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**MSc GEOGRAPHY DISSERTATION:**

**LOCAL REALITIES AND POLITICAL HISTORIES: THE  
WASTE PICKERS IN SASOLBURG AND THEIR STRUGGLE  
FOR TRANSFORMATION IN THE WASTE MANAGEMENT  
SYSTEM OF SOUTH AFRICA**

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THE WASTE PICKERS IN SASOLBURG AND THEIR  
STRUGGLE FOR TRANSFORMATION IN THE WASTE  
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## Abstract

The use of cooperatives as a way to organise waste pickers has been popularised in many nations of the global South. In South Africa cooperatives are being used in two ways, the first being an economic tool by the government to create employment opportunities in the waste management and recycling industry and the second, a political tool used by the waste pickers in South Africa to gain legislative and economic recognition for their work in the waste management and recycling system in South Africa. The latter model is being successfully employed by the waste pickers in Sasolburg. A cooperative called Ikageng-Ditamating, was formed by the waste pickers in Sasolburg with the intent to organise themselves as workers but also to have access to resources, funding and support through partnerships with the Metsimaholo Local municipality (MLM) and various private industry stakeholders through the pilot project at the Vaal Park Recycling Centre. This is the first waste picker led cooperative to have a recycling facility where the waste pickers facilitate all the day-to-day functions and political objectives of the initiative themselves. The study reveals that contrasting perspectives to the formation of cooperatives in South Africa is proving to be challenging in pursuit of a unified outlook on how best to go about integrating waste pickers into the waste management and recycling system of South Africa. The study makes use of the qualitative methodological approach to reveal that the existing literature on waste picker integration and the formation of cooperatives in South Africa has yet to explore an in-depth analysis about how the historical and socio-political issues, such as racial dynamics and lack of transformation in the waste management and recycling system, affect the manner in which integration is understood by different stakeholders, and as a result how it is implemented in practice. By engaging with a Foucauldian outlook on power and various literature on critical geographies of race and critical race theory, the study illuminates that the success of an integration model is dependent on a deeper understanding of the dominant socio-political system of the country that reveals the need for transformation and reframing in order to allow for new perspectives to flourish.

Keywords: waste pickers, cooperatives, integration, race theory, transformation, waste management and recycling systems

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## **ABBREVIATIONS**

CSIR - Council for Scientific and Industrial Research  
DEA - Department of Environmental Affairs  
DEAT - Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism  
DST - Department of Science and Technology  
IDP - Integrated Development Plan  
IWMP- Integrated Waste Management Plan  
KKPKP- Kagad Kach Patra Kashtakari Panchayat  
MLM – Metsimaholo Local Municipality  
MSW - Municipal Solid Waste  
MSWM - Municipal Solid Waste Management  
MWF- Metsimaholo Waste Pickers Forum  
PETCO- PET Recycling Company  
SAWPA - South African Waste Picker Association  
SWaCH- Solid Waste Collection and Handling  
SWM - Solid Waste Management  
VRC- Vaal Park Recycling Centre

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. INTRODUCTION TO STUDY

In the present post-colonial context, many of the citizens of the global South have found refuge in more informal economic activities as a means to make a living. Of these informal economic activities, wastepicking provides an opportunity for many women, men and children to create livelihoods from the very by-products of a more affluent and consumerist formal economy (Beall, 1997; Medina, 1997).

The challenge of managing heaps of waste created within these densely-overpopulated cities, with limitations to infrastructure and resources, is a challenge shared by many of the countries of the developing world (Wilson & Velis, 2014). In South Africa, waste production is estimated at 1.8 million tonnes per annum, which local municipalities are given the mammoth task to manage despite the difficulty of measly budgets and a diminished availability of airspace at landfill sites (DEA, 2012 Godfrey *et al.*, 2016).

For decades, Municipal Solid Waste (MSW) in South Africa has been managed by using unsustainable methods which include the disposal of 90% of the nation's waste at landfill sites (Godfrey *et al.*, 2016). This method of waste management has become both a financial burden on municipalities and is environmentally detrimental. As such, in recent years, policy and legislation have emphasised the need for more viable, creative and sustainable solutions in an attempt to alleviate the management of waste in this manner. (Department of Environmental Affairs, 2012). The focus of achieving this outcome has been sought through the implementation of various methods to divert waste from the landfill sites in order to reduce the financial burden of waste treatment and disposal but also to ensure adequate management of the environment. While it has taken the national government a while to come to this conclusion, waste pickers have been salvaging material from these inundated landfill



sites and selling the recyclables for an income, while they remain unrecognised by local municipalities, this informal economic activity has been saving local municipalities an estimated R309.2 – R748.8 million in landfill airspace every year (Godfrey *et al*, 2016).

Waste pickers are a community of men, women and children around the world who make a living by salvaging recyclable and reusable waste material from streets, landfill sites and even residential areas' garbage bins and from this they are able to reuse or sell the recyclables to higher-level traders to generate an income (Samson, 2010; Schenck and Blaauw, 2011). They can be found working as individuals or as a collective in either a formal or informal cooperative. Some waste pickers prefer to organise themselves into a collective so that they can reap the benefits of economies of scale and participate in a political commitment to ensure that there is safety in numbers. As a result, waste pickers have been found forming cooperatives all over South Africa and the world at large. Research exploring the success rate of waste pickers working in a cooperative versus those who work individually still remains greatly unexplored in waste picker literature.

In 2016, a report by the CSIR revealed a 91.8% failure rate of waste picker cooperatives in South Africa. Despite this alarming statistic, waste pickers continue to organise themselves into cooperatives. In recent waste picker studies undertaken in South Africa, the manner in which waste pickers form their cooperatives can be said to have alluded to a top-down approach to said "integration" programs. The burgeoning literature on waste picker studies in South Africa, has scantily focused on why integration initiatives take a top-down approach and how this may affect its success. The study aims to question the extent of feasibility that the formation of cooperatives, as a possible requirement by the municipality, presents in the quest to integrate the waste picker workforce.

There is currently a limited source of studies that have been conducted to try and unpack the theoretical underpinnings of this approach to integration so as to create frameworks that will lead to successful integration programs in the future (CSIR, 2016). This study focuses on the waste pickers in Sasolburg who may be redefining the integration process by contesting the top-down approach. In Sasolburg, the waste picker integration process is said to be following a bottom-up approach where the waste pickers themselves are at the forefront of the integration process by forming their own cooperatives and forging relationships with the various stakeholders in the waste and recycling industry.

The failure rate of waste picker cooperatives in South Africa reported by the CSIR is interesting as it problematizes the manner in which cooperatives as a municipal requirement for integration are being formed and promulgated by local government departments. In their contestation of the “top-down approach” to integration, waste pickers in Sasolburg still choose to organise themselves through cooperatives and have been doing so successfully. The study attempts to decipher the reasons why the municipalities still choose to utilise cooperatives as the primary means of organising waste pickers into integration programs, despite the high failure rate of waste picker cooperatives that has been reported by the CSIR (2016). This study thus seeks to understand several issues underpinning why waste pickers continue to form cooperatives; what sort of power dynamics are at play within these organisations and how they might affect the overarching integration process in Sasolburg and broader South Africa.

## 1.2. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Much of the literature on overcoming marginalization focuses on the formation of cooperatives in order to organise waste pickers as a collective (Medina, 1997, 2000; 2008, Berthier, 2003; Bolaane and Ali, 2005; Dias, 2010). This has been advantageous as a political strategy for mobilisation in order to garner municipal support for the creation of more formalised work for waste pickers. It is noteworthy to add that the political contestations, policy frameworks and academic debates, around

waste picker organisation, arose in different parts of the world in response to the localised historical and political events that occurred in these respective countries (Huysman, 1994, Medina, 2008; Dias, 2010). However, scant attention has been paid to the reality that waste pickers are complex in the manner in which they order and structure themselves as a polity. There are waste pickers who work collectively; however, the majority work individually (Medina, 2007; Samson, 2009). Despite this, South African municipalities are requiring them to form cooperatives in order to integrate them and overcome their marginalization. While CSIR (2016) has identified that 91.8% fail, few if any studies unpack the challenges they face. The purpose of this study would then be to delve into and understand the underlying social and power relations which may explicate the current failure rate as identified by CSIR.

The problem this study identifies is that the underlying political issues that constitute the relationship between the waste pickers and the waste management system of South Africa, are structurally displacing the national efforts towards integration. The lack of transformation within the broader waste management of South Africa and the lack of progressiveness that prevails as a result, will continue to deter the efforts being made to not only acknowledge waste pickers as change agents in the waste management system but to value them as workers who deserve to be integrated and compensated fairly for the work they do (Packaging SA, 2018:18). Thus, a high-level focus on solutions that only address the mundane aspects of integration and formalisation of waste picking will only scratch the surface of the magnitude of socio-political solutions that are required in this context. In order to create a sustainable industry, the process must start with the dismantling of the racial hierarchy that currently exists within the industry (Packaging SA, 2018:18).

In addition, scant academic analyses have been conducted to illuminate how a lack of transformation and racial diversity can contribute towards a stagnant waste management system which is unable to structurally and politically accommodate the movement towards integration and formalisation of waste picking in the post-Apartheid era of South Africa. This study aims to reveal how the formation of cooperatives by waste pickers is thus the beginning of a revolution towards mobilising and transforming the waste management landscape in South Africa, it should thus be seen more as a political tool in this sense, rather than a municipal objective (CSIR, 2016).

### 1.3. ACADEMIC AIM

In an effort to formally recognise the “informal” economy within developing countries, strategies about how best to go about achieving such an objective have been the subjects of a multiplicity of academic debates. Of the varied strategies debated upon, informal worker organisations have been at the forefront of such discussions. In their paper, Bonner and Spooner (2011) present a number of ways in which informal workers may choose to organise themselves depending on issues relating to gender, the type of work they do and the kind of political impact they may want to have. Given the fact that this study primarily focuses on waste pickers, the focal point is to assess how waste pickers organise themselves as well as the reasons they may choose to do so in a particular manner. As Bonner and Spooner (2011) point out, waste pickers all around the world have chosen the formation of cooperatives as the most effective way of organizing themselves. This is because it is not only a democratic Member-Based Organisation (MBO) but it focuses on directly improving the livelihoods of its members by collectively pooling resources and moving up the value chain (Bonner and Spooner, 2011; Rosaldo *et al.*, 2012). This study aims to contribute to ongoing academic debates about varied informal worker organisations by using conceptual frameworks focused on power relations and organizing informal workers. These frameworks will be used to assess the effectiveness of having cooperatives as the main form of waste picker organization in South Africa as a way to integrate waste pickers into more formalised solid waste management systems despite the 91.8% failure rate of waste picker cooperatives in South Africa reported by CSIR (2016). In addition, the study will highlight some of the social and power relations which both constitute and are constituted by the formation of an organization of this nature within the waste picking industry. This will further illuminate on how municipalities and the government benefit from implementing this model as a way to use waste picker labour to provide basic services without having to remunerate them for their work.

## 1.4 RATIONALE

South African municipalities are said to be requiring waste pickers to form cooperatives in order to integrate them into more formal solid waste management (SWM) systems and overcome their invisibility and marginalization (NWMS, 2011). While the CSIR (2016) has identified that 91.8% of waste picker cooperatives fail in South Africa, it does not provide a detailed discussion and analysis of why that be case by using more qualitative analysis to achieve a more nuanced understanding of this issue. This study problematises the lack of in-depth analysis as it presents a case where a waste picker-led cooperative has managed to thrive regardless of the challenges it has faced in its implementation which in turn builds on the case reported by the CSIR (2016) that does acknowledge that cooperatives can be successful in South Africa. What the results may reveal is that the cooperative model, when it is led and is inclusive of waste pickers is in fact successful and that the current meanings attached to the pervasive views of integration as a tick-box solution to waste picker formalisation may need adjustments in the way it is conceptualized, understood and implemented in South Africa if the broader integration process in South Africa is to have any hopes of being a success story.

## 1.5. RESEARCH QUESTION

The initial question the study aimed to respond to was “ How does the analysis of the experiences of waste pickers, in Sasolburg, contribute to debates on using cooperatives as the primary means for waste picker integration”. However, in the process of data collection and the completion of the study, the empirical information highlighted the need to revise the research question in order to illuminate the issue that is most central to this study. As a result, the overall research question this study seeks to answer is: How do waste picker cooperatives in Sasolburg reflect the local realities and political histories in South Africa?

The subsidiary questions that assist in answering the overarching research question are:

- a. What form do the cooperatives in Sasolburg take?
- b. Why did waste pickers in Sasolburg choose to form cooperatives?
- c. What are the social and power dynamics inside cooperatives, between cooperatives, and between cooperatives and the municipality?
- d. What do waste pickers understand integration to be?
- e. How do municipal officials conceptualise and understand integration?
- f. What are the political systems that underpin integration in South Africa?

## 1.6. ARGUMENT

In this study, I argue that waste pickers who navigate their local realities as predominantly black working class people shape the manner in which they perceive their working environment but also that their concepts of the form that integration should ideally take is rooted in the dismantling of a long history of oppressive systems that prevented black people from opportunities in the skilled labour force and in formal political participation. Their formation of cooperatives is not only based on the advantages for their work but more importantly, as a socio-political tool which functions through the strength in numbers to force transformation in the waste management hierarchy. The idea is that this transformation allow them to function more proactively in the value chain and free them of the economic and mobility constraints forged by the middle-men in the industry. There is an insufficient amount of academic literature that engages with the concept of the integration of waste pickers within the broader understanding of the socio-historical and political fabric of South Africa and how that may be directly linked. This study aims to contribute to the broader academic debate by illuminating these issues and bringing a different outlook on the manner in which waste picker cooperatives are perceived in the plight of the formation of integration programs within the waste management system of South Africa.

## 1.7. OUTLINE OF THE THESIS STRUCTURE

The thesis consists of eight chapters which form a comprehensive and cohesive elaboration of the argument presented above. It is structured according to the following chapters:

Chapter 1: **Overall introduction** to the project and the background, this chapter aims to present the foundational knowledge to which this thesis speaks to.

Encompassed in this chapter, are the problem statement and rationale which bring the prevailing issues of failing waste picker cooperatives in South Africa, as reported by the CSIR (2016), to the fore. In addition, this chapter presents the research question which is “how do waste picker cooperatives in Sasolburg reflect the local realities and political histories of South Africa”

Chapter 2: the **literature review** presents the academic debates around informal work; waste picker cooperatives and their relationships with organisational structuring; social and power relations in the waste picking landscape. The academic conversations presented here focus on various aspects of what this thesis draws from. By presenting the various debates I was able to show how I drew on the conversations but also how this study aims to contribute to these debates. This is done by adding that, in the formation of waste picker cooperatives, the political histories of a place and the subsequent political systems that appear as a result, shape how cooperatives are formed but more importantly, they shape why they are formed in the first place.

Chapter 3: the **conceptual framework** illuminates the theoretical underpinnings that this thesis is informed by. This chapter is crucial because it exposes the lens through which this thesis is to be perceived through. Encompassed in this chapter is the path I followed in my interpretation of the underlying power and Critical Race Theory schools of thought which informed my understanding of the political histories that have excluded black African waste pickers from South Africa’s waste management system in the post-Apartheid era. Furthermore, the exploration of feminist organising paves a clear understanding of how minority groups are able to form organisations collaboratively which act as political mobilisation tools and movements to create transformation in a given industry.

Chapter 4: the **methods and methodology**, I unpack the research question and the sub-questions in order to depict why I chose to use certain research methods to

collect my data. I also explain why the qualitative methodological approach was feasible for this study as it allowed me to fully engage with the subjects and have conversations with them without any preconceived notions of what the data may allude to.

Chapter 5: the **legislative and official documents analysis** presents the current views expressed by official documents shared by the state and other stakeholders that were involved in supporting the formation of Vaal Park Recycling Centre. In this chapter I will detail the legislature relating to waste management in South Africa, recycling programmes and the participation of the community as active agents in the service provision of such initiatives.

Chapter 6: the **results and discussion** show that the waste pickers in Sasolburg formed cooperatives for reasons that were largely unknown to the state and many stakeholders in the waste industry of the area. This chapter reveals that the reported failure of cooperatives may be valid in the context of state-assisted cooperative archetypes, however, in the context of waste pickers in Sasolburg, the underlying reasons for their formation was never truly understood in the first place. Perhaps with a clearer understanding of why they were formed, the formation of waste picker-led cooperatives may be understood far more as a powerful organisational tool.

Chapter 7: the **conclusion** ties the main arguments of the study and the key findings together and aims to provide some views on possible future studies that can be undertaken in order to continue the ongoing academic conversation that this thesis contributes to. Finally, these chapters will be succeeded by the **references**.



## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1. THE MISCONCEPTIONS OF INFORMAL WORK

To pave a way of understanding why, in the contemporary era, informal workers are mobilising and organising themselves in order to be recognised as worthy workers in their respective occupations, one has to trace where the concept of informal work originates from and how it has been understood through time. 'Informal work' is a term that has been used based on the assumption that the economy is constituted by a formal and informal sector. This assumed binary between the formal and informal sector has resulted in some contentious academic debate about the black and white approach to viewing the economy which does not recognise its interconnectedness and complexity (Hart, 1973; Mead and Morrison, 1996; Chen, 2005; Roy, 2005; Denning, 2010; Rosaldo *et al.*, 2012).

Given that the 'informal sector' is the portion of the economy wherein 'informal work' supposedly exists, it is crucial to understand its theorisation. The 'informal sector' is a term coined by Keith Hart (1973), a British anthropologist. He used this term to refer to and categorise unregistered workers in the 1970s. Following some scholarly debates and contestation, the term was later converted to 'informal economy' because scholars felt that 'sector' only refers to a particular group within the industry. 'Informal economy' however, was thought to encompass all the networks and complexities that this sphere of the economy is comprised of (Rosaldo *et al.*, 2012). The problem that was identified with the use of 'informal economy' was that it has given people the impression that the 'formal economy' is superior, powerful and takes precedence over the informal economy (Roy, 2005, 2011; Rosaldo *et al.*, 2012). There are also issues of space and scale to be considered with the use of such terms as some sort of binary (Sanyal, 1991; Cox, 1998; Herod, 2012; Rosaldo *et al.*, 2012). To elaborate, the terms 'formal' and 'informal' economy produce a scalar, or rather a hierarchical, outlook on the whole economy where the formal economy seems bigger, prestigious and superior to the informal economy. It also alludes to a demarcated and bounded space where the formal economy exists and insinuates that the informal economy exists outside of that space which, more often than not, does not hold true (Sanyal, 1991; Cox, 1998;

Herod, 2012; Rosaldo *et al.*, 2012). When one witnesses the binary use of 'informal' and 'formal' economy one might assume these 'economies' operate separately and are not at all interconnected. In fact, it has been argued that they are mutually co-constitutive and without one, the other will not function optimally (Portes, 1983; Sanyal, 1991; Roberts, 1994; Roy, 2005, 2011; Rosaldo *et al.*, 2012). The types of work categorised in both spheres of the "formal" and "informal" economy are important in their own right and help provide incomes and livelihoods to a large population of working people.

Furthermore, scholars have critiqued the assumption that has been made about 'informal work' directly implying a state of poverty which is not the case (Roy, 2005, 2011). 'informal work' encompasses precarious work, casual work and self-employment which are the types of work which are not included in the formal economy but the individuals undertaking such work do earn an income and are not considered impoverished (Hart, 1973). It is not discounted that people who are impoverished do predominantly participate in the informal economy but the landscape is made up of various other informal types of work (Sanyal, 1991; Roy, 2005, 2011; Rosaldo *et al.*, 2012).

When applying this binary of an "informal" and "formal" economy into the context of waste pickers, one starts to understand why the binary approach is problematic. Waste pickers in South Africa save municipalities roughly R2 million a year by recycling material which would otherwise find its way to various landfill sites (CSIR, 2016). This figure contributes directly to the formal GDP yet their work has been highly marginalised and unacknowledged by the formal sphere when ironically, it exists at the center of it. When considering the abovementioned, one is forced to unpack why such social injustices are directed to the waste pickers who contribute a lot of their blood, sweat and labour power to the GDP and the waste management system in South Africa.

## 2.2. WASTE PICKERS AS INFORMAL WORKERS

Given the socio-economic inequalities that are prevalent in developing nations as a result of a long history of colonialism and capitalism, it is unsurprising that most of the

population is unable to have a claim to the formal economy and have thus opted to make livelihoods from the environment around them (Beall, 1997; Medina, 1997). Waste pickers, otherwise known as reclaimers, scavengers, garbage pickers and recyclers (Medina, 1997; Mitchell, 2008; Samson, 2010; Schenck and Bleeuw, 2011), are people who make a living by salvaging recyclable waste material from streets, dumpsites and even residential areas' garbage bins and from this they are able to reuse it or sell the recyclables to higher-level traders to generate an income (Samson, 2010; Schenck and Bleeuw, 2011). Waste pickers often endure countless experiences of marginalisation and stigmatisation due the stereotypical views that follow that most of them are poor immigrants and because of the kind of work they do which is often perceived as filthy (Medina, 1997; Samson, 2010; Whitson, 2011). Contrary to popular belief, waste pickers actually play a vital role in reducing costs to municipalities, estimated at R309.2 – R748.8 million in landfill airspace (Godfrey *et al*, 2016), by decreasing the amount of waste that needs to go to landfill sites and also contributing to sustainable and efficient recycling practices which have benefits for ecological footprints (Schenck and Bleeuw, 2011). More importantly, it provides a means by which people, who may not be able to work as skilled labourers or employees in a more formal context, can make money and sustain livelihoods. In South Africa, many waste pickers are educated and have various skillsets however, due to job unavailability in the formal market, they have taken up work as waste pickers. While this literature focuses on how societies and the state perceive waste pickers, less attention has been paid to the crucially important issue of how they organise and collectively work together to be actively recognised as worthy workers within the waste management industries of their respective countries.

#### INFORMAL WORKER ORGANISATIONS

Historically, informal workers were not recognised as workers who are able to be organised because of various factors including their dispersed geography (which posed an issue with regards to collective action); lack of institutional experience and legal protection as well as the lack of registration to a formal company (Rosaldo *et al.*, 2012). It had been thought by many scholars that informal work was eventually going to dissipate as a result of new arenas of formalised work; however, that ideal is slowly dying out as reality suggests differently particularly in the case of developing countries (Sanyal, 1991; Bonner and Spooner, 2011). The contemporary phenomenon is

dealing with how best to expand the economy so that it can recognise informal work as viable but also how to protect informal workers given that they work in a minimally regulated space where they are unable to be protected by the laws that govern formal work (Bonner and Spooner, 2011; Rosaldo *et al.*, 2012).

In previous years, informal work was viewed as a transitional phenomenon that would pass by and thus people did not attribute any political viability to informal workers and thus they were unable to garner support to certain rights and compensation within their respective industries (Sanyal, 1991). In order to be effective, informal workers sought to influence policy decisions through organizing and forming informal worker movements and organisation (Sanyal, 1991). However, to understand how and why informal worker organisations are formed it is crucial to interrogate the conditions under which such mobilisation takes place and also how they may possibly fail even after some brief successes.

Sanyal (1991) argues that shared interests and identity are two criteria by which informal workers may choose to organise. The first informal worker organisation that gained recognition from the international trade union organisation, the International Union of Food and Allied Workers is India's Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA), formed in 1982 (Rosaldo *et al.*, 2012). This organization now has more than a million women registered and is considered the world's largest informal workers' organization. In the 1980s other informal worker groups including domestic workers, waste pickers and home-based producers all over the global South started to form their own, more localised, organizations (Rosaldo *et al.*, 2012). However, it was not until the 1990s where these organisations started to expand to more national and international levels of recognition (Rosaldo *et al.*, 2012).

There are several types of organisations that informal workers may choose to be a part of or form, these member-based organisations (MBOs) include unions, associations and cooperatives and are often assisted and supported by Non-member based organisations (NGOs) (Rosaldo *et al.*, 2012). For waste-pickers in particular, the difficult working conditions; lack of concrete opportunities from the municipality; unreliable or lowered incomes based on middle men interactions and bribing police officers for salvaging materials at odd hours, it became an extreme necessity to organise in order to improve the working circumstances they were faced with (Medina,

2008). By organising, waste pickers are able to collectively negotiate better prices and liaise with industries and government; become pro-active in discussions about developments within the waste management sector and in their respective communities in hopes to eradicate poverty, improve service delivery and bargain for higher incomes while fighting for the legalisation of their activities (Medina, 2008).

According to Medina (2008) there are three organisational forms or models used by which waste pickers may be more formalised, namely: microenterprises, public-private partnerships and cooperatives. Microenterprises are based on setting up small to medium enterprises which are profit driven and aim to function on a more business-centered model (Medina, 2008). Public-private partnerships provide a symbiotic relationship between the waste pickers and society where private companies and donors are able to provide funds and infrastructure for the waste pickers while they bring in their skills and labour (Medina, 2008). Lastly, cooperatives are formed by waste pickers who all have an equal share in an organisation and are often sub-contracted by local municipalities, who provide basic work material and transportation, to provide various services within allocated areas. In South Africa and most of the global South, the formation of cooperatives seems to be the favoured type of organisation. Despite the successes of cooperatives in Latin America, the model seems to be failing dismally in South Africa as the CSIR has reported an astounding 91.8% failure rate of cooperatives in South Africa. Sanyal (1991) attributes the failures of informal workers' organizations to various factors including the competitive pressures amongst informal workers in different cooperatives or enterprises who trade the same goods as well as the red tape of government policies which only assist selected groups of informal workers who look more "promising" than others. These more 'promising' informal workers, who when formalised, protect their own interests and inhibit the progress of their counter-parts.

### **Waste picker worker cooperatives as formal organisations**

Waste picker cooperatives are a fairly new organisational structure in the journey waste pickers have walked from working informally on landfill sites and on the streets in many cities across the globe. Although considered informal, waste pickers were

working in organised niches with set working hours in order to meet daily waste collection targets so that they can sell their materials collected for the day to make some money for various necessities in their lives. How this fairly structured and organised yet informal daily routine, transitioned into the formation of institutions -in the form of waste picker cooperatives- around the world presents an interesting topic of discussion.

Meyer and Rowan (1977) state that formal organisation arises as a measure to coordinate and control activities when the work can be located in networks of technical relations. They add that in modern societies, formal organisations arise in highly institutionalised contexts. This forces these emerging organisations to adopt the practices of the prevailing practices and procedures under institutionalised concepts of organised work in society. In doing so, these emerging formal organisations are then able to access legitimacy as well as survival potential in their respective industries (Meyer and Rowan, 1977). What Meyer and Rowan (1977) further argue is that in pursuit of formal organisation, reflections of the institutional environment appear to be the driving force rather than the actual demands of the work activities of the organisation. Furthermore, emerging formal organisations face conformity as a result of the institutional norms of how the structure of formal organisations should ideally look like and in the process, the initial social purpose of the organisation transitions into a more technical practice and despite the needs of the individual participants or those of the organisation, attaining the legitimacy takes precedence and the prevailing practices and norms must be enacted and adhered to (Meyer and Rowan, 1977).

Craig and Pencavel (1995) carried out a study where they compared the productivity of worker-owned cooperatives to conventional firms, here they argue that worker-owned cooperatives are more productive because the workers have a direct vested interest in the progression of the organisation as they benefit from its success. They state that in conventional firms where the managers or owners are not working on the ground, they may compromise the overall well-being of workers at their own benefit (Craig and Pencavel, 1995). In the same light, workers on the ground may

have sound suggestions about how to better manage and run the firm but may be hesitant to raise these ideas in fear that the owners may use their ideas without due credit, compensation and acknowledgement for the ideas shared (Craig and Pencavel, 1995). Transparency, self-monitoring and accountability play a large role in the successes of worker-owned cooperatives, as every worker is an owner, they are each accountable for their actions and how they impact them personally but also how they impact the overall organisation. This results in higher productivity and more interactive and inclusive decision-making processes which may not always present themselves in conventional firms (Craig and Pencavel, 1995).

Furthermore, Craig and Pencavel (1995) recognise that although there are productivity advantages to worker-cooperatives, they are still not the most common of formal organisations, at least not as common in the markets as conventional firms. They add that the reasons behind this are highly based on the risk the worker-owned cooperatives have for the workers because they are so directly involved from both a labour perspective but also financially. If the cooperative lacks funds, it is the worker-owners' responsibility to fund the cooperative's needs. This tends to be a high-risk situation for potential investors and often, the worker-owners end up turning to banks for loans for which, in this case, they are directly liable for the collateral should the cooperative fail (Craig and Pencavel, 1995). In conventional firms, by contrast, workers have less risk associated to them. The board of directors carry the risk and even then, the conventional firm is its own entity none of the workers are directly liable for anything if the firm dissolves (Craig and Pencavel, 1995). Craig and Pencavel (1995) mention that when desperate situations present themselves worker-owners in cooperatives might have to sell their shares and this may compromise the initial structure which was formed on the premise that the cooperative is owned by individuals who have a common goal and purpose.

The above study by Craig and Pencavel (1995) presents some valuable insights when considering some of the challenges that may be faced by waste picker cooperatives. Although many waste pickers collectively work together to form cooperatives so that they can benefit from the economies of scale, the social

interactions and added safety in numbers, capital resource acquisition is at forefront of their struggles. Added to this, they are often unskilled in running organisations and managing co-workers (Godfrey et al., 2016). The South African state does provide some support but the state has many requests that they make to cooperatives which often leads to waste pickers being sub-contracted as opposed to being partners in the service provision structure. However, as the two papers explored above suggest, there are some incredible advantages that come from forming cooperatives, the challenge is to figure out a framework that will provide the necessary skills development and funding without compromising the core structure and ensuring that cooperatives are setup to be self-sufficient and sustainable in the long run.

### 2.3. WASTE PICKING AS A VEHICLE OF SOCIO-ECONOMIC FREEDOM

The definition found for a cooperative in Pezzini and Ambiorix (2006:4) is:

“A co-operative is an autonomous association of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social, and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly-owned and democratically-controlled enterprise”.

Countries in the Global South, as compared to their counterparts in the Global North suffer a great deal from underdevelopment due to long histories of socio-economic and political capture under imperialism (Fieldhouse, 1981) and as a result, the informal economy presents a favourable space for unskilled individuals with no access to formal employment opportunities to make a living (Beall, 1997; Medina, 1997). In South Africa, the end of the apartheid regime saw the adoption of the neoliberal project through the ruling party's structural reform by way of the Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) policy in 1996 (Ashman and Fine, 2013). Mining and agriculture industries fell and this created an influx of black unskilled workers who were unable to compete in a world that required more skilled labour (Banerjee *et al.*, 2008). Given this phenomenon, poor African people in rural areas attached their hopeful dreams for a better livelihood to the city and this created a



mass of urban migration (Banerjee *et al.*, 2008). The cities became rapidly overpopulated leaving municipalities inundated with service delivery tasks that now had to be spread to include the predominantly black areas that were historically, and are still presently, under-serviced (Miraftab, 2004). Waste in particular, became increasingly difficult to manage and maintain. The consumption and wasting practices, within these urban areas, has reached a devastating high. Municipalities are faced with landfills which are holding on by a thread as they are engulfed in waste far and well beyond their recommended maximum capacities (Troschinetz and Mihelcic, 2009; Chimuka and Ogola, 2015). Given this reality, seen in Malawi, waste pickers have been informally exploiting this service gap as a way to make a living and have subsequently formed cooperatives, through wanting to attain bargaining power within the value-chain of this service-gap, as a primary common goal (Kasinja and Tilley, 2018). Moreover, through their efforts of seeking collective recognition from their formal counter-parts for the work they do, they have endeavoured to socio-politically and economically transform the waste management system (Kasinja and Tilley, 2018). In South Africa, the formation of waste picker cooperatives has been mainly through the state's intervention, fewer cooperatives have been formed by waste pickers themselves. The few that have been formed by waste pickers have done so in pursuit of the recognition and bargaining power that the waste pickers in Malawi have sought to obtain ( as described above).

Cooperatives have been popularised as political tools for community empowerment and poverty alleviation in the global South since the 1970s. Pezzini and Ambiorix (2006) suggest that cooperatives were seen as quasi-governmental structures which were sub-contracted, in many instances, to provide essential state services. In their assessment of co-production, Joshi and Moore (2004) elegantly point out the various ways in which the state may engage community members for service provision in poorer communities. Most of the arrangements that the authors explore, are based on filling the gaps of a lack of service delivery, to the community's detriment, as a result of the state not having enough resources to provide services. An unpopular but pertinent driver of such an arrangement can also arise as a result of a lack of job creation. As such, persons, who Brendson and Presoff (2006) refer to as the third sector, explore a new niche of service provision that previously did not exist to creatively curb unemployment by providing a service the community might eventually

deem essential. However, they often have little to no affiliation to the state, they only act as an illusion of the state's holistic efforts towards proactive service delivery (Pezzini and Ambiorix, 2006). Thus, they may represent the state's heroism to the ordinary citizen but they are actually a group of individuals whose community work is often unacknowledged as a service and are therefore uncompensated (Samson, forthcoming). However, they effectively patch up the holes in the state's service provision structure (Pezzini and Ambiorix, 2006).

Essentially, the formation of worker-cooperatives provides poor, marginalised individuals with opportunities to make an income by coming together with a common goal and providing an essential service. It is important for the government to notice these acts and recognise their efforts as a way to open avenues for resource acquisition and support for these cooperatives. Especially in the case where job creation is a municipal priority.

