, there are criminals, it is really a bad district! When we saw you arriving, we said to ourselves that you should have gone somewhere else... » (Mehmet, Istanbul, 4/07/2014).

However, the reclaimers collect 30% of the recyclable waste in down-town



Near the Suleymanieh Mosque, a touristic place, 2016, © P. Garret

Historical, political, cultural, ethnic marginalization



Istanbul, 2016 © P. Garret

A Roma-turkish young woman sorting for the wholesaler



The Young Girl with a Pearl (painting of Vermeer, 1665), Istanbul, 2015, © P. Garret

Historical, political, cultural, religious, ethnic, etc. marginalization



Down-town, Istanbul, 2017, © P. Garret

This young Afghan carries 300 kg of recyclable waste.

A double-punishment : they are migrants (illegal, homeless, etc.) + they are less paid than turkish men

Inside the waste : the more they collect the ultimate garbage, the more they are relegated to a lower position.

Those who do the dirty work of the "dirty work" (Hughes, 1962) are the ones who save waste from ultimate loss, during the ultimate stage, in the ultimate place which is the dump.



Casablanca, 2012, © B. Florin

700 men, women and children, inhabitants of the villages, collect day and night in the closed and violent world of the dump of Casablanca: they are in the marge of the margin and in the leftover of the leftovers.

In Paris suburbs, the scrap collectors bring 30% of the materials to the scrap wholesalers but these make 50% of the wholesaler's turnover...



**Informal
scrap
collectors
are the
small hands
of the
profitable
and
globalized
economy**

Roma people and Gypsies are still more discriminated and less paid than French by the wholesalers (« thieves », « badly educated », « dirty people », etc.)

==>> This lower social and spatial assignment explains that reclaimers are not associated to public policies reform, despite a mediatized speech on recycling, re-use and "sustainable development"

==>> Their work of reduction of waste, sold to industry, supports waste formal and lucrative system valuation, but does not give them access to labor laws or social rights



**It's a form of « perverse social inclusion »
(Sawaia, 1999)**

**« The informal is not an alternative to globalization, but is the product of it »
(Lautier, 2015)**

II - Perception of injustice and resistances : waste pickers' right to work - Cairo and Istanbul

A - When public action increases marginalization

Problematic for the Egyptian government :

- *to modernize and improve the image of Cairo*
- *the aim was to provide a less fragmented service, to cover the whole city, whatever the standard of living of the inhabitants*
- *the reform was a service delegation to private European and Egyptian companies*



Problematic for the waste pickers (zabbalin) community :

- **the 100 000 wastepickers were not integrated to the reform !**
- **overnight the collection became illegal for them**
- **they had no more access to the resource**

Istanbul (2016) : -The wholesalers who buy the collection of waste pickers have to pay a fine of 44 000 US\$.

The waste pickers have to pay a fine of 6000 US\$...



The State : *It is told that there's a lot of money in your sector, isn't that true?*

The waste-picker : *No, there isn't that much money, but at least we contribute to the protection of the environment, my brother.*

The State : *Stop talking politics!"*

Source: a cartoon found on the Facebook page of a warehouse owner

B - Resistance

An example of small tactics :

- the portrait of Atatürk to prove the patriotism, the good « citizenship » and to prevent an eviction**



**Another example of small tactics :
hang on the national flag on the
cart**



In both cities, waste-management reforms exclude them : modernization cannot involve “poor”, “dirty” and “archaic” reclaimers.



Modernization of the service: buried containers...

... and a cane to « fish » the waste...

(Istanbul)





**An example of
small tactics :**

**Siddiki is an illegal
Malian Migrant
who wears a
cleanliness uniform
to make himself
invisible (Paris)**



Siddiki goes on his collection tour (Paris, 6 am)

C- Mobilization : demonstrations and strikes

Waste pickers manifestations in Ankara :
May 1, 2010 : « *Do not throw the capitalism to the history trash. It costs nothing* »



Waste pickers' right to work

*« We are here nevertheless!
The waste pickers are here, where
are the real thieves ? »
Garbage Workers*

In Cairo and Ankara: a
mediatization and a public
« coming out »



Cairo : Waste pickers answers to face with the neo-liberal reform :

- Spontaneous demonstration of anger
- Strikes
- Theft and recycling of plastic containers installed by the multinationals...

Romani, son and grandson of waste pickers and one of the leaders of the community



After the pigs slaughter (2009), the waste pickers stopped collecting the organic waste
== piles of trash everywhere in the streets...

In front of their exclusion, felt as an injustice, the waste-pickers, by the actions of their leaders want to be listened. They develop a speech about their professional know-how and the environmental dimension of their work.



Istanbul, 2015, © P. Garret

**Emergence of
new leaders**



Istanbul, 2015
© P. Garret

A « new waste-businessman »

*Yusuf, son and grandson of waste pickers
and now scrap merchant
He negotiated the role of the waste pickers
with the municipality*

If they always prefer to remain invisible individually, they try - by these organization and mobilization - to have a collective visibility, a professional legitimacy and the recognition that they are full city-dwellers and that they are working for the environment

When the mobilization fails...



With Mustapha, Casablanca, 2015, © P. Garret

Casablanca : on the right side, Mustapha, the leader of the community who asked for rights and recognition, but without success ...

Conclusion - Experiences !



In Istanbul, these 4 young men are organized in a cooperative, without boss. They negotiate directly with wholesalers.

They bought a truck to sell directly to the recycling factories and share their income

(شركات اجنبية تتولى نظافة القاهرة)



In Cairo, negotiations :

- between government and companies
- subcontracts between the reclaimers and the Italian Company
- Sorting agreement with the shops



Les entreprises étrangères prennent en main la propreté du Caire...

(shirkāt ajnabiyya tatawala naḍāfat al-Qāhira)

Source : Al-Ahram,

67 % of the zone of the Italian Company is collected by the informal sector = 12 % of the company's expenses...

On the left, sortes cardboard bags for reclaimers

From urbanity to citizenship ?

In Cairo and in Istanbul : we observed a shift from urbanity to citizenship via the small resistances, the exits of the margin, the construction of a collective discourse against reforms imposed from « the top »

== open the debate about political dimension of injustice and the response of actors



The resistances have often been repressed, but they also have contributed to the emergence of public debates about the “right to work” and more social justice



"The authorities never come to see us" (Mustapha, Casablanca, 05/06/2013)