Social life of waste

A study of waste and the various stages of its transformation within the context of Buenos Aires

Kine Stenersen

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Centre for Development and the Environment

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I lived in Buenos Aires, Argentina, for a year while finishing my Bachelor's degree in 2007/2008. During my stay I grew more and more interested in the phenomenon of garbage pickers in the streets, or the *cartoneros* as they are called in Spanish. I started to wonder about the whole process of recycling; how was it organised, what were the contributing factors that made the inhabitants of Buenos Aires separate their waste, why choose a life as a *cartonero*? Was it environmental concern, or something else? So I decided to return to Buenos Aires for my fieldwork and explore these questions more thoroughly.

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Acknowledgements

Argentina   Buenos Aires   Buenos Aires City   Palermo

Figure 1: Map of Buenos Aires

1. Introduction

The empirical focus of this thesis is on waste and the various stages of its transformation within the context of Buenos Aires. Not many substances are so present in our every day lives, yet so invisible and forgotten. Garbage is rarely considered, mainly because it is something that we want to remain out of sight and out of mind (Nagle 2010). While numerous scientists study consumption, very few study waste. This is somewhat of a paradox since waste is a logical corollary of consumption: all that is consumed eventually turns into waste. To understand consumption one needs to understand waste management. And if one wants to understand the operation of waste management systems, or why and how recycling systems work or fail, there are many factors, which need to be considered. I will demonstrate that it is not merely enough to examine the policies, or the incentives to recycle, or campaigns to create recycling awareness. Rather one should explore the actually existing waste systems and their function. It is necessary to examine the motivations, practices and strategies of a complex range of actors involved in waste management. Throughout the thesis I thus follow the social life of waste through its different stages, from its place of origin to its place of destruction or recycling. By focusing on the social life of waste the thesis examines the roles and experiences of different sets of actors who are involved in the production and processing of waste. Various empirical cases, such as the personal stories of some of the actors involved, seek to describe and examine the social life of waste. Hence, it explores the practices, relations and obstacles of the *cartoneros*[1] the middle class residents, NGO´s[2] and government, in their efforts to achieve a better, cleaner and safer environment.

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[1] The Spanish word for Garbage collectors, its usage will be further discussed when explaining the different types of garbage collectors.

[2] Non Governmental Organisation

Even though Argentina walks and talks like a European country, its waste industry is distinctly third world. In the world's biggest cities, such as Cairo, Calcutta or Buenos Aires, garbage pickers collect trash from doorsteps and streets, and bring it to local sorting centres that in turn sell it to industrial middlemen. In Buenos Aires, five thousand tons of waste is buried in the outskirts of the city every day (A.R.S, [3]November 2010), and several tens of thousands [4] *cartoneros* live off of sorting and collecting garbage in the streets, or directly from households (Rodriguez, 2010). Argentina is a country that seems to encounter a crisis every ten years. It experiences continual political instability and corruption, and the gap between the rich and poor, is ever growing. In societies with great social differences, such as Argentina, it is the rich that generate most of the waste, while the poor gather and make livelihoods out of whatever the rich are disposing of.

The Argentinean economical crisis of 1999 - 2002, led to an extremely high unemployment rate, and to a large increase in the number of *cartoneros*. Since then, the *cartoneros* have become a permanent consequence of the crisis, when the peso devalued by seventy per cent (Paiva, 2008). The *cartoneros* are perceived as a marginalised group and this thesis will explore many of their challenges and difficulties. In the Argentinean capital there is modest interaction between the *cartoneros* and the municipal government and there is little governmental incentive to recycle. I will argue that the result is less efficient waste management systems and that it makes recycling nearly non-existent in comparison to European countries. In spite of this, the work of the *cartoneros* has had dramatic effect on the environment by reducing the amount of solid waste going into landfills by 25 per cent (Baillie et al., 2010). Consequently, it is a paradox that it is the poor and unemployed, but self organised *cartoneros* who are doing the city's dirty work. Still, they are amongst the few who are currently

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[3] Asociacíon para el Estudio de los Residuos Sólidos, Member of the internation ISWA (International Solid Waste Assocation.