#### 2.4. UNDERLYING POWER RELATIONS IN WASTE PICKER COOPERATIVES

Djike and Poppe (2004) define power as an ability to realise one's goals through others. While Brass (1984:514) sees power as a phenomenon that is embedded in structure which in turn, imposes constraints on the individual. Often, in the context of informal organisations, the prevailing power dynamics are not as distinctive because people from similar backgrounds, geographical locations and socio-economic status come together to meet common goals, each with what seems like similar resources to offer. Thus, it becomes challenging to discern, at the first glance, how the power gradient is composed as a result of the assumed egalitarianism. As Karl Marx profoundly theorises, nothing exists outside of social relations, they are mutually co-constitutive and continuously socially produced (Miliotis and Dimoulis, 2018). With that said, the fact that power relations do not explicitly reveal themselves does not follow that they are non-existent. They may be subtle given the nature of an organisation's structure and the behaviour of the individuals as well the behaviour of the organisation in its entirety.

In scholarly debates around power, researchers have stressed the importance of studying behaviour in order to understand the subtler manifestations of power. Brass and Burkhardt (1993) mention that to have a clearer view of power within an organisation one needs to assess both the macro-structural and micro-behavioural approaches as opposed to focusing on just one approach and seeing the other as unaffected or unrelated. The importance of doing this is rooted in understanding that structure provides a backdrop onto which the individuals involved are able to attain and exercise power (Brass and Burkhardt, 1993). According to Brass and Burkhardt (1993) the structure of an organisation provides access and control over certain resources while simultaneously, behaviour shapes how those resources are acquired and strategically used.

In organisations, the structure represents the space for repeated, patterned actions and interactions among individuals that then comply with the overall institutional goals of an organisation (Brass and Burkhardt, 2003). Herein, hierarchy plays a significant role as it dictates authority and feeds into legitimacy and legitimate power (Brass and Burkhardt, 2003). Within an organisation's structure, the players (both superiors and subordinates) are all aware of their positions and the roles they can play as a result of their place in the hierarchy. These hierarchical positions are as Brass and Burkhardt (1993) state, strong sources of potential power but often present structural constraints on power. The consistency and routine practice of social interactions within an organisation's hierarchy forges an institutionalised pattern of stability that underpins constraints on behaviour (Brass and Burkhardt, 1993).

An analysis of power in an organisation which is more informal in structure requires a closer assessment of behaviour. Brass and Burkhardt (1993) identify that people differ in abilities, skills and the eagerness to use that which they have inherently to exercise their power. As such, structure does not always reveal the power gradients however, behaviour when assessed from the six categories identified in Brass and Burkhardt (1993)'s paper, can shed some necessary light. They list assertiveness, ingratiation, rationality, exchange, upward appeal and coalition formation as the six

behavioural factors to assess in the exercise of power (Brass and Burkhardt, 1993:447).

In essence, the manner in which the abovementioned behaviours are not only identified in an individual but to what extent they are put into action reveal interesting patterns about how one exercises their power and the lengths to which they can go to attain more of that power. The idea is to consider that where there are human relations at play, particularly in the context of an organisation (no matter how informal), there are always power dynamics. Understanding how to assess them given the context, provides a working framework for ways to understand how and why the roles played in the organisations result in the state the organisation finds itself in as well as how it is perceived by others.

On the other hand, while in conversation about power, I identified that the article by Brass and Burkhardt (1993) does not acknowledge how the power dynamics can be underpinned by cultural nuances especially in an African context. These cultural nuances are those particularly relating to factors such as gender, age and the eloquence or proficiency one depicts in their expression of the English language. Even in our navigation of our African identities within the postcolonial context, irrefutably the cultural expressions of power rooted in customs and tradition are and will always be at play. As such, understanding the social relations in informal organisations comprised of black African people, cultural nuances cannot be negated in assessing how these interactions are written in the socio-political fabric of behaviours that factor into power and our interpretation of it.

Mama (2001) neatly states that an African identity is often assumed and scant attention has been given to understanding the complexity and the extent to which colonial and apartheid systems have confused and infiltrated this assumed identity. Linguistically, prior to the Bantu education act passed in 1953, colonisers were under the impression that African indigenous people needed to be more civilised and they sought to do this by making English a pervasive medium of spoken language

(Rudwick, 2008). This resulted in an increasing number of black Africans attending missionary schools where English was the only spoken language and soon the language was adopted in many African homes as their own home language. However, in the apartheid era this logic shifted as the Afrikaner apartheid strategists noticed that having too many well-educated black people would reduce the manual labour workforce and so they reversed this logic and passed the Bantu education act which focused, primarily, on low quality education taught in the mother tongue (Rudwick, 2008).

Although the English language was still taught, it was taught by African teachers who lacked proficiency themselves in the English language. The students at the time felt subjected to a dysfunctional school system and protested during the Soweto uprising in order to contest being taught in Afrikaans (Rudwick, 2008). As such, language played a significant role in the disempowerment of black African people. Given that some -more fortunate black African- people had access to suburban schooling opportunities and others were subjected to Bantu education, this created what one can view as a form of linguistic stratification between black Africans who were proficient in the English language and those who were not. Those who were proficient were often skilled workers who were able to access much of the better opportunities in the work field while those who were not ended up in incredibly labour intensive roles. As a result, due to its close proximity to whiteness in an era where blackness was at the bottom of the social-political barrel, proficiency in English became a symbol of access to better opportunities (Soudien, 2004; McKinney, 2007).

That narrative has not changed drastically in the present day as English remains a requirement for most well-paying employment and tertiary education opportunities . In an African context, given the nature of the organisation, individuals who are more proficient in English often obtain the positions of power because the other members believe that it breaks down communication barriers with more established persons in order to expose them to more working opportunities (Soudien, 2004; McKinney, 2007) When assessing informal organisation power dynamics in a South African

context, I insist that role English proficiency plays be considered as a contributing factor.

When taking a closer view of more cultural nuances, in African culture –patriarchy has been normalised and reproduced through time. Older men are often highly respected and are given authority as the family heads. Similarly, women in professional spaces, particularly in cases where many of the members of a said organisation share similar cultural affiliations, they still feel the need to pay more respect to older men. As Gordon (1996:8) neatly puts it “patriarchy in Africa has its roots in African extended family systems and precapitalist familial modes of production that controlled both women’s productivity and reproduction”. This is cultural conditioning through time that now permeates modern socio-political and economic spaces which are including women more largely in the capitalist system. Amidst this radical change, it would be ignorant to not acknowledge that women experience their participation in capitalism differently because of the bodies they are born into and how historically those bodies had naturalised roles attached to them which subject them to defined and assumed social relations with men (in power) (Frederici, 1975).

In Bangalore, India, women are faced with various constraints and struggles that leave wastepicking as the only alternative to survival (Huysman, 1994). In most cases, they are either widowed or have been abandoned by their ex-husbands whom they were fully financially dependent on. Many other women waste pickers are still married and some are un-married. Most of them uneducated, and poor with children to look after. In the midst of the roles of wife, mother and household care-taker women, in these cases, must be breadwinners too. Wastepicking presents a flexible working opportunity that provides a daily income without the need for any formal qualification. as precarious as work the of wastepicking is, women are able to balance all their roles and make an income (Huysman, 1994). It is not glamorous but the women must survive and so they make do, despite the lack of safety, health hazards to themselves and at times their children, the violent attacks and gawking from men (Huysman, 1994). This narrative is universal in developing nations, women

are often faced with other roles to play outside of the work they do. As a result, it can be difficult to have time to hold positions of power in order mobilise as that requires a lot more dedication- often if they are in cooperatives, these roles are entrusted to men. What presents itself then are women's specific needs within the industry far from the forefront of the integration process.

The above realities for women have been addressed by the cooperatives formed under the Kagad Kach Patra Kashtakari Panchayat KKPP (organisation of scrap collectors) trade union from Pune, India who have placed an intense emphasis on gender equality (Chikarmane and Narayan,2010). Open conferences held before its inception, addressed the daily struggles faced by women in the wastepicking space and it was evident how crucial it is to prioritise these issues (Chikarmane and Narayan, 2010). As a result of confronting and acting on the brutal realities faced by women waste pickers, power dynamics have somewhat equalised between the men and women but often and still, that is not the reality for many other women waste pickers in other developing nations.

## 2.5. GEOGRAPHIES OF RACE

The exploration of race in geography has gained a lot of scholarly attention over the years as it is becoming more prevalent that racial dynamics are spatialized and spatial dynamics are racialised (Pulido, 2000; Massey, 2005; Price, 2010; Neely and Samura, 2011). Studying space, which is what geographers are known best to do, is not fully explored without questioning the racial aspects of how space is constructed, contested and engaged with. However, there are still gaps of knowledge in many geographical studies which struggle to fully engage with the racial tensions in their subject matter. This leaves room for unexplored socio-political terrain and conversation, more importantly, an opportunity is missed to present a further understanding for readers on how pervasive racial experiences are in our social world.

‘there is little dialogue concerning the increasingly distinct positions geographers are taking up in relation to the study of race and the manner in which these perspectives shape our object of inquiry’

(Nayak, 2011: 548).

The above quote speaks to the crucial exploration of race in research undertaken in the geography discipline. Mahtani (2014) discusses that the manner in which race has been engaged with in geography scholarship has been rather safe guarded and neatly presented for the sake of academic integrity but this has created a gap of knowledge regarding what these safe scholarly engagements with racial tensions have on the lived reality of the subjects that are being studied. Essentially Mahtani (2014) argues that although race is often an important component of much of the social work done in the discipline of geography, the manner in which the information is neatly and academically packaged and thus consumed by readers, creates a distance and disconnect with the reality of what this race dynamic has on the ground in terms of the actual lived experiences of black people outside the realm of scholarship Mahtani, 2014).

Mahtani (2014) further supports the work done by McKittrick (2007) in the article by commending her work on identifying the manner in which work done in the geography discipline has seemingly managed to make racial discussions in academia more of a superficial necessity in the trio of analysis of gender, race and class than to purposefully reveal what this means for “black ways of lives” and social positioning for “a black sense of place in geography” Mahtani (2014:362). In addition, Mahtani (2014) states that the discipline of geography has been more obsessed with blackness in comparison to whiteness or the normality of white livelihood (historical or otherwise) and its effects on blackness than a deeper more engaged scholarship of race analytics to reveal black lives as their own entity with their own experiences outside the realm of whiteness and that the binary still gives scholarship on whiteness more traction in the long run (Mahtani, 2014). Scholarship on race analytics that reveal the realities of black lives require their own platform without



needing to be contrasted to whiteness to be understood or considered as a source of knowledge for black identities and black lives in geography (Mahtani, 2014).

To achieve the level of depth in race analytics identified by Mahtani (2014) scholarship on geographies of race must begin to reflect the realities of black identities and how navigating space in a black body morphs the everyday experience into one that is always intertwined with racial tensions no matter where one is, the critique of these racialized experiences should not only be reserved in the wake of socio-political struggle or academic inquiry but acknowledgement and normalisation of the reality that they are an everyday and consistent way of life needs to be explored more explicitly and intentionally.

In the literature review, the socio-economic and political variables that have been otherwise scantily explored in academia, when attempting to decipher the underpinnings of the formation of cooperatives and the challenges that arise as a result, have been presented. Explored in this chapter are conversations around power, linguistics, race, space and understanding informality. These issues form some necessary foundation for the thesis based on how the socio-political complexities faced by waste picker-led cooperatives are to be understood throughout in the context of why transformation is a crucial component of waste picker integration in South Africa.

## CHAPTER3: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

### 3.1. INTRODUCTION

The conceptual framework section presents some foundational theoretical concepts that the thesis is informed by in order to form a nuanced understanding of the formation of waste picker cooperatives as a vehicle for the integration of waste pickers. This section illuminates the lens and schools of thought that the thesis is to be seen through and details the concepts of organising informal workers, critical race theory and power and how they have been applied and engaged with throughout the study.

### 3.2. POWER

Functioning within a Foucauldian school of thought, the idea here is not to provide a definition of what power is or what it should ideally look like on paper, but more imperatively, this section aims to delve into the nuances of how power is both understood and exercised which is where Foucault insists power lies, in action not in its capacity or potential (Allen, 1997; Bevir,1999).

Power has often been understood within the binaries of being central or diffuse, or existing at the “top” or at the “bottom” (Allen, 2004). What these binary views of power tend to overlook is the idea which much of the work that Foucault brings to the fore and highlights. This is the idea that power is pervasive and it can be found anywhere or rather, everywhere at any given time (Klein, 2001; Allen, 2004). Klein (2001) emphasises that power is all around us and as a result it has become increasingly difficult to discern its whereabouts as it can almost feel like power is everywhere and nowhere at the same time.

Liberals believe that state power acts as a threat to the autonomy of its citizens (McFaul, 1995), while Marxists believe that the state acts as a regulatory institution that maintains the class relationship between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat (MacKinnon, 1983; Smart, 2013). However, what Foucault understands of state power is that just as it functions through imposing certain practices of discipline by having laws, rules and regulations it only maintains that power because individuals are always constructing their own identities against a more affective and socio-spatially influenced view of that it means to be virtuous, or rather, what it means to be a citizen who finds oneself in a particular space and behave in a manner that suits that space accordingly (Foucault, 1978;1980;1991). These two process are simultaneously at play and as a result they manifest themselves in different ways because individual identity constructions and manifestations of social conduct are not informed by the same social milieus which makes this approach to understanding state power incredibly dynamic (Bevir,1999; Allen, 2004).

Symbols of power and representations of power such as political institutions, are socially informed and socially produced (Wendt, 1992). However, the social relations within these institutions are also informed and reproduced by these symbols and representations of power which affect how individuals themselves self-regulate and conform behaviourally to maintain the idea that these institutions hold power (Foucault, 1978,1980,1991). Political institutions do not inherently possess power; rather, they are a symbol of it to the individuals who follow the belief that they possess power (Foucault, 1978,1980,1991). Individuals who have a counter belief to the notion above will not imbue any power to institutions because they believe in different symbols or rather, representations of power (Foucault, 1978,1980,1991). This view encompasses how complex interpretations of power are. Power exists in daily practices and these are socio-culturally, and more importantly, spatially and temporally informed (Allen, 2004).

### 3.3. CRITICAL RACE THEORY

Critical Race Theory (CRT) is a theoretical framework that confronts concepts of race by providing an outlook on race that goes beyond the scope of biological and natural differentiation nuances. More importantly, CRT confronts how concepts of race feed into society through their social production which has continually benefitted people who promote and support white supremacy (Delgado and Stefancic, 2000).

In Delgado and Stefancic (2000) Hanley López highlights that racial formulations function through four elements. Firstly, race is constructed by humans and not by social forces. Secondly, alongside the construction of race by humans is an entire social fabric that incorporates gender and class relations. Thirdly, the meanings attached to the constructions of race change quickly rather than slowly. Lastly, the social constructions of race are relational and are not produced, reproduced or constituted in isolation.

Historical constructions of race were based on supposedly scientific assertions that race could be genetically traced and that there are physical attributes that can be ascribed to a particular racial group (Delgado and Stefancic, 2000; Nash, 2003).

Recent scientific work refutes these assertions and it has been revealed that there are in fact no genetic markers for race (Delgado and Stefancic, 2000; Nash, 2003). Racial typologies cannot be proved, only the systems which have been formed and informed as a by-product of its construct can be seen and felt, but race itself is not real nor can it be defined. Landson (1995) neatly states that it is a weak framework which has been and continues to be the basis of economic, political and social life.

Within the discourse of Critical Race Theory, is an identifiable academic gap from which geographers began to produce a considerable amount of work in.

Geographers identified that CRT focused on race, class and - at some juncture- gender without an adequate interpretation of how it is mutually co-constitutive with space (Pulido, 2000; Massey, 2005; Price, 2010; Neely and Samura, 2011).

Functioning within this epistemological base, geographers critique the manner in which racial dynamics influence how a space is experienced by those who exist in it

and conversely, how race is spatialized in order to reproduce and maintain the status quo (Pulido, 2000; McKittrick, 2006, Neely and Samura, 2011).

In their article, Neely and Samura (2011) express the importance of unpacking constructions of space as they engage with and are produced by underlying social relations of contestation, meanings, knowledge and power. They highlight that through the process of critiquing and understanding how the production and experience of space is imbued with socio-political meanings (Massey, 2005), race too is produced under the same social lens. Therefore, by understanding how we interact with space, one can begin to understand better how racial dynamics are produced spatially but also, how spatial dynamics are produced racially (Neely and Samura, 2011).

### 3.4. FEMINIST ORGANISING

The frameworks that have been previously explored in organisational theories have often had a rigid and “top-down” understanding of organising. These interpretations have left little room for more contemporary organisational structures. Structures which function outside of the margins of hierarchy and can be seen existing along the lines of collaborative and horizontal management as opposed to the traditional vertical management approach (Brown, 2002).

According to Brown (2002) the current spectrum of organisation theory has not provided an all-inclusive outlook on organising that encompasses non-hierarchical forms of social organisation which do not focus on talks of ‘leaders’ and their ‘subordinates’. She further highlights that this is due to a conceptual framework of organisation that has limitations on the language required to express, recognise and accommodate organisational relationships that are non-hierarchical. Of these organisational structures, are cooperatives and women-led social movement organisations which seek to eliminate hierarchy by drawing on collective social action processes which reduce differentials between members (Brown, 2003). There

is a salience in what Brown (2002) brings to the fore because small organisations often do not fit the pervasive and universal models that conventional organisations typically follow. In an effort to better understand their objectives in the contemporary era, an adequate amount of academic and social representation of the internal processes of these more “alternative” organisational forms need to be explored.

Of the varied reasons as to why women are often at the forefront of forming organisations is the idea that historically, women had not been recognised as direct participants in the more regulated and formalised capitalist system, furthermore their direct access into it was limited if even present at all (Frederici, 1975). Due to the breakdown in the traditional family and introduction into more nuclear family structures, the labour women contributed on the margins of the capitalist system was seen as a form of naturalised household maintenance which was unpaid and unrecognised as work (Young, 2007; Basu, 2018). These normalised perspectives on women’s labour exacerbated the narrative that women are not workers even though much of their labour allowed for the rapid growth of the capitalist system (Young, 2007; Basu, 2018). In the chapter by Narayan and Chikamane (2010), it is highlighted that this idea of women was not only exclusive to the formal economy but even amongst the poorest of the caste system in India, men were still earning far more than women while doing the same kind of waste work. This illuminates that this view of women was not only as a result of being unskilled or having no access in a formal industry, women were undervalued and unrecognised as workers in all forms of labour.

It is as a result of the above that women often create organisations, historically they have been erased and undermined by the conventional organisational systems of society and seek to find their own voice, one that not only recognises them but one that speaks on the issues they face on a daily basis that have been smoke screened in the plight of patriarchy and capitalism (Frederici, 1975; Narayan and Chikamane, 2010).

For the purposes of this study, I draw on an organising framework that is viewed through the feminist perspectives of social organisation where collaborative voice and action are emphasised over hierarchy, leadership behaviour is emphasised over roles of leadership and power is accessible to all as opposed to its potential resting latently in the hands of the few individuals with authority (Brown, 2002).

## CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY

### 4.1. INTRODUCTION

The methods and methodology of any research are informed by a purpose behind the aims and objectives of what a particular study seeks to achieve but also any values and belief that the researcher may hold true (Mouton, 1996,). As a result, I discuss the methods that were initially proposed for the study and how they were applied or in some cases, not applied. This forms a part of research integrity in the manner in which it illuminates a researcher's academic intent and how that plays out in reality so as to answer the study's sub-questions and to contribute to answering the overall research questions). These sub-questions and the methods allocated to them are presented in the table below (Table 1). Following the table, substantiation for the selection of these particular methods is presented.

**Table 1: Research sub-questions and relevant methods of data collection**

<b>Sub-Question</b>	<b>Method of Data Collection</b>
<b>What form do the cooperatives in Sasolburg take?</b>	Semi-structured Interviews and Focus Groups, Research diary (fieldwork notes)
<b>Why did waste pickers in Sasolburg choose to form cooperatives?</b>	Semi-structured Interviews and Focus Groups
<b>What are the power dynamics inside cooperatives, between cooperatives, and between cooperatives and the municipality?</b>	Semi-structured Interviews and Focus Groups
<b>What do waste-pickers understand integration to be?</b>	Semi-structured Interviews and Focus Groups



## 4.2. METHODS AND METHODOLOGY

The sub-questions of my research project are best interpreted through a qualitative research approach and as such, I have chosen that to be the methodological approach for this study. A qualitative approach is described as an interpretive paradigm which allows for a free and collaborative relationship between theory and research (Corbetta, 2003). The qualitative approach seeks to engage with the objects of the study on more affective and personal grounds than on empirical grounds. In utilising the qualitative approach, I avoided prescribing preconceived notions on theories before the fieldwork process took place as a way to reduce my subjectivity from the research conducted and allow for a more objective view in order to assess scenarios for what they are and not based on pre-conceived notions (Corbetta, 2003). I carried my research fieldwork diary throughout my entire fieldwork experience and used it to note down any observations made throughout the various interactions with the participants but also as a way to debrief at the end of each day as a method of mental data consolidation.

### Sampling Techniques:

Sampling plays a crucial role in the credibility of the data collected from fieldwork. Bearing in mind that my project is a qualitative study, the sampling methods that are pertinent according to Marshall (1996) are judgement and snowball sampling. Judgement sampling is the primary sampling method used to select the most conducive sample to participate in the study (Marshall, 1996). The selection was based on suggestions offered by my supervisor, and evidence from the study itself which suggests the need for specific groups of people i.e. waste pickers in Sasolburg, and representatives from the district, Sasol and the municipality (Marshall, 1996). An added benefit to the use of this sample is that it leads one to the snowball sampling

technique. Snowball sampling was used to gain access to more participants suggested by the already selected participants found the people they recommended as useful contributors to the study (Marshall, 1996). Two sample groups were chosen (Waste pickers from 2 cooperatives and a groundWork representative, SASOL representative, Fezile Dabi waste officer and the chairperson of the South African Waste Pickers Association (SAWPA). The waste pickers were interviewed based on availability as often they were often working throughout the day at the recycling centre. The waste picker who is also the chairperson of Tshwarahanang (township cooperative) allowed me to schedule a meeting with her for a specific interview at her home in Zamdela, Sasolburg. Information was also gathered from interviewing a SASOL representative at the SASOL offices in Sasolburg. An interview with the waste officer of Fezile Dabi was conducted at the local district offices in Sasolburg, the groundWork representative was interviewed during a waste pickers' exchange event in Sasolburg and the chairperson of SAWPA was interviewed at the Vaal Park Recycling Centre.

#### *Semi-structured Interviews:*

The semi-structured interviews were conducted in SesSotho, SeTswana and English but also varied in content and complexity depending on whether they were targeted at either the waste pickers or the officials from the various stakeholders who participated in the study. A semi-structured interview is an open-ended interview which follows a general script and covers a list of topics selected by the interviewer and freely explored by the interviewee (Bernard, 2006). This method proved to be beneficial under the time constraints that were encountered, where there was only one opportunity to interview a particular participant. Semi-structured interviews follow the general feel of an unstructured interview with an interview guide being the only crucial difference between the two (Bernard, 2006). An interview guide is a list of all the topics that need to be covered in a particular study, it was used in conjunction with an interview schedule and it dictated the order and structure of the interview process (Bernard, 2006). The advantage of semi-structured interviews along with an interview guide and schedule is that it showcased competence and preparedness during an interview while allowing room for free-flowing discussions with the participants.

#### Focus Groups:

A focus group is a conversation between 4-10 people (roughly) where the interviewer facilitates the discussion between the participants (Secor, 2010). Focus groups are incredibly useful when wanting to engage with how matters are talked about or debated about between certain groups of people, from such conversations one is able to pick up on certain aspects of the matter that one may have not identified initially (Secor, 2010). For this study, focus groups were meant to be conducted with the workers from the recycling center; however, it did not seem necessary upon further situational analysis. This is because while completing my participant observation, I was able to talk to them casually without needing to conduct a structured focus group. Particularly with the women, they were all willing to contribute to the discussions as any topic came about. Furthermore they all had a consistent view with regards to the topics that came up regarding work, they also kept referring me to their supervisor (a waste picker who I interviewed) for more knowledgeable information.

#### Participant Observation:

Participant observation is understood quite differently across all the social science disciplines, however, in this study it refers to the researcher making observations of the roles being played by the participants while playing the role of the participant in the site that is being studied (Atkinson and Hammersley, 1998). On 12 and 13 September 2017 I experienced what it was like to be a woman working at the recycling centre. I arrived dressed in my casual clothes and brought along the gloves I was told to have in handy prior to the participation. In these two days I learnt how to identify which material was recyclable and which was not, in this case it was according to what the recycling centre deemed a marketable recyclable material or not. I also learnt what materials to sort and how to go about doing so in respect to type of material, colour and quality, lastly I learnt how to weigh the material and where it must be stored. During the arduous work I was able to gain some insider perspective about what the working conditions are like in the space, one is usually engulfed in the stench of rotting consumables that must be discarded of before the material is sorted, secondly there was no shelter and the sun was blazing which meant an incredible amount of heat exhaustion, dehydration and sun burn are common occurrences. These are just a few

of the observations I made while playing the role and simultaneously observing it. This method assists a researcher in understanding their data more closely as opposed to being completely removed from the reality of what the data represents, by virtue of that it added a layer of insider understanding that was beneficial for my data collection.

#### Positioning (methodological observation)

Acker (2000) states that positioning is the ability to recognise the extent of one's "insiderness" or "outsiderness" and to be mindful of it while conducting the research. This involves some critical engagement with one's self in relation to one's work but more importantly, one's relationship with the participants of the research. A researcher's "insiderness" can be advantageous in that it allows the researcher some access into the participant's life that may assist in strengthening the research (Acker, 2000). However, researchers tend to bank on their commonalities with the participants to access information but neglect the fact that the differences between themselves and the participants as well as the prevalent power dynamics may be important to recognise (Acker, 2000). For this study, an assumed "insiderness" based on racial and linguistic commonalities was identified which I presumed would make it simple for me to gain information from the waste pickers. Furthermore, the participants assumed that this was an opportunity for them to be lifted out of their difficulties related to the work they do. This is because they related to me because we share the same race and we speak the same language, however, I am more educated and have been afforded an opportunity to go to an institution such as the University of the Witwatersrand. The waste pickers assumed this puts me at a better position to be listened to by stakeholders and help them alter their working conditions. At that point, my experiences emphasised what scholars such as Acker (2000) describe and it became clear that one has to be aware of one's positioning when one conducts qualitative research because it affects the quality of the research as any other method would.

### 4.3. POLICY DOCUMENTS CONSULTED

The main policies consulted included the following:

- The National Waste Act
- The National Waste Management Strategy (NWMS)
- Metsimaholo Integrated Development Plan (IDP) 2016/2017
- Metsimaholo Integrated Waste Management Plan (IWMP) 2016/2017

These documents were used to evaluate the current status of waste legislation in South Africa and how that affects integration initiatives. It also assisted in gauging the level of waste picker recognition in the eyes of the law and from the perspectives of municipal and national government delegates.

These documents served as beneficial tools given that the study is based on integration which aims to be achieved through a change in national policy to better recognise the waste pickers.

#### 4.4. DATA ANALYSIS METHOD

##### *Grounded Theory*

This method of data analysis, developed by sociologists (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Strauss and Corbin, 1990) consists of a series of techniques applied to identify themes and concepts which can be linked to formal theories (Bernard, 2006). Secondly, it assists a data analyst to immerse and “ground” him or herself within the data so as to identify some patterns within the transcripts of the data (Bernard, 2006). This method was used to analyse the raw data as it could serve as an effective tool to use to unpack the information in the transcripts for all the interviews that were conducted (Ntuli, 2016). The first step that was taken was to highlight and note down anything that seemed alarming as a way to start identifying some themes that relate to the major topics this the study one engages with. Following that process, folders were created for each theme that was identified from the transcriptions of the interviews conducted, to which relevant quotes were then allocated. Once that process was complete, the data analysis table provided by the supervisor was used to start seeing the threads and patterns regarding how the data fits together with the main arguments, key findings as well as the theory that was engaged with and any other relevant theory identified . This method proved to be effective because it even provided a structure for the results and discussion section which, as can be noted in that section, contains the

themes that were identified and all the quotes and literature associated with a particular key finding.

#### 4.5. ETHICAL CONSIDERATION

When carrying out my fieldwork, interviewing minors was avoided (<18 years) and the objectives of the research were explained, anonymity was ensured where possible and written or recorded consent was obtained from every participant prior to conducting the interviews.

Following these ethical procedures is vital for the credibility and reliability of this research because as (Smith, 2010) states, research is political and it may be done exceptionally from a technical point of view but if ethical procedures are compromised it decreases the research's viability. As scholars who aim to either produce or contribute to new knowledge it is our responsibility to ensure transparency, accountability and sufficient moral standing when conducting research because it influences the lives of those who participate in the research (particularly vulnerable participants) and those who learn from the research conducted in ways unimaginable. Ethical matters are highly contextual and unique to every research conducted, thus, Smith (2010) states that much of the contradictory aspects of research in regard to ethics, need to be dealt with accordingly ensuring that the data is not tampered with or altered in the process. Finally Smith (2010) identifies a crucial matter that speaks to my own research moral compass and that is the fact that credit and acknowledgement need to be given where they are due because it is unethical to use other people's ideas as your own. In an attempt to comply with the abovementioned, necessary acknowledgement was given through citing and referencing the sources used throughout the research project.

#### 4.6. LIMITATIONS

During the semi-structured interview process, some of the questions posed to waste pickers had to be simplified so they were able to give information related to their interpretations of power and the integration process in South Africa. However, this simplification of the concepts may have been a limitation because it causes a slight deviation from the actual concept. In addition, vernacular languages do not have comprehensible words for concepts such as power in an academic sense and

integration which made it difficult to explain to interviewees, although the waste pickers were very knowledgeable on the contents of the study so it was simple to get around the language barrier as they were used to engaging with those concepts in English at various stakeholder engagements. Furthermore, I decided against conducting focus groups as I had initially intended to, which may have been excellent sources of collective opinions from waste pickers on the themes discussed in the research project. Subsequently, the research site is a long distance away from my home in Johannesburg, so the distance with the difficulty of busy schedules and my relocation to Cape Town for employment purposes, made it challenging to get more interviews with the waste pickers which could have aided in a richer thesis with more perspectives from the different stakeholders. With regards to using grounded-theory as a method of data analysis, one can argue that categorising data and fitting the data into themes inhibits out-of-the-box thinking as one becomes fixated with making the data fit those themes and this may have been a limitation for how I analysed the data.

## CHAPTER 5: THE INCEPTION OF THE VAAL PARK RECYCLING CENTRE

### 5.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter follows an ethnographic view of the journey of the establishment of Vaal Park Recycling Centre and explores the various socio-political and economic drivers that led to its inception. At the very core of this organisation, are a group of strong-willed waste pickers who wanted to change the waste picking landscape in Sasolburg by pooling their labour resources and finding external assistance with regards to formalising their work in the area. Much of the journey had been filled with tumultuous hurdles and barriers to entry into the industry given that they were not perceived as formal waste recycling practitioners by their formal counter-parts.

### 5.2. FORMING A WORKER COOPERATIVE AT THE LANDFILL SITE

The Sasolburg landfill site is the biggest of the three landfill sites found in Sasolburg, Freestate (Metsimaholo final IDP, 2016/ 2017). It encompasses much of the waste collected from households and commercial spaces within the area which is diverted to the landfill site. The landfill site has become inundated and is said to have surpassed its recommended maximum capacity (Metsimaholo final IDP 2016, 2017). There are currently plans of having it closed down permanently and a new landfill site development project is said to be on the rise (Metsimaholo final IDP 2016/ 2017). The issue to address here however, is that for decades, there have been waste pickers on the landfill site who have been salvaging the recyclable material to sell for an income. A lot of them have even opted to live at the landfill site so that they can look after all their recyclable material that they have collected. The members of the Ikageng-Ditamating cooperative, who run the Vaal Park Recycling Centre, used to collect their recyclables from the Sasolburg landfill site as well. One of the founding members of the Ikageng-Ditamating cooperative explains his encounter with wastepicking at the Sasolburg landfill site as follows:

*“In 1983, about a year after I started working at the landfill site. In the midst of fighting and contesting the things that were unfairly happening at the landfill site I was being harassed by the police. They were trying to block my progress but they were failing because the court was not going to arrest me given the fact that Spooks had been at the landfill site for less than a year. At the core of the issue, we are talking about landfill waste, it does not belong to anyone and so even Spook himself*



*had no say in the matter. In their attempt to scare me and threaten me I was being arrested for about a week at a time without any court appearances. When they would release me, I would go back and fight again then the whole cycle would begin again, this happened until about 1987.”*

(Interview 2- Chairperson - Ikageng-Ditamating- 8/8/2017).