[4] Numbers vary.

preventing the whole amount of waste from going to the landfill. And these people might only earn a few pesos a day, if they are lucky.

Research Questions

By focusing on the social life of waste the thesis examines the roles and experiences of different sets of actors who are involved in the production and processing of waste. Through several empirical cases this thesis gives an insight into the social worlds of waste and the every day life of garbage as livelihood.

The overall question of this thesis is accordingly:

> *In their efforts to achieve a better, cleaner and safer environment, how is the social life of waste/waste management in Buenos Aires organised, practised and experienced amongst the cartoneros, the middle class residents, NGO´s and the government?*

The four questions below will help answer the main research question by looking at some more concrete aspects related to the waste industry. The different questions investigate all social levels and all the actors involved in the production and processing of waste.

Hence, to further examine this topic some more concrete research questions are raised:

1. *What is the social life of waste- and how is the waste management systems organised?*

2. *How is life as a cartonero experienced, and why do people choose a life within the garbage economy?*

3. *Why do the upper – and middle class residents choose to recycle?*

4. *What are the local barriers to recycling in Buenos Aires?*

The first research question is raised in chapter three and describes the organisation and emergence of a garbage economy. It provides insight into the structuring and organisation of waste management in Buenos Aires and the value of waste. The second question is explored in chapter four and analyses *cartoneros* as contested category and how a life as a *cartonero* is experienced. *Cartoneros* make a decent living in the (semi)informal garbage economy in a context of economic recession, and some of them even do it with pride. Yet their association with garbage means that they are perceived as a polluted matter out of place, and *cartoneros* are therefore often stigmatised by other residents of the Argentinean capital. In spite of this, several people choose a life in garbage economy. The paradox is that they do not do this out of an environmental concern, but because of economical difficulties and/or the lack of better possibilities. Occasionally, however, they are also met with signs of empathy and even solidarity. Among the middle class in particular, empathy towards the poor and a desire to be seen as 'doing good' creates a motivation to recycle, as middle class residents willingly let 'their' waste become the *cartoneros'* livelihood.

These motivations are explored in chapter five and the third question and states that there exists no single explanation as to what motivates people to recycle. Through empirical data this thesis demonstrates that it is not an environmental consciousness, but various other factors, such as religious and political values, which contribute to developing a recycling system in the neighbourhoods. Lastly, chapter six examine the final research question, and adopts a more macro-structural perspective on waste management, and analyses the links and conflicts between the *cartoneros* and the local state and administration. As a consequence of weak implementation of environmental legislation and recycling laws, corruption and general state indifference towards the plight of the *cartoneros,* the latter are often deeply distrustful of the local state. While many *cartoneros* therefore prefer to get by without the state, poor administrative performance and a generalised distrust between the recyclers and the state create a number of barriers to a better and more efficient system of waste management in Buenos Aires. The cooperatives located in Buenos Aires want to implement a formal recycling system run by the cooperatives themselves, but in collaboration with the state. Even so, the government will not introduce a more formalised system with salaries and labour rights for the *cartoneros*, or a more formalised structure for the handling of garbage in the city.

Why study the social life of waste?

"Thousands of scientists study consumption, but almost no one is studying garbage. That is strange, since garbage is a logical implication of consumerism, everything which is consumed turns in to garbage sooner or later, if it does not end up at a museum". (Freely translated from Thomas Hylland Eriksen 2011).

So far research has tended to focus on merely one stage of the social life of waste, for example the consumers. However, I argue the necessity to have a

broad focus that includes all social levels and all the actors involved in the production and processing of waste. We need to understand the practices and perceptions of both lower and of higher income groups and of other implicated institutions. Only in this way can one arrive at a complex understanding of the many motivations at play, the structural and cultural conditions that facilitate or hinder efficient waste management, as well as the politics of waste that contribute to its development.