The above quote details the general atmosphere in this era at the landfill site as incredibly violent and volatile, waste pickers were being threatened and were being told they cannot collect recyclable material because a formal SMME run by Spook had been given the tender to collect the recyclables from the landfill site. The waste pickers had no formal agreements with the municipality and were often evicted by policemen and arrested because they were considered to be trespassers in the area. A founder of the South African Waste pickers Association (SAWPA) who only began working in the landfill site a decade after the member in the quote above, still mentions that when he started to work at the landfill site there were still disputes. He explains the following:

*“At first, when I got here, the landfills in South Africa even during Apartheid still had recycling happening, the only difference was that recycling privileges and tenders were given to white owned SMMEs. They would get the tender and all the black people who would be collecting and sorting material from the landfill would be forced to sell that specific tender recipient. So, when I got to the Sasolburg landfill there was a white man who had received the tender at the time, so getting in wasn’t easy you had to ask the white person for permission to get in and start working there. That white person quickly left the tender unattended as he had accumulated a lot of money and was probably getting distracted. It then became easier to come in and out of the landfill and work as you pleased, that’s how I got in. in 2002, the tender was going to be awarded to someone else and that’s when we started to fight because we weren’t understanding why we were not being given that tender because we are the ones working there on a daily basis. Even after our efforts, the tender was awarded to another white man.”*

(Interview 3- Chairperson-SAWPA- 12/9/2017)

This quote reveals that the tension in the landfill sites were not only as a result of the lack of formal registration of the waste pickers but also some racial dynamics that existed in the area given the dominant political system of Apartheid at the time. The power struggles that came with wastepicking in the Apartheid era have still not been addressed in the present. Waste pickers still remain socio-politically disadvantaged in the waste management system

of South Africa. They still work in dismal conditions, most do not have the equipment to collect waste in a safe manner and they still do not get to determine their own selling prices (Medina, 2007; 2008). The power still rests with big waste recycling corporations such as PETCO and Collect-A-Can who from the top will dictate how much they are willing to pay for recyclables. Power here exists in the gatekeeping of the waste market, allowing no free movement and the top-down price determination that has somehow become an accepted and uncontested dominant way of work functionality within the system, as far back as the 1980's as the quote above suggests (Medina, 2007; 2008).

Given the circumstances illuminated in the above quote, the waste pickers soon realised that the only way they would be able to work in the landfill site without consistent intimidation and eviction would be to begin to organise themselves as a collective and to bargain for their own prices as they felt like being forced to sell to one buyer meant that they had to accept the prices he was willing to offer them despite the fact that the pricing standard was unfair. The quote below explains this more accurately:

*“we started discussing these issues at the landfill site when we realised that the people we sell to are buying our material at such a low price, we started looking for other people we could sell our material to. We found a guy named Don in Vereeniging and his prices were really good. When we come back from selling to him, you come back satisfied. So for instance, if we work in pairs and we combine our loads and sell we could each walk away with a decent R5000 or R6000. After a while we discussed the possibility of all working together as men and combining all our loads and so we started doing so. We hadn't received permission from the municipality and so we would be threatened and chased out, particularly when a white man called Greg started working at the landfill site. Greg wanted us to sell to him but he was not offering us decent prices for our loads when we had found someone who gives us satisfactory prices in Vereeniging and that is how the disputes started. “*

(Interview 5-Waste picker- Ikageneg-Ditamating, 8/9/2017)

After realising that working together was more favourable in terms of generating a better income and for improved bargaining power, they considered forming an informal cooperative called Ditamating a cooperative comprised only of men from the landfill site. The quote below explains the sequence of events lead to the creation of Ikageng-Ditamating.

*“In 2006, while I was still working at the landfill, we started a cooperative. This cooperative was called Ditamating, and was only made up of men. So, while we were fighting with Phuthang who were given a waste project at the time, they decided to let us sell to whoever we wanted to sell to because we were organised and they were still being stricter on the women who collected plastic, paper and cans instead because they weren't organised and they were too scared to be chased out of the*

*landfill site so they would obey whatever rules Phuthang had. The women spent 4 months not getting paid because Phuthang wasn't paying people saying that they weren't receiving any money this situation made us stronger because as long as things weren't going well for Phuthang it meant that we wouldn't have to be involved with them. Following that, the women approached us asking that we help them become more organised, we sat and discussed things with them and they formed a cooperative called Ikageng and that was the cooperative of people working with recyclables, while Ditamating worked with scrap and precious metals only. This meant there were 2 cooperatives on the landfill site, and now we were helping them chase Tau and all those people who were a part of the Sasol Rejuvenation funded waste project out. We eventually succeeded and we chased them out. Around that time, we had started liaising with Groundwork and we had been exposed to the organisation in India and that is when we decided that we needed to form one cooperative so that we avoid being divided. We combined Ikageng and Ditamating and that is how the cooperative ended up being called Ikageng-Ditamating. At the time, it was still not formally registered, it was an informal organisation. We were just working together as one unit combining everyone's load together at the landfill and we would share the money amongst us all."*

(Interview 3- Waste picker-SAWPA-12/9/2017)

From this point Ikageng-Ditamating worked as an informally organised body who were able to collect recyclables together by pooling their labour resources and selling to a buyer whom they all agreed offered the best prices. Following this, due to some internal conflicts, some tension within the cooperative erupted to the point where some of the waste pickers decided it would be better to start working independently again.

### 5.3. POWER DYNAMICS AND INTERNAL CONFLICTS IN THE WORKER COOPERATIVE

In their informally organised cooperative (Ditamating) comprised of only the men from the landfill site, the waste pickers entrusted a few of their members to handle the selling of the collected recyclable material when they were satisfied with the total tonnage. These elected representatives became responsible for the trip to the buyer and to ensure that the weighing and pricing was fair. However, as seen in the quote below some dishonesty started to surface and this caused a dispute amongst all the members and they began to lose hope in the system of working together as a collective.

*"What had happened was, when we were working together as Ditamating (unregistered) here was a man who used to work with called Doc, we trusted him and*

*another guy to go and sell our combined loads from which we will all share the profits. Upon receiving the money, the one guy named Doc ditched the other guy by going into the toilet with the money and escaped through the window and fled with the money. The other guy had to come back to the rest of us who were waiting for the money to tell us what had happened. We assumed that the other guy was also in on the job and he was tasked with coming to report back to us.”*

(Interview 5 – Waste picker- Vaal Park Recycling Centre, 8/9/2017)

Following this dispute some members chose to work independently, and others still chose to stay and work as collective as they believed in the broader vision that was instilled at the beginning, it worked well for a while until another incident related to money occurred, the quote below details what one key member explained as the order of events and how that caused the final rift in the organisation and hope was lost in the Ditamating cooperative as a trustworthy structure due to mismanagement.

*“after the first incident, everyone went back to working independently until Groundwork arrived and that is when we explained to them that we want to work together here but the municipality is not considering us. Groundwork was able to guide us and give us some steps to follow. We then decided to all come together, men and women, and combine all our loads and share the profits amongst us. That is when Ikageng-Ditamating was formed and we signed up. We all worked together for a while until issues of money became a problem because some people were not working as hard as others and we also didn't have a bank account for our cooperative. So in that case, we had to use people's personal accounts and the money has to go through them before it comes to us. At times the money isn't all there and it caused a lot of conflict, for instance the one-time money for a single load disappeared and no one knew where the money was. It turns out the money was in an account owned by a member of the cooperative's partner and that money was never meant to be there and this stirred the pot and caused another dispute amongst members. At that point, everyone decided that clearly working together is impossible so rather everyone goes back to working individually.”*

(Interview 5 – Waste picker- Vaal Park Recycling Centre, 8/9/2017)

The above quote speaks to the power struggles that created conflict in the cooperative. In this case, one must consider how poverty is a major driver in cases where money may have

been stolen, also the lack of adequate business acumen, training and bookkeeping skills are contributing factors as identified by an interviewee in the quote below..

*“Even now, we have started this Ikageng-Ditamating project here but it is not in the right shape, not how I had envisioned it when we first started it. This is because our management is not well equipped with the financial skills and bookkeeping skills that it takes to run this project, I have been asking and begging for training in this regard and until today there has been nothing. All one ever hears about and all one is ever invited to are workshops, workshops are very industry and business specific and they do not cater for the training needed in our particular line of work with the types of people we have working here. We want to gain financial skills and knowledge and to get mentorship and decent training. What is restricting our growth and really slowing our ability to grow is that management is not well equipped with the business and managerial skills to lead the cooperative to the place to which we want it to go. That is our biggest obstacle even 3 years into this project.”*

(Interview 2- Waste picker - Ikageng-Ditamating- 8/8/2017).

The disputes did not dishearten all of the members as a few

still endeavoured to make something of what was left of the cooperative. Following the challenges explored above, they sought help from the environmental justice nongovernmental organisation groundWork in 2009. groundWork has been working closely with waste pickers to assist them in their organisation, particularly through the establishment of the South African Waste Pickers Association SAWPA ((groundWork, 2014).

#### 5.4. IKAGENG-DITAMATING MOVES TO VAAL PARK

With the assistance of a representative from groundWork, the waste pickers were able to get some assistance to start liaising with different stakeholders to see if they could find a piece of land for them to establish their own working space away from the political and violent struggles they were constantly having to confront at the landfill site.

*“in 2009, Groundwork found some funding for an exchange for air quality and that’s when they involved waste pickers and we decided that we would go wherever they are going for this exchange because we are the ones at the landfill site. As India is organised, we wanted to expose them to South Africa’s waste pickers. So, I went*

*along with two guys from KZN and we went to India to go and find out more about how they managed to organise themselves. When we got here we held provincial meetings and following that, in 2009 we launched SAWPA. When SAWPA launched, the structure only included provincial coordinators, it was an interim structure to ensure that SAWPA can be registered as an organisation so that constitutions can be drafted and we can have a more formal structure for SAWPA. We've been working on it since 2009 until last year when it got registered and this year the conference was even bigger."*

(Interview 3- Waste picker-SAWPA- 12/9/2017)

With the formation of SAWPA as mentioned in the quote above, the chairperson of SAWPA was tasked with identifying a cooperative that would be involved in the pilot project to start integrating waste pickers into more formal waste management systems as it had been seen in their travels to India and Brazil. Simon suggested that they explore Ikageng-Ditamating as they were already organised and knowledgeable with the type of work involved in wastepicking.

*"SAWPA was given the task to recommend where in South Africa a pilot project would be established. When the funding became available, Ikageng-Ditamating had already been established and was registered and we had already found a site from the municipality. This site was an illegal dumping space which the municipality was struggling to maintain, that is how we decided to approach the municipality and tell them that we could potentially receive funding and we would like to use this space more productively. We drafted a proposal along with the industries because of their commitment we could not draft this proposal alone, this was because the municipality did not have any grievances with providing the land, the only issue was that they could not offer us any other resources which is why they needed industries on board and officially committing to this project."*

(Interview 3 – Chairperson- SAWPA, 12/9/2017)

With the assistance of the task team, which a document provided by PETCO (2018) reveals included Recycling Association Group (RAG), (PackagingSA) WastePlan, Rejuvenation, Metsimaholo Local Municipality, District of Fezile Dabi, Province (DEA and LED), SAWPA and Ikageng-Ditamating. The Vaal Park Recycling Centre was established in November 2014. Its main aims were to service 3000 households in the predominantly white suburb of Vaal Park by introducing separation at source initiatives and collecting recyclable materials in the area (WIEGO, 2016). The launch of the pilot project was met with many challenges as

it was close to the festive season and the waste pickers mention that they struggled with marketing and sourcing recyclable materials at that time of year as described by an interviewee in the following quote.

*“The project was launched on the 27<sup>th</sup> of November 2014 which was a time nearing the festive season, we worked the entire December collecting all waste including wet waste because the municipal services were on a festive break. We worked throughout December with no pay which started the project off on a shaky note. Another one of our issues is that at the landfill site waste pickers were used to being their own bosses, so people lacked the patience to wait for the loads to accumulate kilos before selling. The members end up going back to the landfill site where they know they can sell their material whenever they please. The challenges that led to people getting angry and leaving are many, before the project was launched it was agreed upon that we would be given machinery such as a baling machine and also, we would have electricity installed for us, when the project was pitched, this was sounding like they were building a separation at source and recycling firm for waste pickers. However, during the stakeholders meeting everything changed towards the launching of the project. The promises that people made during project development were unfulfilled towards the time of having to launch the project. The project started off with no start-up capital so we had to work with nothing just to ensure that we find a way to pay off the expenses we had such as the truck’s fuel, maintenance and insurance which was problematic because people were not understanding why they could not be paid even though they were working so hard when the project was launched.*”

Interview 7 – Chairperson- Vaal Park Recycling Centre, 7/8/2017)

In the quote above, the chairperson of the Vaal Park Recycling Centre (VRC) expresses that they launched the project without having received much of the resources they were promised and in the process, they lost out on employees because people were not going to work for free. Out of frustration, a year after its launch, the chairperson of the centre sent an email communication to the industry partners asking them why they were not delivering on their commitments to provide the recycling centre with assistance to baling machinery and electricity access. In their internal communication with one another, the stakeholders expressed some confusion as to why they were still expected to be assisting the centre as, according to their understanding about the funds already invested and support already given, they believed that ideally the centre should have been self-sufficient by that point in 2015.

During the preliminary visit to the site in the latter part of 2017, I spoke to the chairperson of the Vaal Park Recycling Centre, he showed me an agreement form that was meant to be signed between PETCO and Ikageng-Ditamating yet was never signed and still remains unsigned today. This agreement form stipulates all the terms and conditions for both stakeholders and also stipulated a total of R4 Million rand in sponsorship for the project which the chairperson of the VRC states they have only received a fraction of even 3 years after the project has launched. He states that they received a solar grid which no longer works and now they are stranded completely without electricity, they received 6000 bins; access to water; trolleys; cages -which they won from the competition they had entered and managed to win- and a car which they used the competition money to buy to the value of R252 000 – the remaining R201 000, they used for savings in case they would find themselves in desperate need of money one day (Fieldwork notes-Vaal Park Recycling Centre, 17/07/2017).

The Vaal Park Recycling Centre represents a paradigm shift in the manner in which the integration of waste pickers was being thought of before. Important changes include their involvement as a primary stakeholder in the integration proceedings as well as their determination to run and manage their own cooperative based on their perspectives of how a recycling cooperative should ideally be run with the assistance of their partners. However, according to the cooperative members, the stakeholders involved in this project have not delivered in the manner that they had promised they would as per the initial agreements in the long strategy and planning meetings that were held prior to the launch of the pilot project. In the processes, waste pickers have expressed that they feel as though their hard work and effort is being undermined. The different views and understanding of what was expected of the roles played by all the stakeholders involved in the steering committee and the reality of what transpired upon the project of the launch are indicative of an unclear stipulation of roles and a lack of accountability. Despite their disappointment in the proceedings, the members of Ikageng-Ditamating continue to work hard proving that their tenacity is the only reason that site is still standing amidst all the hurdles and lack of expected support from the stakeholders in partnership with the cooperative. The quote below taken from an interview with the waste officer of Fezile Dabi stipulates that there has been a lack of accountability in terms of what was promised to the waste pickers and what they had received in reality.



*“With this project, the saddest part is that when it was launched it was not meant to pan out the way it did. The project was meant to be much bigger than what we see today because one stakeholder decided that this project didn’t suit them anymore and it really had a ripple effect. This stakeholder had more power or muscle with their expertise and they were expected to play the role of the leader as one with a major background in the field. So, due to disagreements, the stakeholder didn’t give 100% and that impacted the project badly. Hence, the struggles with electricity and such. I would say everybody involved did what they set out to do, well speaking for Fezile Dabi we agreed to monitor and support the project which is what we still do. In the document that explained the roles of the stakeholders, it was never stated that Fezile Dabi had to support and monitor yet we have taken it upon ourselves to do so. There were different stakeholders who had responsibilities, but unfortunately the logos you see when you enter the recycling centre are just there, most of them did not uphold their end of the agreement. “*

(Interview 8- Waste officer- Fezile Dabi, 27/9/2017)

## 5.5. CONCLUSION

The chapter has explored the journey that the waste pickers who are now at the Vaal Park Recycling Centre have travelled to get to where they are, although they faced many challenges they managed to get away from the politics of the landfill site and be a part of what can be considered a revolutionary project in the waste picking landscape where waste pickers have been at the forefront of an integration process. Despite the growing pains, it seems that these waste pickers still remain determined to make something of their Recycling Centre and have the hopes of establishing other recycling centres in the area so that they can form a waste pickers forum and start to sell directly to the industries in an effort to cut out the middle-man. I discuss this plan and the Metsimaholo Waste Pickers Forum further in a later chapter.

## CHAPTER 6: UNDERLYING RACE AND CLASS DYNAMICS IN WASTE PICKER INTEGRATION

### 6.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter illuminates the underlying racial tensions that have been scantily explored in much of the academic debates surrounding waste picker integration in South Africa. It does so by interrogating the formal recycling companies who much of the waste legislation on recycling, prior to 2011, has been framed around in contrast to their informal recycling counterparts who very little has been mentioned of in legislation. An emerging literature on wastepicking has explored its gendered nature, issues around nationality and at some juncture class relations. However, racial dynamics still remain unexplored territory. It is crucial that this be addressed, particularly in South African scholarship where the politics surrounding race have played a major role in the current socio-economic and political fabric of the country.

### 6.2. THE RACIAL TENSIONS BETWEEN THE FORMAL AND INFORMAL RECYCLING INDUSTRIES

The waste pickers in South Africa are mainly African in ethnicity, although not all are citizens, they are amongst the poorest people in the country. In scholarship, their poverty is mentioned in passing, particularly in relation to why they deserve to be integrated into South Africa's waste management services, so that their means of making a livelihood can be recognised and as a result, taken more seriously. However, scant attention has been given to exploring what it means to be black and poor while trying to penetrate an industry that has never recognised you or the work you do to begin with.

The formal recycling industry in South Africa has been operational for the last three decades (Godfrey and Oelofse, 2017). One of the waste pickers interviewed in this study mentioned that he started wastepicking in 1982 (Interview 2- Waste picker-Vaal Park Recycling Centre, 2017). This would mean that waste pickers have been actively collecting recyclables prior to the more formal establishment of the recycling industry. Furthermore, it means that as it was established, waste pickers were intentionally overlooked even though their labour has, for many years, contributed to the growing value chain of the recycling system in South Africa.

The companies who are at the forefront of the formal recycling initiatives in South Africa namely: Collect-a-Can, PET Recycling Company (PETCO) and the like received access to international funding and support from organisations such as Coca-Cola and the Danish Cooperation for Environment and Development (Godfrey and Oelofse, 2017). Website images of the current faces on the board of directors of these companies reveal that they are predominantly managed by white people. What it means for waste pickers however, is that they do not have enough representatives at the very top of these organisations who look like them or understand more deeply the lives they live and the type of socio-political, economic and historical struggles they have endured. To have their work recognised and understood in spaces dominated by people who may not even understand poverty and experiences of black lives is a terrain that has proven to be tumultuous for the waste pickers as they repeatedly bring up economic racism and a lack of transformation as the main barrier of entry into to the recycling industry. Packaging SA (2018) drafted an Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) document which recognises the necessity of racially transforming the waste industry in South Africa, however, class issues are also at the fore of this argument. Supporting black businesses contributes to an emerging black middle class who waste pickers are still excluded from. The goal of transformation in the waste and recycling industry should thus be to understand the articulation of race and class and present solutions that speak to both given that the integration process exists on the nexus of both socio-political issues. This is seen boldly expressed in the following quote:

*“Yes of course, it’s economic racism at its best. This sector is the second biggest industry in the world, not South Africa, the world. It contributes billions of rands to our GDP. As long as one wants to promote recycling, one doesn’t promote it by funding the bottom tier of the pyramid (the waste pickers) only and doing nothing more than that. At the end of the day, you are still supporting the white industry with the nation’s investment. If one is really serious about investing in this industry, one has to invest from the bottom up. Come up with programs for industrialisation, we must see a significant rise in black-owned industries, manufacturing end-user products. Yet this progress is being blocked. The support is there, it is just structured in a way to ensure that we don’t move higher up on this value-chain.”*

(interview 4-Chairperson-SAWPA, 13/9/2017)

The above quote depicts the current realities faced by the waste pickers when attempting to move up the waste hierarchy. Their main grievance is that they are being assisted just enough to sustain their projects however, upscaling is not made possible with the limited skills training, resources and funding that they receive. When corroborating these findings with what is said in Neely and Samura’s (2011) article, it is quite clear that as waste pickers

continue to exist, spatially, on the periphery of the waste management structure in South Africa, much of their racial identities, ideas, and opinions continue to be trapped, silenced and unheard. The importance of their self-led cooperative movement is thus to reshape the spatiality of the waste management structure by physically existing in these spaces and having a say on their own selling prices and their involvement in the broader value-chain, but more so, thereby introducing transformation, racially, in these spaces too. Should

these barriers of entry can be broken, it will prove that waste pickers can be both black and successful within the waste management industry of South Africa and they can thus open up more channels of entry for future waste pickers.

When asked why he thinks integration projects in other parts of the global South, such as India and Brazil, have been so progressive the interviewee said the following.

*“The waste pickers in India and Brazil are still fighting the same struggle as us, they just happen to be much further in the struggle because they started long before we did and they are thus better off than we are. They have overcome a lot of challenges. Brazil was helped by the fact that their president Lula da Silva was from the Workers’ Party. When they wanted to recruit supporters for his second term, during his campaign, they focused on waste pickers and in fact, the whole informal sector. A lot of programs which embraced the informal sector were established and that’s how he won over the waste pickers and other informal workers. The difference is that in Brazil, these are indigenous people, so at every tier of the waste and recycling pyramid they are all Brazilians and so racist politics are rarely at play. In South Africa, there are barriers which are created by the apartheid system that are not broken, one can forget about going anywhere. The waste and recycling sector really needs to be transformed, we are here now and they don’t have an option. We are here to fight the system.”*

(interview 4- Chairperson-SAWPA, 13/9/2017)

The above quote speaks to race and racial politics as an underlying barrier of entry for waste pickers in South Africa. The waste pickers are aware of this dynamic but it seems that other stakeholders may not be aware of how much racial politics may play into the reason integration processes are proving to be difficult, this is of course not the sole reason for the difficulty in integrating waste pickers. The integration process seems to be underpinned by a myriad of socio-economic complexities such as their political power being undermined, racial constructs being overlooked and the lack of access to resources. However, acknowledging every facet of what could be the source of the challenges is vital, particularly from the waste pickers’ perspectives. Even amongst themselves they raise that they are really struggling to

mobilise because the leaders they elect get power hungry and are unable to see their visions through so the barriers to entry are very layered and they seem disheartened but are eager to see how they will be dismantled, it is a fight they are willing to see through as the quote below suggests.

*“At this stage I feel like government affiliated structures undermine any plan proposed by waste pickers, these are the plans that could help to curb political disputes and strikes. Presently, I can confidently say only these big companies are prioritised, ours is not even acknowledged. On the other hand, I also acknowledge the part played by waste pickers in that we have to fight a stronger fight and have reliable leaders if we want to be recognised in this industry, we should be mobilising and doing everything to have our claim in this value chain. Right now, we entrust certain people with the duty to lead the struggle through the South African Waste pickers Association (SAWPA) yet meetings are held and issues are discussed but nothing concrete happens, it’s the same story time and time again. Lack of implementation, and lack of support though training and education at grassroots are probably our biggest obstacles.*

(Interview 2- Chairperson-Vaal Park Recycling Centre, 8/8/2017)

The conversation about power politics in this case lies in its subtlety. As discussed in a previous chapter, power hierarchies may not be obvious in cooperatives because they are formed on the basis of a common goal for a group of people who all seem to have the same socio-economic struggles. However, some of the waste pickers expressed that the leaders they entrust with the vision of seeing the industry change to integrate waste pickers tend to only have their own personal interests at heart and misuse their leadership to access these opportunities. The internal power dynamics at play are amongst the reasons they feel the progress they want to make in gaining recognition is slow. On one of my interviews I questioned a participant as to why they keep voting in these individuals if they have lost trust in them, the participant stated that a lot of them do not have the ability to express themselves and their ideas the way the people who are voted into power can. This is why I added that the ability to express oneself in the English language has been able to give some waste pickers far more access to power and opportunity than others. This adds to how multifaceted the struggle for waste pickers is to get to full integration and even further up the value chain. It is a process that needs to be addressed by breaking down internal power dynamics but also outside of the organisation, waste pickers need to fight systems that are prohibiting socio-political transformation and racial evolution within the waste management system of South Africa.

### 6.3. CONCLUSION

The struggles faced by the waste pickers are not going to be easy to overcome as there are many issues underpinning the type of systematic inclusion that this requires from all stakeholders. A better communication network between the waste pickers, municipalities, private organisations, NGOs and academia is needed in order to engage favourably and to have all these issues addressed in a meaningful way. It seems at the core of these struggles in integrating the waste pickers into formal waste management services, are misunderstandings of what the integration process should ideally look like in its implementation. In the next chapter I discuss what integration represents to various stakeholders that have been interviewed in this study and reveal that fundamentally it is being understood differently by all the stakeholders and that perhaps working towards reaching a common ground of understanding would be the first step in the process.

## CHAPTER 7: WASTE PICKERS ORGANISING

### 7.1. INTRODUCTION

Waste pickers in other parts of the global South such as Colombia and Brazil, intentionally chose to organise themselves into a cooperative as it provided the best organisational structure for their mobilisation and waste picker identity representation. In India, they have managed to form unions (Fergutz *et al.*, 2011). In South Africa, waste pickers are coerced into forming cooperatives in order to have access to resources and support from the government and private companies as discussed in the previous chapter. I note, however, that the waste pickers in Sasolburg intentionally chose to form a cooperative in their own right and without the coercion from government as a mobilisation tool to gain more waste picker recognition, but also to have the opportunity to compete in more formal recycling markets. The obligation to form cooperatives from the state has not always been favourable as people have been able to scheme their way into accessing government funding by registering cooperatives that have no intention of participating in the recycling industry, on the other hand it has created some contention for street pickers and landfill site pickers who still prefer to remain independent as they too are unable to access the support and resources if they are not organised and registered. This chapter explores the different organisational structures that the waste pickers have formed and also looks into the waste pickers who still prefer to remain independent as a way to assess if the current integration model is as all-encompassing as it supposed to be for all waste pickers.

### 7.2. THE UNREGISTERED WASTE PICKERS

I question the views that state that waste pickers who choose to work independently at landfill sites or on the streets are “unorganised” because many of these waste pickers still work in groups and have found viable ways of collecting their material and participating in various social interactions with each other in an organised manner. This allows them some autonomy and flexibility but is still organised to some degree. The current system that perpetuates the idea that to have access to the necessary support, funding and resources means that they have to belong to a cooperative is one that does not favour the needs of independent waste pickers. While on my preliminary research visit to the Vaal Park area in July 2017, I was able to talk to the independent waste pickers who come to the Vaal Park Recycling Centre every Wednesday after they have collected their recyclables, just before the municipality trucks come to do their weekly collection in the area. They explained that they want to form a cooperative but they are unsure about where they will find the land to do

so and they are weary about how it will be beneficial to their stream of income as they are used to earning money on a daily basis. It is revelatory that to street pickers, having land is a requirement for them to form a cooperative, which is interesting because there are waste pickers who have formed cooperatives at the landfill site and from their backyards in the township households who do not have any land from the municipality. It seems that the Vaal Park Recycling Centre has become a model for organising in Sasolburg where independent waste pickers now see land acquisition as the primary means of forming a cooperative. Furthermore, the street pickers mentioned that they do not like the idea of having a boss and being told what to do and also the political and internal conflicts that happen within cooperatives are not challenges they want to face.

On 18 July 2017, I visited the Sasolburg landfill site along with the chairperson of the Vaal Park Recycling Centre. During this preliminary visit, I felt completely small in the middle of the heaps of overbearing stench and garbage that surrounded me. During a moment of reflection, it dawned on me how desperate one might have to be to choose to not only live in this place but to make a living out of physically diving into these heaps of garbage to salvage recyclable material on a daily basis and still remain unacknowledged for the benefits that doing this work brings to the environment at large. This is the reality faced by hundreds of waste pickers on the landfill sites and on the streets who are held back by a system that I feel, does not view them any differently from the waste they interact with. I interacted with a couple who has been living at the landfill site for about a decade and when I questioned them about why they were not in any formal cooperative and they informed me that they once tried to be a part of the cooperative when it was formed at the landfill site but the lack of respect, decent leaders and money politics made it difficult to believe in the benefits of working collectively with other waste pickers. As such, they left the cooperative and have been working together as a couple to make ends meet. During that engagement, the man and the chairperson of the Vaal Park Recycling Centre started conversing and the man mentioned Simon and where the money that he owes them is. This was in reference to the incident that the other members of the Vaal Park Recycling Centre brought up during the interviews conducted with them about money going missing. This incident happened at least 5 years prior to that encounter and it was something that stayed with this man which reinforces why he would not consider going back into a cooperative. When I asked the chairperson of the Vaal Park what the cooperative's relationship is like with the independent street pickers he said the following:



*“Most of them were at the landfill, they left the landfill because of the problems and politics of that place and they decided to be street pickers following around the municipal garbage collection schedule. Before we came to Vaal Park, they were collecting around the area, they were mostly collecting clothes, toys and scrap material. When we moved here, we thought the residents would be fully supportive of the project because we were told there were 3000 households here during stakeholder engagements prior to the launching of the project. In reality, the outcome was everything but that, only a bit over a quarter of the residents came to collect the bins we were giving out, so a lot of the recyclables are still in the Vaal Park area but are not being given directly to us. So, to avoid conflict, we suggested that instead of collecting only toys, clothes and scrap material rather they start collecting the recyclables within the area for the residents who don’t participate and then they can sell those to us.”*

(Interview 7- Waste picker- Vaal Park Recycling Centre, 7/8/2017)

The quote above reveals an interesting dynamic because prior to my research I was under the impression that these different working spaces in which waste pickers function in would create competition amongst them and the reality has proven to be anything but that. The waste pickers in Sasolburg work together and with each other despite where they choose to work and that shows that they are committed to a waste picker identity that they all share and by virtue of that, they all want to see each other succeed in their respective spaces of work. To affirm this notion, I conducted an interview with the chairperson of another cooperative whose cooperative (Tshwarahanang) functions within the township space in Sasolburg. She shared that she sought assistance from the leaders of the Vaal Park Recycling Centre while she had the aspiration of starting her own cooperative. She explained that she admired their hard work and tenacity given that they were able to surpass the hardships they were faced with the landfill site and make something out of their cooperative which led them to having the Vaal Park Recycling Centre. Something she wishes to have someday as well. She described her experience as follows:

*“...I first started by reaching out to Ikageneg-Ditamating because they had more experience with forming cooperatives. They encouraged me to find people who are waste pickers around the township and form a cooperative. Abram from Ikangeng-Ditamating said that even if we have 11 people who have registered you cannot exclude those who didn’t register, you have to keep working with them. So, I’m always encouraging them and telling that even though they never registered, once the project is up and running we will all be working together. This whole project needs involvement of people and shutting people out won’t help us reach our goals especially because Sasol was encouraging us to find youth”*

(Interview 6- Waste picker- Tshwarahanang, 15/9/2017)

The above quote affirms that the waste pickers in Sasolburg, despite their organised or unorganised status or whether they are registered or unregistered, still belong to a unified community of people who share a common goal to progress in the recycling system of South Africa together. With this goal in mind, the representatives of the Vaal Park Recycling Centre had the idea to form a forum of waste pickers that would combine all 8 of the cooperatives in the Metsimaholo Local Municipality in order to build an even stronger workforce and to be able to compete for a bigger share of the market. I discuss the establishment of the Metsimaholo Waste pickers Forum further in the following section.

### 7.3. THE METSIMAHOLO WASTE PICKERS FORUM

The Metsimaholo Waste pickers Forum (MWF) was an idea executed by the two chairpersons of the Vaal Park Recycling Centre. While struggling to gain the necessary resources from the stakeholders they are in partnership with for their cooperative, they decided to create an organisation that would have an even bigger impact for the livelihoods of waste pickers in the Metsimaholo Local Municipality (MLM). This organisation aims to bring together all of the 8 cooperatives in the MLM to form one registered forum where they all combine their kilos and are able to collectively sell their recyclable materials to major recycling companies, in an attempt to completely eliminate the middle-men who have been offering them low and unstandardised prices for their recyclables. When questioned about what he would like the Metsimaholo Waste pickers Forum to achieve, one of the founders responded as follows:

*“Abram and I sat under a tree and planned this waste pickers’ forum in hopes of reaching a point of growth we have always dreamed of. The idea is to register this forum so that middlemen don’t mess with the structure or the waste pickers within it. The point of this forum is that we, as waste pickers within our various cooperatives in the area, will service one municipality. The point is that if we combine all our loads together, we can compete with the middlemen instead of selling to them, we can sell to the industries themselves. We don’t want things going above us any longer, we want to be able to sell on our own without liaising with middlemen and negotiating with them for prices first. The main goal for us is to own the means of production, we need to be able to own the entire value chain from separation at source to producing products such as tissue with the white paper we collect. We’ve become smarter and more informed about this entire industry so we deserve more out of it than just being the collectors and separators. Our long-term goal is to start mobilising at forum level,*

*then district level then eventually it'll get to the provincial level and when we reach that level we can have the numbers to be able to own the means of production."*

(Interview 2- Waste picker- Vaal Park Recycling Centre, 8/8/2017)

The above quote depicts the type of aspirations the waste pickers are fighting to achieve, it is long-term oriented and plans to serve future generations of waste pickers who they hope will not have to face the same struggles as they presently do. It will ensure that waste pickers are respected and valued as innovative thinkers that have worked hard to be recognised as such in the recycling and waste management industry of South Africa. Sasol and the MLM have committed themselves to assisting the forum with finding the necessary land to create sorting facilities for each of the cooperatives involved. Interestingly, the waste officer at the Fezile Dabi district shared that he has decided to start a forum for the waste pickers in all the municipalities he oversees as a way to bring together waste pickers from the different municipalities. The co-founder of the Metsimaholo Waste pickers Forum expressed that he saddened by this as he feels that this is typically what happens in their experiences. Waste pickers come up with innovative ideas, they approach municipalities for assistance and instead of receiving assistance the district municipalities turn around and steal their ideas and advertise them as their own. When asked about his idea of a forum the waste officer said the following:

*"local committees will form a structure locally first then it will go into the secondary stage which is the district. So firstly, it will be to coordinate the recycling activities within the municipalities and district. Secondly, it is to share information amongst themselves and with us, also in terms of legislation and what the markets are looking for at the time. I feel sometimes the recyclers are recycling products that the industries don't want so through this we can educate ourselves and each other. The other point is to engage about health and safety.. One of the goals will be to try and get as many waste pickers out of the landfill sites which would mean we can work better if there are separation at source sites like the Vaal Park recycling centre but that will take a while. For now, we want to tackle the health and safety of waste pickers. At the moment, no one can tell waste pickers to leave the waste pickers because even if we do that, there is no decent management and security there so they will go back. So, in the interim, this is the least we can do to ensure that people don't die and fall sick in the landfill site."*

(Interview 8- Waste officer- Fezile Dabi, 27/9/2017)

The idea proposed in the quote above is similar to the one being executed by the founders of the Metsimaholo Waste pickers Forum, the district has the resources to include health and safety and engage with other government departments to make this idea far more impactful, whereas, the waste pickers do not have that kind of power. This is indicative of a form of dispossession of waste pickers' intellectual property without giving them the due credit for their ideas (Samson, 2015). What Samson (2015) explores in her article is based on "epistemic dispossession", this is currently the reality in the waste management industry where waste pickers' ideas are being misused while delivered in a manner that suggests a saviour complex, to the detriment of the waste pickers as this notion does not lever their progression in the value chain, but their ideas are dispossessed by private companies and municipal employees instead. This not only hinders their plans for growth but disrupts the very aim of integrating waste pickers according to their own ideals. The narrative that is pervasively spread is that waste pickers want hand outs and they cannot do things for themselves and are waiting to be rescued in order to reach their ideal working conditions. Little is ever discussed about the fact that their ideas are being used without granting them the platform to execute these ideas in a way that is favourable for their political goals. When interviewed about why he feels the municipality and district do not give them sufficient support and assistance the co-founder of the Metsimaholo District Forum mentioned the following:

*"I would honestly say its jealousy, nothing but jealousy because the concept is not coming from them, they can't claim the idea as their own. I mean if you knock on Fezile Dabi's (the district) door and present something to them or ask for help, for something they can easily help with they give you the run around for weeks on end and the next time you see this person they are driving a new car and they present to you the same plan you had presented to them and tell you that Fezile Dabi wants to start this new project. How is it possible for Fezile Dabi to launch this project when I wanted help with the same idea just weeks ago? One just does not understand how such happens. We go to the municipality, who should be highly impressed with what we are doing and supporting us the most because we are helping them with their waste and community development initiatives, yet we are not getting the support we need from the municipality."*

(Interview 2 Chairperson- Vaal Park Recycling Centre/Metsimaholo Waste Pickers Forum, 8/8/2017)

The quote in the abovementioned, refers to feelings of dissatisfaction with the manner in which the municipality and the local district officials have made a claim to an idea that the waste pickers feel they pioneered. It has been emphasised throughout this project that

engaging with waste pickers and including them in the formulation of plans and strategies - prior to launching integration initiatives- is vital. However, going about it in a manner that dispossesses them of their intellectual property is problematic for their struggle to be acknowledged and recognised as worthy forward-thinkers in their line of work. If the district officials feel that their execution of these ideas would have better reach, as they have the resources and social network to ensure that it does, they could still do so perhaps without making it seem like these are ideas of their own. This would ensure that the ideas are executed collaboratively with an involvement from the waste pickers but also with the added knowledge and resources from the municipal officials which is ideally, what the integration process seeks to achieve in the long-term.

#### 7.4. THE SOUTH AFRICAN WASTE PICKERS ASSOCIATION

In partnership with groundWork and Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO), the South African Waste Pickers Association (SAWPA) was founded in 2009 with the intent to have a representational structure that would create a movement behind a unified voice for all the waste pickers in South Africa (Global Alliance of Waste pickers, 2018). It was founded based on the idea of waste pickers being able to have a space where irrespective of the local challenges faced by the waste pickers, on a national front they would all stand behind a common goal while being able to garner support from national and international audiences through political activism and mobilisation. They had 6 000 registered members by 2010 and their main aims and objectives include prioritising waste picker rights; recognising waste pickers, recycling, alleviating poverty and improving the livelihoods of waste pickers, organising at a national and local level, fighting against privatisation and reducing the exposure to vulnerability and risk faced by the waste pickers (Global Alliance of Waste pickers, 2011).

In pursuit of a national structure that would allow the waste pickers the platform to reach the goals they have, with regards to advancing themselves and their recognition as waste recycling practitioners, SAWPA was formed with the assistance of groundWork. The chairperson of SAWPA shared the following quote to explain how it came about:

*“in 2009, Groundwork found some funding for an exchange for air quality and that’s when they involved waste pickers and we decided that we would go wherever they are going for this exchange because we are the ones at the landfill site. As India is organised, we wanted to expose them to South Africa’s waste pickers. So, I went*

*along with two guys from KZN and we went to India to go and find out more about how they managed to organise themselves. When we got here we held provincial meetings and following that, in 2009 we launched SAWPA. When SAWPA launched, the structure only included provincial coordinators, it was an interim structure to ensure that SAWPA can be registered as an organisation so that constitutions can be drafted and we can have a more formal structure for SAWPA. We've been working on it since 2009 until last year when it got registered and this year the conference was even bigger. "*

(Interview 3- Chairperson- SAWPA, 12/9/2017)

Waste pickers in Sasolburg form a part of SAWPA and have shared some grievances with how the organisation is run and with the manner in which challenges faced by the waste pickers are not effectively addressed. I managed to interview the chairperson of SAWPA and get his understanding about why he feels that all the cooperatives and independent waste pickers should be members of SAWPA. In response to this he mentioned the following:

*"if we are being honest the waste pickers are the backbone of recycling, so they should be the ones benefitting the most out of what this industry has to offer. The only way to obtain what they deserve is to build strength by coming together as cooperatives and as an association so that they can have a voice or some sort of power to own their material. I mean with cell phones or any other good sold on the market, the person selling the item is the one who determines what the price is. In this industry, how is it that the person who is buying gets to dictate to those selling how much the price is. This will be the case until we get to the point here we are not governed by middlemen and their prices and we are able to export our material to China for instance and say take it or leave it. Now, we are the ones being told to take it or leave it and yet we are the ones with the material. We are the beholders of gold, but we cannot set the price the price is set by the buyer. Another plan for cooperatives going forward, is that if we can all work together we will be able to get to a comfortable and profitable place where we can assign one recyclable material to each cooperative and they will specialise with both the collection and the processing of that specific type of recyclable i.e. plastic or aluminium can etc. that way we can build a waste picker-led recycling industry specialising in many materials, all cooperative run and owned. However, I think I can understand why this plan and end goal is being met with a lot of resistance, white people can see that if we get to this point we will have a lot of the power and a say in this industry."*

(Interview 3- Chairperson- SAWPA, 12/9/2017)

From the above quote, it is clear that the aims and objectives that the chairperson of SAWPA has for the advancement of waste pickers is consistent with those of the other waste pickers who participated in this study. However, a number of waste pickers expressed that they are disappointed with the manner in which SAWPA, as the main national representational body for waste pickers, is addressing the challenges they face. The chairperson of Tshwahanang (township cooperative) in Sasolburg expressed the following:

*“SAWPA plays quite a significant role but I would argue that it is doing a less than decent job in the Free State. Free State is still very far with regards to recognising waste pickers. SAWPA has not played its role well here at all, but in Johannesburg for instance, it is quite evident that they are getting waste pickers some recognition. The person who was assigned as the Free State coordinator was not working well with us, this individual went silent and we did not even know of the person’s whereabouts until a new coordinator was chosen. The person was voted in but wanted to work for other places and not serve the people who voted the individual in. He would be attending all these meetings and such, but no information would ever find itself to us. He would never attend any of the meetings we have either, unless it was a big municipal meeting, but I can’t say he knew our struggles as the waste pickers in the Free State. So, at the moment, we have elected someone else to be the coordinator. We hope that our concerns will be heard and that we will start to see some changes soon.”*

(Interview 6-Chairperson-Tshwarahanang, 15/9/2017)

During an informal engagement with one of the chairpersons of Ikageng-Ditamating he had mentioned that he was eager to attend the SAWPA conference that was going to be held on 27 August 2017. He mentioned that he had been waiting for this conference so that he would have an opportunity to confront the leadership committee of SAWPA, so that him along with the other waste pickers could collectively remove one of the leaders because he feels that he is not a waste picker and he is actually a mechanic who only uses the title of waste picker to gain exposure to travelling opportunities through SAWPA. Both the chairpersons of Ikageng-Ditamating were adamant in saying they cannot accept having a man at the forefront of the waste picker struggle who does not understand the reality of being one. They argue that the leadership of SAWPA’s lack of involvement and commitment to the waste picker struggle has contributed to the slow progress of the recycling initiatives in Sasolburg specifically, they added that they have access to information and resources which they rarely use to benefit the waste pickers in the Free State (Field work notes from preliminary site visit, 19/7/2017).

When I interviewed a groundWork representative, he stated that the advancement of waste pickers in the South African waste management and recycling system is a slow one. Transforming an entire system that has been running in a discriminatory manner for decades cannot happen as quickly as people would like it to. However, the work is being done and there will be progress. His perspective was as follows:

*“SAWPA is doing demonstrations. They have projects in different towns. They have 4 projects in different towns. They are demonstrating to the government that they can do the work. And now the minister has recognised them. She even talks about them during her minister speech. I believe that in the next presidential speech, waste-pickers will be mentioned in the president’s speech-which is a good thing. So, this is a slow process. We cannot reach the same status as Brazil because Brazil is 30 years ahead of South Africa. So, I believe that around 2030, the cooperatives will be sub-contracted as the waste collectors here in South Africa. And that’s good because it is for them, it is for everyone.”*

(interview 10- groundWork representative, 23/8/2017)

The contemporary academic conversations as well as the meetings being held by various spheres of government and the formal recycling industry have failed to identify that the entire waste recycling industry would need to be transformed both racially and socio-politically in order for waste pickers to have a chance at being integrated successfully. The conversations that are being had still focus on registration, training and acquiring resources. Those are worthy conversations to be had, however, there is a political system that underpins their access to growth in this industry and that requires urgent addressing. Waste pickers are not represented well in the top tier spaces of the waste management system, for as long as they are “othered “and seen as needing to be rescued much of the core objectives that they have identified will not be met. Their integration relies heavily on a changed perspective on who they are and understanding that thoroughly. Thus, mobilising and gaining numbers through various organisations is still the method that waste pickers rely on in order to build a stronger waste picker representation and identity that will be able to garner legitimate support and partnerships.

## 7.5. CONCLUSION

The different views shared above about SAWPA and its leaders are revelatory in that they paint the picture of how challenging it is and will continue to be to dismantle and repair the waste management system so that it recognises and meets the needs of waste pickers at all



spheres and in all their struggles. Presently, one is exposed to the internal conflicts that even waste pickers amongst themselves share with their leaders. There are socio-political disconnects present in every one of the ways in which waste pickers are attempting to organise, from the cooperative level, to the forum level and even through SAWPA. The only individuals who are working without conflict are the independent waste pickers, however, even they face the threat of a looming eviction from the landfill site and a lack of access to support and resources due to the fact that they are not registered to any cooperatives. This research has illuminated much of the matters that need addressing but more importantly, that the core issues stem from a lack of common understanding about how the integration process should be structured as well as the challenges of not having an inclusive medium of communication that will allow all the stakeholders involved in this process an opportunity to be heard about their respective opinions on how they can contribute and how they plan to do so. The next chapter presents some conclusions and recommendations based on what this study has revealed about the complexities of integration particularly while looking at it through the lens of a model that aims to integrate waste pickers through cooperatives.

## CHAPTER 8: THE MYRIAD OF INTERPRETATIONS OF WHAT THE INTEGRATION PROCESS IS

### 8.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter outlines the different meanings and interpretations that the various stakeholders who participated in this study have of what integration is and how the process should be ideally implemented. The chapter does so by drawing on the implicit meanings by assessing the way the various stakeholders interact with the waste pickers as well the quotes taken from the interviews that were conducted. It is important to consider practice and how it carries implicit meanings in order to gain a different perspective through the assessment of social interactions and behaviours, which depict implicitly, the subtle conceptions people have about other people, institutions and spaces which they may not explicitly state in their verbal communications. The chapter forms an integral part of the thesis as it illuminates the different interpretations of integration which seem to be fragmented. The fragmented understandings of integration provide some perspective on why it has been a difficult process to reach a common ground of understanding between all the stakeholders involved in seeing this integration process through.

### 8.2. INTEGRATION AS IT IS UNDERSTOOD BY DIFFERENT STAKEHOLDERS

From the data collected, waste pickers have various definitions or rather, outlooks on what integration is depending on their level of exposure to the state, the needs of their cooperatives and their personal needs. Street pickers express having land as a requirement for them to have a cooperative and to be integrated, Waste pickers who are already in cooperatives express that having resources such as business training, electricity and water to run their facilities is a form of integration while landfill site waste pickers stress that having protective clothing and gloves as well as adequate trolleys is a form of integration. Nevertheless, waste pickers are desperate to be acknowledged and recognised for the work they do on more than just a local or municipal level, they want national governments to start prioritising the needs of waste pickers as they feel the work they do greatly assists the waste sector of South Africa. More importantly, waste pickers are starting to identify that industry and major recycling companies need to also start doing their bit to assist waste pickers in this integration process. According to them, it is a process that requires a collaborative effort by everyone in the waste management and formal recycling sector of South Africa. As the integration process requires a multi-stakeholder framework to transform the institutions and practices within this sector that

have failed to recognise waste pickers. Issues surrounding “economic racism”, a term used by an interviewee in the previous section, and lack of transformation have been raised by waste pickers with regards to why integration is not being structured in a way that allows waste pickers to progress from selling to middle-men and not competing with the major recycling companies.

Waste pickers’ biggest grievance is with the municipality as they feel that is the first point of recognition that would allow them a platform to be recognised and assisted by the stakeholders in the waste management system. The quote below depicts some feelings shared by the chairperson of Tshwarahanang, a cooperative in the township of Sasolburg.

*“In specific reference to Sasolburg, I’d say waste picker issues are still being suppressed. Our municipality is still shutting us out, our rights as waste pickers are still being suppressed. I mean in India; the municipality is so supportive of waste pickers as service providers and we are nowhere close to that. When money is made available for waste pickers we never get it, we never know where the funds end up. Our duty is to fight until the government recognises waste pickers and accepts that we are here to stay. When budgets are made and the money comes out, we never get the money that has been allocated to us. The municipality is even aware that we know that we are not getting the money that is rightfully ours”*

(Interview 6-Waste picker-Tshwarahanang (township coop), 15/9/2017).