This thesis is of general interest, because there is a huge interest in consumption in the society in which we live in, but there are only a few that write about garbage. This is somewhat peculiar, considering the amount of space it takes up in our everyday lives and the fact that all of our consumer goods end up as waste sooner or later. At the same time, we witness an increased consumer appetite, where most societies are greatly influenced by global expansion of commodities and consumerism, and the goal is ever continuing progress Andersen & Hønneland, 2008). In order to increase profit, new products are intentionally manufactured to go to pieces, and we observe how products go out of fashion after only as short amount of time in the stores. According to Bauman the new "normal" of today is to consume and things, people, societies etc. are all expected to develop, or to grow in new and better directions (Baumann, 2005). We all want the latest, the newest and the best. A "happy life" is defined by catching as many opportunities as possible, hopefully the ones most talked about and the ones that are most desirable, and catching them no later than others and preferably before most (ibid.). This is what is considered as normal, and everything deviant of this is understood as abnormal.

This consumer society evidently influences the environment, since garbage is a logical corollary of consumption and since garbage is a big part of environmental obstacles. Everything that is consumed will eventually turn into to garbage. As soon as we take an object out of its package it starts its journey towards becoming garbage. Garbage has great consequences for the world's climate. For example 15 per cent of the methane gas that goes in to the atmosphere, which

helps destroy the ozone layer, comes from different land fillings from all over the world. This and the fact that on an international level, it seems like the environmental consciousness is decreasing, makes the subject of garbage very interesting. This anthropocentric view, where human needs surpass nature, is a major influence on the environment today, since all of which we consume end up as waste (Witoszek and Brennan, 1999). The additional problem is, as argued by Bell, that what defines society today is not needs, but wants (Fischer et al., 1999), something, which only generates even more waste. In accordance with Baumann, he argues that we consume a lot more than what we need, and that what is best for the environment is less important than our greed (ibid.).

Amongst the very few that actually study garbage we find the Norwegian social anthropologist, Thomas Hylland Eriksen. He recently published a book, called "Waste – rubbish in a world of repercussions" (2011) presenting the framework for the analysis of the implication of consumerism, namely waste. In addition, the analytical insights offered in Robyn Nagle (2010), Helle Bundgaard (2003) and Mary Douglas (1995) have been other sources of analytical inspiration insofar that they to varying degrees address waste challenges and its implications. Yet other theoretical and analytical approaches are incorporated, but these will only be introduced insofar as they have a bearing on empirical analysis. O´Brian states that one can understand waste as a dynamic that drives social change. Whether to burn it, bury it, sell it, recycle or reuse it, reduce it, minimise or sort it or dump it: these issues are central to the conduct of individuals and organisations, and they say something about that particular society (Thompson, 1999). By studying waste and the different actors involved one can reveal social activity and other hidden structures.

It is of interest to follow the social life of waste in Buenos Aires, since in order to fully understand the operation of waste management systems, or why and how recycling systems work or fail, one need to explore the existing waste systems and their function. The social life of waste in Buenos Aires will illustrate, according to my opinion, a pattern of a more general interest, since its

organisation of waste and the roles of the different actors of Buenos Aires´ social waste world can said to be characteristic of several waste worlds in the South.

2. Methodological Approach and Field Introduction

This thesis is based on interdisciplinary, and multi sited ethnography (Marcus, 1995). The first part of this chapter will give a short introduction and clarification to some of the main concepts and definitions used throughout this thesis. Second, it will give a short presentation of the field and the fieldwork, and give an account for what kinds of methods I thought to be the most suitable in regards to my thesis, and what kinds of challenges I met and experienced along the way.

Concept clarification

In this section, I will try to explain some of the definitions of the different concepts used in this thesis.

Waste

Waste is generally understood as unwanted or useless material (Nagle, 2010). The definition in itself is a constructive starting point, but this thesis will demonstrate that it is an insufficient definition. The border between waste and a useful object is difficult to draw. Waste does, in accordance to place and situation, have value to certain people. One object could be discredited and unwanted by one person, but wanted and meaningful to another. Objects can over time turn into something of value, and become antiquities. And waste can mean stable incomes for yet another group of people; there are millions of people around the world who make a living out of waste.

Since there are so many different definitions of waste, I will first list three different definitions. Subsequently on the basis of the three, I will suggest a more

suitable definition for this thesis in order to better understand what it is I am referring to when talking of waste/garbage. The United Nations development program (UNEP), defines waste accordingly:

"Wastes are materials that are not prime products (that is products produced for the market) for which the generator has no further use in terms of his/her own purposes of production, transformation or consumption, and of which he/she wants to dispose. Wastes may be generated during the extraction of raw materials, the processing of raw materials into intermediate and final products, the consumption of final products, and other human activities. Residuals recycled or reused at the place of generation are excluded" [5]

The European Union (EU) defines waste as:

"An object the holder discards, intends to discard or is required to discard. Once a substance or object has become waste, it will remain waste until it has been fully recovered and no longer poses a potential threat to the environment or to human health" [6]

Finally, Thomas Hylland Eriksen defines waste as:

"Waste – garbage, rubbish, leftovers – is the remains, the intruder, the unintentionally side effect, the redundant and unwanted". (Hylland Eriksen, 2011: 3)

All of the definitions above define waste as something, which is of no longer use. The first definition emphasises the creation and process of waste, while the second one highlights the time span of garbage. The thesis will not differentiate

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[5] Glossary of Environment Statistics

[6] European Directive (WFD) 2006/12/EC

between waste and garbage and will make use of the term interchangeably. On the basis of the already mentioned conditions and research questions, and because of the relevance in all three definitions, I choose to define waste in the following way:

"Waste is material for which the generator has no further use in terms of his/her own purposes of production, transformation or consumption, and for which he/she wants to dispose. Once a material or object has become waste, it will remain waste until it has been fully recovered and/or once again returned to something of use, and no longer poses a potential threat to the environment or to human health"

Garbage is, as mentioned above, something we prefer to keep out of mind and out of sight. All cultures will dissociate themselves from waste and in this sense; they make a distinction between what is seen as pure and what is seen as impure. Mary Douglas brings this concept to life in her book "Purity and Danger", where she emphasises the fact that garbage does not become garbage before someone sees it as "matter out of place" (Douglas, 1995).

"(…) Dirt as matter out of place (...) It implies two conditions: a set of ordered relations and a contravention of that order. Dirt is the by-product of a systematic ordering and classification of matter, in so far as ordering involves rejecting inappropriate elements (…) In short, our pollution behaviour is the reaction which condemns any object or idea likely to confuse or contradict cherished classifications". (Douglas, 1995: 36).

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The structures and classifications in a society, as she mentions in the quotation above, decide if an object is seen as a "matter out of place". All societies, even those who barely discard anything, have strictly composed methods as to how to handle human and material waste. In modern societies we classify everything around us according to categories, and one of these categories is order. . "*Everything that does not fit in to this classification is seen as dangerous and needs to be controlled*" (Hylland Eriksen, 2011: 10). Shoes are not dirty in themselves, but it is dirty to place them on the dining table; toenails are not dirty on the foot, but it is disgusting when one finds them on the couch.

Cartoneros

In many major cities throughout the world, such as Mexico City, Cairo, Calcutta, Bangkok and Rio de Janeiro, there are people who scavenge materials from waste as their sole source of income. In Buenos Aires, these informal workers are known as *cartoneros*, or cardboard pickers, individuals who collect recyclables from the streets in order to process or sell them. In literature regarding waste collection numerous terms are used, including scavenger (Silver, 2009) and waste picker (Bundgaard, 2003). *Cartoneros* is the name most frequently used when talking about both independent and cooperative workers in Buenos Aires, and that is why I choose to use this definition. More elaborated definitions follow below. Even though I am aware that some stigmatisation is attached to this term. The name derives from the material that was most commonly collected in the past, cardboard or carton.

The *cartoneros* collect recyclables, such as plastic, glass, metals, cardboard and paper. The materials are collected from households, enterprises, or from bags left on the street, before they are sorted either directly in the streets or at different sorting stations. Afterwards it is sold on to middlemen or agents, who in turn sell it to processors of recycled feedstocks. However, some more organised

cooperatives sell directly to industry (Baillie et al., 2010). Garbage collectors in the Argentinean context do not constitute a homogenous category or population. During my fieldwork I identified four different 'types' of collectors, distinguished by their degree of organisation and closeness to the institutions of the state. As demonstrated in Figure 1, these are:

- *Garbage collector:* a collector who is employed by the state, and who brings the garbage directly to the land filling.
- *Garbage recycler:* a collector who is member of a cooperative, which either brings the garbage to wholesale traders or sorting stations. A garbage recycler may also work at one of the sorting stations.
- *Scavenger:* an independent collector who is neither employed by the state nor a member of a cooperative. A scavenger typically goes through the contents of the plastic bags left on the streets and sells the "valuable parts" to wholesale traders or to sorting stations in or around the city.
- *Cartonero:* a collector who combines features of both the garbage recycler and the scavenger, namely both a cooperative member and an independent collector.
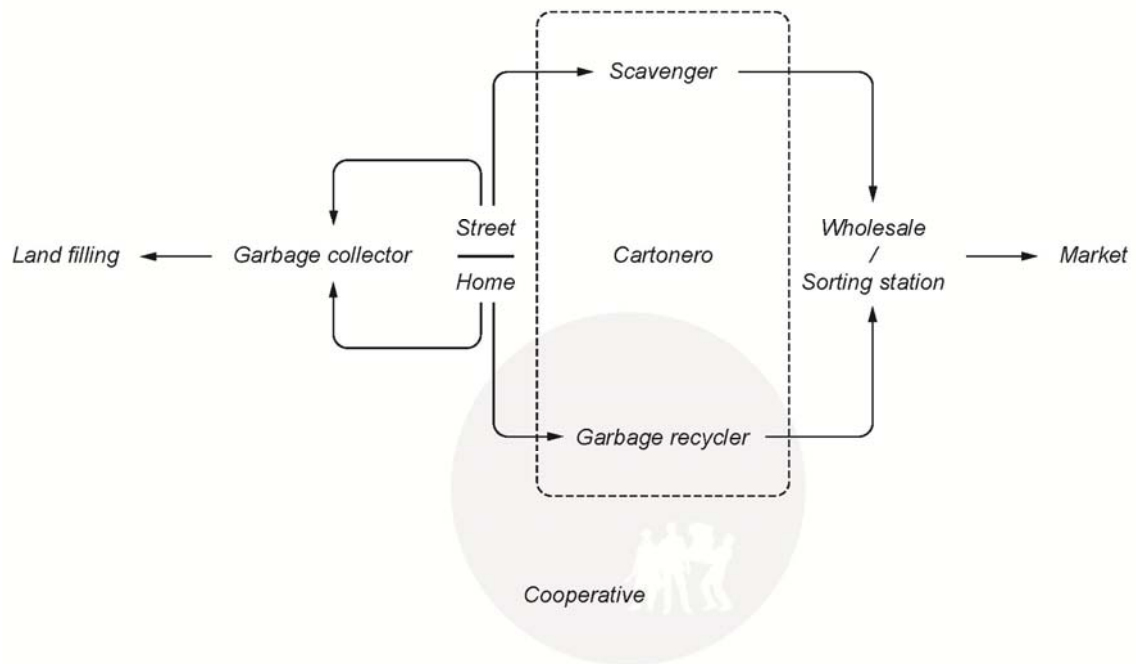
Figure 2. The figure illustrates the four different types of garbage collectors and the journey of waste, form when in hands of the collector to its final destination. As illustrated the final destination for waste depends on the collector handling it.

Cartoneros are responsible for recovering 90% of what gets recycled in Buenos Aires, making them far more effective than official programs, which recover only 1-2 per cent (Baillie et al., 2010). The residents of Buenos Aires produce 4500 tons of waste daily (Rodriguez, 2010); the *cartoneros* should have plenty of work to do, but this is not the case. The lack of official policies and the number of different actors involved who make good money in the industry makes it difficult for the *cartoneros* to get formally involved. This thesis will explore this further in chapter 5.

Cooperatives

The informal recycling industry boomed at the same time as another grassroots movement in Argentina: the development of cooperatives as a means of rebuilding the vast unemployment market left by the neoliberal government's policies during the 90's. The International Co-operative Alliance defines a cooperative as "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". According to the International Co-operative Alliance, and ideally cooperatives are based on the values of self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, equity and solidarity, and they are business enterprises where all three interests; ownership, control and beneficiary, are vested in the hands of the user (International Co-operative Alliance, 2007). According to Defourny and Develtere (1999), cooperative movements arise out of necessity. One of my female informants, a co-founder of one of the cooperatives, explained that this necessity sprung out of the neoliberal policies of Menem and its decreasing institutional support after the economic crisis of 2001 (Powell and Steinberg, 2006).