During an interview with a representative of the Fezile Dabi district municipality, I asked the official why he thinks politicians and the municipality at large need an immense amount of convincing to begin to prioritise matters relating to waste pickers and their integration into more formal waste management services and he said the following:

*“Municipal issues are tough and sensitive, in my personal opinion, we don’t all see things the same and we don’t all prioritise things the same either. When I attend conferences, all I hear when people speak is how municipalities are not participating, but they never think about what leads to those circumstances. Out of all the other elements of environmental management i.e. water and such look and assess why there’s a difference in attention between those facets and waste pickers, that will answer your question. The mere fact that the president has not stood up and addressed crucial matters relating to waste management tells you that we still have a very long way to go. Right now, the economy is a huge topic in our country as well unemployment, those happen to be the priorities. The biggest thing that I feel, if looked at from a different perspective, is that if we took the waste management sector more*

*seriously we would all be playing a major role in rectifying the state of the waste management sector. I see a need and so I will do my best to address it, I even try to educate some of my colleagues when we meet on national platforms about the importance of integrating waste pickers”*

(Interview 8-Municipal Official- Fezile Dabi, 27/9/2017)

I questioned him further and asked for his perspective on what he considers integration to be he gave the following response:

*“Integration, to me, I would say is like a chain interconnected with different links, essentially what we do in our offices, what happens in the home and what waste pickers do is all connected like a chain. Waste pickers are in the middle and we try to strengthen their connection with the other links of this chain. I mean, waste is produced at household level then it goes to the street if it doesn’t go the landfill site then from street and other waste pickers it makes it to middlemen and then gets to the big industries all of this has the municipality tied to it. So, essentially, we are trying to be better at connecting all these facets and the relationship between waste pickers and all the other stakeholders. This is because, people create waste at a household level then waste pickers are trying to see what they can do to educate people about the types of material they need and how they should separate their waste but there is no actual understanding and engagement. So, integration for me is finding the missing links and bringing everyone together, where we can all be on the same page”*

(Interview 8-Municipal Official- Fezile Dabi, 27/9/2017)

The interpretation of what integration is given by the municipal official above is accurate in theory and aligns itself with what the waste pickers express they need. If municipalities understand what the integration process is meant to achieve it is concerning that the implementation is not correlating with what they know they have to do. In an attempt to gain further perspective on this matter I asked the official what the different government departments have been tasked to do in relation to the mandate they have received as stipulated in the NWMS (2011) to assist cooperatives in their development and he gave a revelatory response as follows:

*“in my opinion, there is a very concerning issue of departments not working together, I am saying this because when individuals start cooperatives and start looking for funds from government there must be procedures that are put in place. One cannot just assist someone or a group of people that no one has a background on.*

*Recycling is something that is stated within the national waste management strategy which states that it has to be done to reduce the amount of waste that makes it to landfill sites. So, certain departments such as DTI and Small Businesses units within the provinces were approached about the need to empower cooperatives so they can handle separation at source and recycling services but these tasks were given without specific instructions to make sure that they empower waste pickers. So, these departments are approached by a group of people saying they registered a cooperative and they need funding assistance they just see it as an opportunity to get closer to meeting their annual work targets.”*

(Interview 8-Municipal Official- Fezile Dabi, 27/9/2017)

The above quote is revelatory as it brings interesting internal government politics to the fore regarding how funds that are meant to be utilised to assist and support waste pickers are being mismanaged due to the pressure to meet annual targets, in the various departments mandated with the task of seeing these NWMS objectives through. The departments tasked with facilitating these projects are not informed about how best to do so and are exercising this power blindly without understanding the extent of damage caused to the lives of people who are desperate for this government assistance. The waste pickers have repeatedly stated that they know there are funds available but these funds are not being used to their benefit. An interview conducted with a representative from the environmental justice NGO reveals a similar finding. He expressed that these funds are not being used towards supporting legitimate waste picker cooperatives but are being given to pseudo-cooperatives who have no vested interest in the sector. He mentioned the following:

*“Government also says they can give you funding if you are cooperative. Because the government stipulates that they can’t give individuals rights to enter landfills because an individual may take-over the landfill and all the waste-pickers might end up working for this one individual and they will be selling to him while he makes more money as compared to them. So, the government said that if they form cooperatives, government can assist them by giving them cooperative-incentive schemes and some might even access funding through cooperatives. But I know that cooperatives are known to have high failure rates in South Africa. You know what’s the cause of that? It’s because there was a drive by government to form cooperatives about 10 years back. Unemployed people from townships would go to one another, source their unemployed friends and form cooperatives so that they can access R350 000. But they didn’t have a common purpose like waste-pickers as workers who are already in the system. So that is why the cooperatives were registered, they applied for the money, they get it and distribute it among themselves. So that’s why those cooperatives that were researched by the CSIR were failing, they say it’s a high failure rate. It’s because they were driven by access to funding.”*

(Interview 10- groundWork representative, 23/8/2017)

The quote above affirms the statement made by the municipal official that these funds are being offered to people who do not contribute favourably to the vision and objectives stipulated in the NWMS about expanding on the employment opportunities within South Africa's waste management system. Given that private companies and industries have also been on board in the process of trying to formalise and integrate waste pickers into the waste management services, an interview with a SASOL representative was conducted. SASOL is the largest private industry in Sasolburg, they contribute immensely to the GDP of the town so it is fitting that they would have an opinion on this matter as they have been involved in the integration project through their carbon offsetting initiative. When questioned about what he thinks would improve the conditions for waste pickers in a more formalised way he said the following:

*“It’s difficult to say because there needs to be regulation, especially regarding the pricing of material from the government’s side. Because at the moment there are inconsistencies. If I decide to give them 50c for a plastic then I give them 50c, if I decide to give somebody 75c then I give them 75c. So, I think regulation in terms of pricing will assist a lot because it will standardise what they earn, and it will also ensure that they have a steady flow of income which is predictable. At the moment, it’s unpredictable. They just collect, and it depends on the mercy of the buyer and how much they are willing to pay.*”

(Interview 11- SASOL representative, 26/9/2017)

According to the above quote, unregulated pricing standards are hindering the growth of waste pickers and acts as a barrier to their formalisation as they cannot predict their earnings and the income contribution is thus immeasurable, when questioned further about why he thinks it is important for waste pickers to be organised into cooperatives he shared the following perspective:

*“for us as a company, our policy as far as any assistance is concerned, we do not assist individuals. We assist communities or members of communities coming together. So from that vantage point, we want to spread the benefits and not benefit only one single individual. From the waste-pickers’ point of view I think it is important that they get themselves organised so that they can enjoy the economies of scale. Because basically the more they collect, the more they can sell and the more they can earn. “*

(Interview 11- SASOL representative, 26/9/2017)

It is unsurprising that the responses from a private cooperation exclude any issues related to mobilising or safety as an advantage of organising waste pickers, however they see cooperatives as a suitable strategy to be used by the waste pickers to gain resources as their policy only allows them to give support to groups and not individuals. This raises the issue of where the thousands of waste pickers who still prefer to work independently on the streets, or at the landfill site fit into the integration process. They will eventually have to join cooperatives if they want to be integrated and have access to the same opportunities and resources. When questioned about SASOL's role in the integration process and what they are tasked to do he explained the following:

*“Initially, what they tried to do was to organise themselves into cooperatives, which they did. There are about 8 cooperatives. Then after that the next stage was for us to provide them with sites where they could put together their collectibles. 1 cooperative, 1 site. There are 2 that are merged in phase 5 Iraq but that's just because they are in close proximity. They identify the sites and municipality grants the rights to land use. Then what we do is provide them with fencing, paving, partitioning for storage of different types of material and we also give them scales.*

(Interview 11- SASOL representative, 26/9/2017)

The type of support given by SASOL to the waste pickers, as described in the quote above, is more infrastructural than it is assisting the waste pickers with their progression in the market which the waste pickers have described as their main concern. When I questioned the SASOL representative about this he explained that they have also provided the waste pickers with training. The waste pickers, at the forum meeting held on x date agreed that Sasol is giving them training, but they have to pay for their own transportation to go to the training and they merely give them notes to study and expect them to come back with questions. The SASOL representative confirmed this by stating the following

*“What we have done is that through our Sasol Foundation, we invited some guy to try and teach them first of all how to run cooperatives. The idea is that they study the material (in English), they come back to us. We give them some material. The expectation was that they were going to study that material and then if they needed more explanation with regards to running the cooperatives then we would take them through another session and we would give them business skills and so forth”*

(Interview 11- SASOL representative, 26/9/2017)

The waste pickers do not deny that they have received some training, however, they complain that the training is not sufficient and they still do not have the necessary skills to run the cooperative. They lack book keeping skills and managerial skills which a crucial to their growth, above that they have the sites sorted out but the electricity and required to work at maximum productivity is not provided. They feel that they are given just enough support to get by but not to progress beyond that and it is something that proves to be incredibly frustrating for them in their efforts to be recognised. The quote below was an opinion shared by one of the women from the Vaal Park Recycling Centre in her frustration regarding cooperatives.

*It's not okay, it's not good. They don't do things like marketing. They don't market us properly. Our finances aren't okay and there is no one is training us. I just have to do it from what I know. No one is helping us. Like they can just bring people who train us and show us what to do. Now we don't have things like tax clearance-we haven't registered. Cooperatives are annoying because of such things*

(Interview 9- Waste picker- Vaal Park Recycling Centre, 22/8/2017)

The waste picker in the above quote spoke of these problems with a lot of pain and anger, one can see that it is an-going battle that they are exhausted from. However, they know that the reality is that this recycling centre is their livelihood and that if they do not strive to improve their circumstances there then they will have no income to support their families. She expressed that she would rather face these hardships here because going back to the landfill site also as its own challenges that she as a woman cannot live with. The challenges she speaks of faced by women on the landfill site is a lack of safety amongst men who are



always trying to harass them; no decent toilets or bathrooms for them to bathe or take care of themselves when they are menstruating and finally, a lack of hygiene and safe working conditions for pregnant women who often end up giving birth in the landfill site because that is where they live. These are the realities of life when working at the landfill site as a woman that men do not even consider and although working at the Vaal Park Recycling Centre has its challenges, she would much rather struggle there than struggle at the landfill site. In addition, the municipality plans to close that landfill site down as explained in the Metsimaholo IDP (2016/2017) and so all the waste pickers who live there and make their livelihoods from the landfill site will have to be evacuated which poses a threat to their livelihoods as well.

Given the above interpretations of what integration represents to the various stakeholders, one wonders what would be the outcome if waste pickers had an individual, who was once a waste picker that understands women and the challenges they face in the waste picking space, in a sphere of government or in the governing body of the formal recycling industry. Presently, their needs for progression are not met out of a lack of understanding of their core objectives. Waste pickers are not seen as potential partners in the waste management industry of South Africa, they are seen as far more as charities. Assisting them is done through CSI initiatives from private firms or the government hastily trying to reach its annual targets for employment creation in the “green economy” by 2050. I attribute that knowledge gap and misinterpretation of the waste picker identity to the lack of representation and transformation in spaces of “legitimate power” such as the state and the formal recycling industry. Foucault’s views on legitimate power are that it is a social construct that is spatially enacted and reproduced. Perhaps how waste pickers have been stigmatised and perceived by the general public exists in the nexus of powerlessness, criminalisation, blackness and a lack of recognition for the job they do as a business model. Changing that narrative would require a complete dismantling of people’s ideas of what a waste picker identity is, to see them past their poverty and the work they do and instead view them as partners and agents of change who have the capacity to do more if only they were given that opportunity, not through a “white saviour complex” where the assistance they need is dictated to them and is not done through a collaboration with them that assists them in having a legitimate seat at the table where they are able to have conversations and know that what they are saying is being internalised and prioritised because the language they speak is being understood. A “black sense of place” in the waste recycling industry still seems unattainable and by virtue of that and other factors, establishing a view of waste pickers that will empower their path instead of disempower it, still seems like a distant utopia.

### 8.3. CONCLUSION

This chapter has revealed the complicated nuances of the integration process thus far. It seems that all the stakeholders involved in this process may be wanting to assist, however, their understanding and implementation of the integration process is not being met with great results from the waste pickers' point of view as they continue to feel unsupported and disregarded. I again stress the importance of a clear communication network that engages all the stakeholders that are involved and prioritises the needs of the waste pickers and not that of the respective stakeholders primarily. Waste pickers have stressed that all they want is to be included in discussions so that they can redirect the integration initiatives towards a progressive path and not what has been taking place which does not consider their progress as they view it in the industry.

## CHAPTER 9: CONCLUSIONS AND RECCOMENDATIONS

The study aimed to illuminate the underlying socio-political complexities surrounding the integration of waste pickers by assessing the cooperative model and the various ways it has been understood to function as a framework for waste picker organisation. The first chapter presented an introduction to the study by outlining the problems associated with the current status of academic work which neglects to provide an in depth analysis on the challenges faced by waste picker cooperatives when they are being integrated into the waste management system, the chapter also identified the gap this study aims to fill in respect to the problem raised about insufficient literature on qualitative analyses of the challenges face by waste pickers in their formation of cooperatives. The same chapter also presented the overall argument that was developed in the study. Furthermore, the chapter provided some background and foundational knowledge regarding the waste management system in a global context and how that was used to model an integration frame work in South Africa.

The second chapter presented the literature review in which the broader academic debates and conversations related to the theoretical underpinnings of the study were presented. The debates included conversations around the informal economy, informal workers organising, perspectives on black geographies and power relations. What the literature review revealed is a knowledge gap in the way informal workers are organised in respect to the historical and political systems of the country and how they might impact on their experiences of being integrated into more formal systems. The study filled this gap by showing that racial dynamics and the lack of a decolonised waste management system in South Africa has caused waste pickers to feel as though their integration, as it currently stands, is futile if the dominant political systems in the broader industry remain unchallenged and lack racial and socio-economic transformation.

The third chapter presented the conceptual framework. In this chapter I aimed to detail the school of thought that this study is to be understood through. This is vital because there are many theoretical understandings to how one can view integration so outlining the conceptual framework provided some necessary perspectives on the thinkers I engaged with to better understand the concepts that this study grapples with. In this chapter I engaged with the theories of power from a Foucauldian perspective, the relationship between Critical Race Theory and geographies of race so as to include a spatial element to my understanding of the racial dynamics that this study engaged with. Lastly, the concept of organising through a

feminist lens were presented as women's movements have created an ideal frame work for the organisation of marginalised and minority groups around the world.

The fourth chapter presented the methodology in which I discussed the methods of data collection, the methodological approach and data analysis that were used in the study. This assisted in providing information about how the study was conducted so as to give some necessary insight on the intents of the study prior to the experiences of fieldwork as well as to provide some understanding for the results attained.

The following chapters presented the results in the form of quotes from the interviews and simultaneously discussed them to synthesise the data and the related analysis thereof.

Fundamentally, the study has looked into the current integration model as it has been applied across South Africa by assessing the different ways in which cooperatives have been formed. The study has alluded to two distinct ways of understanding cooperative formation in South Africa. The first and more popular notion of cooperative formation has been through an obligation by the departments in government who have been mandated to fund and support cooperatives in the waste and recycling industry as it has been stated in the National Waste Management Strategy (NWMS) of 2011. Alongside this, is a commitment by private industries to offer their support and resources only to waste pickers who have registered to a cooperative. This understanding of waste picker cooperative formation is driven by meeting annual targets for both the state and the private industries underlying their social corporate responsibility indexes. Furthermore, it is more beneficial for municipalities to support this model of integrating waste pickers as it allows them to facilitate their participation in providing basic waste management services to their respective communities without having to remunerate them or provide them with contracts stipulating basic wages and benefits for the services they provide.

The second perspective of understanding the formation of cooperatives in South Africa has been through the formation of Ikageng- Ditamating and pilot project of the Vaal Park Recycling Centre. This cooperative model applied here consists of the waste pickers themselves at the forefront of their own integration into the waste management and recycling system in South Africa. They managed to organise themselves and find assistance from

organisations such as groundWork who were then able to facilitate partnerships with private industry and the state to garner more resources and funding for its growth. In this case, the waste pickers dictate much of the progression of their cooperative in terms of its daily functioning, where they choose to locate their sorting facilities as well as who they choose to get into partnerships with.

What the study reveals is that there are challenges in both perspectives, the first model of waste picker integration is a top-down approach which offers cooperative incentive schemes for any group of individuals who wish to participate in the waste management and recycling sector, I believe it does not have the rights of waste pickers as a priority, the model is structured as a form of employment creation by injecting funds and resources into a sector to achieve the targets dictated by legislature. This is pitched as a means to an end, the end being to achieve the goal of creating 5 million new jobs by 2020 as promulgated in the New Growth Path (Metsimaholo IDP, 2016/2017). The second model of waste picker integration is a bottom-up approach but it is being met with resistance because waste pickers are not only organising to receive funds from the state and private industries but they are contesting a hegemonic system that has marginalised them and as a result their organisation into cooperatives is rooted in the intent to reach their political goals.

In conclusion, the study provides a counter-perspective on the views of the cooperative model as it has been understood in South Africa by showing that waste picker cooperatives can indeed succeed if they are met with like-mindedness and stakeholders who have the intention to help them in their acquisition of political recognition as well as their economic goals. The other side of the coin is that waste picker cooperatives will continue to fail as reported by the CSIR (2016) if the intention is to respond to the growing demand of support for cooperatives by using cooperative incentive schemes to create employment opportunities without understanding the underlying contestations and political intent behind the reasons the cooperative model was adopted for waste picker integration in countries like Colombia, Brazil and India.

I recommend that future studies ought to assess the historical and socio-political space of any new government-led economic intervention prior to assuming that the intervention is failing because it is not meeting the expected economic goals. There are broader socio-political complexities that underpin why the state's attempt at creating mass employment

opportunities will result in an unfavourable result. The main reason being that these social relations are interconnected and mutually constitutive, one cannot focus on one aspect and neglect the rest and hope for the system to be a success.

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Interview List of Interviews Conducted and Transcribed by Zandile Ntuli

Interview number	Date	Location	Position	Organisation
1.	8/8/2017	Vaal Park	Chairperson	Vaal Park Recycling Centre
2.	12/9/2017	Vaal Park	Chairperson	SAWPA
3.	13/9/2017	Vaal Park	Chairperson	SAWPA
4.	8/9/2017	Vaal Park	Coop member	Vaal Park Recycling Centre
5.	15/9/2017	Sasolburg Township area	Chairperson	Tshwarahanang Township Coop
6.	7/8/2017	Vaal Park	Chairperson	Vaal Park Recycling Centre
7.	27/9/2017	Fezile Dabi	Waste Officer	Fezile Dabi District
8.	22/8/2017	Vaal Park	Secretary/Treasury	Vaal Park Recycling Centre
9.	23/8/2017	Vaal Park	Official	Ground Work
10.	26/9/2017	Sasol Offices	Official	SASOL