I met with five different cooperatives that guided me through the cooperative world in Buenos Aires, but the participant observation was mainly conducted in the El Ceibo cooperative.

The field and the fieldwork

Data collection was done from September to November 2010, in Buenos Aires, the capital and largest city of Argentina, with a population of around 13 million. It is estimated that 4 million people live under the poverty line (need more info). Since my last visit to the city, it seems as though the gap between poor and rich

has grown even bigger. This, and the economic crisis in 2001, has led to the fact that waste has become a way of making a living and big business.

 To study the complex society of Buenos Aires in search of possible and relevant answers to how waste is organised, practised and experienced demands different methodological approaches that can demonstrate the issue from different angles. That is why early on in the project I decided to study the recycling process using a multi-sited approach, where I would look at the recycling industry from different levels, through the eyes of different related actors in society and by following garbage from the beginning to the end of its life circle. To get the best possible overview of the situation before I left and while I was there, it became evidently important to follow up on public discourses by participating in organisational life and by keeping myself updated on relevant newspaper articles and programs in the media.

I have therefore approached the issue of theory with certain eclecticism insofar as I draw on a wide body of analytical work from the disciplines of anthropology, social geography, sociology and political science. Hence I have attempted to combine various dimensions of different analytical approaches, which can serve as a purpose of illustrating waste management from a qualitative rather than quantitative perspective. Therefore I focus on an ethnographic approach and will accordingly demonstrate the role of the lower class, in this case the *cartoneros,* the role of the upper- and middle class, and finally the state and other relevant institutions, and how their practices is relevant when considering better recycling systems.

The starting point of this fieldwork was the different cooperatives, or *"las Coopearativas"* as they are called in Spanish, which originated from a *cartoneros*' wish for a stable income. I participated in one cooperative, El Ceibo, for five weeks where I joined them in their daily activities. Together with them I was able to follow garbage from the point where it was collected at neighbours' doorsteps, to its endpoint at the recycling station, or at a land filling. This cooperative is localized in Palermo, one of the more fashionable neighbourhoods in Buenos Aires. I was surprised on my first day: it was nothing like what I had imagined. I thought that I would help out with administration, but I soon realized that that was not possible since they had no office supplies and everything was done on a much more basic scale then first expected. So for five weeks I participated in their daily routine. This meant that I drank maté (traditional Argentinean tea) with them in the morning and followed one girl particularly on her route collecting and separating garbage. This gave me a new insight to her world, and over time it seemed like we became friends. But sometimes I felt it could be difficult asking her certain types of questions since we belonged to such different parts of society.

Over time I built myself a network that gave me access to some of the employers' lives, and through my already established network, and several phone calls, I got in contact with other relevant informants. Since I was looking for an understanding of the perceptions and experiences of the recycling process, or waste management and thus discover potential limitations to environmental consideration, I decided it was important to talk to people involved in different aspects of the garbage industry, - NGO´s, garbage companies, educational institutions, cooperatives, researchers, governmental employees and garbage pickers. Among the neighbours that I interviewed, I also tried to consider age and class. I participated in my informants' work life, such as collecting and separating garbage, meetings and demonstrations, but I was also involved in more informal

Garbage disposal bags outside of the cooperative, El Ceibo.

and social settings, for instance, several visits to different cafes, I was invited in to their homes, and to different barbecues and dinners.

El Ceibo

It is early in the morning in the neighbourhood of Palermo. Cars are running by and people are hurrying off to work without noticing the shabby door connected to an old, tired building that houses the cooperative, El Ceibo. Inside sits an elderly woman and several young men, drinking maté and smoking, waiting for the day's work to begin. The work is hard and the pay even worse, she sighs.

El Ceibo is one cooperative located in Buenos Aires, and was founded by seven women in 1989. When El Ceibo was founded in the late 1980s, the *cartoneros* still struggled with obtaining necessary equipment, such as protective gloves, or trucks to transport the recyclable materials. Additionally, the women wanted a formalisation of their scavenging activity and an improved everyday life, with higher incomes, so the seven women started a campaign, going from house to house, knocking on people's doors, in search of the neighbours' support. The cooperative aims towards its goal of more recycling trough changing people's attitudes. Therefore they started to explain to the neighbours of Palermo how to separate garbage and how much this would help their survival. The idea was that the neighbours helped by separating plastic, paper and cardboard from the rest of their waste, and that the *cartoneros* from El Ceibo would come around to each house and collect the garbage, before sending it off by truck for more separation. At the recycling station the garbage is separated into bundles of plastic, paper and cardboard, before being sold off to different enterprises without any middlemen. The average price of a kilo off cardboard is 0,15 American cents (0.85 kr.), but this varies according to season. Today neighbours from over 100 different blocks support El Ceibo and their work.

Choice of method

Because of the ethnographic character of the thesis I use a qualitative approach in order to acquire knowledge about how individuals experience and interpret the recycling industry. I chose to conduct qualitative research because it is an interpretive analysis strategy that allows the researcher to attain insights into social patterns and to develop concepts from the empirical data, and because qualitative research has the ultimate purpose of understanding the deep meaning behind a particular phenomenon (Scheyvens and Storey, 2009).

Additionally, to be able to show all the different angles and the transformational stages of waste in relation to this interdisciplinary research, I chose to use an approach by George E. Marcus. He suggests a mode of constructing the multi-sited space of research involves tracing the circulation through different contexts of a material object of study. In this way I decided to follow garbage through its different stages, from its place of origin to its place of destruction or reuse. (Marcus, 1995).

In the analytical part of this thesis I will also make use of a comparative methodological approach (Kvale & Benjaminsen, 2009). By comparing the different interpretations and observations of my informants, I will be able to find similarities and differences, which will contribute to my findings and bring out the complexity of the issue. I wanted to understand the operation of waste management systems, and why and how recycling systems work or fail and explore the different actors involved and the ways in which they are interconnected through waste. To be able to do this it became evident that the research questions asked in this thesis demanded interviews and participant observation with a wide range of different social actors from different levels in society.

Two different approaches: participant observation and interviews

During my fieldwork I used the methodological tools of participant observation and interviews. With participant observation I believe I achieved knowledge about the social network that I studied through being present and seeing and hearing how people interact. To be a part of that interaction gave me useful insight into my informants' world. To be with my informants over a longer period of time was a goal of mine because of the importance of gathering data based on observations of what people actually do, and not only through interviews where they say what they do. I collected, organised and distributed garbage with El Ceibo for five weeks, and in this sense participated and took part in their lives on a daily basis to be perceived as an equal partner. This proved to be challenging, since it was clear that we originated from different classes in society and that I only was visiting for a short period of time. I kept a journal throughout my fieldwork and I wrote down my observations as soon as I was alone.

With the interviews, I got broader insight into my informant's perceptions and opinions and the way people construct their reality. As my sample involved a broad range of informants belonging to very different parts of the recycling process, such as employees at the city council administrative office, different NGO´s, various private waste companies, upper – middle class residents and several *cartoneros,* I used open-ended interviews that I prepared and modified according to whom I was talking to. In preparation for the interviews, I tried to learn as much as possible about the interviewees before meeting them by reading up on their background and involvement with the recycling industry. I tried to ask questions that were specific to people's actions and practical life instead of questions about their general opinions. To differentiate between what people actually do, and what they say they do, is especially important in regards to what is being done within the recycling process in Buenos Aires. It turned out to be

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more resourceful to ask about their habits within their homes and workspaces, instead of their general interest in environmental concerns.

In total I was in contact with forty-two informants, twenty-three women and nineteen men, from the age of fourteen to eighty three. I interviewed six *cartoneros*, additionally there were five or ten other *cartoneros* I had a more casual talk with during interviews with the cooperatives or during my participant observation in El Ceibo. I interviewed 5 cooperatives, in the total four women and four men. Four NGO´s, Greenpeace, A.R.S, Waste for life and Ecosistema were interviewed, and additional two private waste companies and one private/governmental waste company. I talked to three teachers and three students. Furthermore, I interviewed 10 upper – and middle class residents mostly located in the neighbourhood of Palermo, where of seven were women and three were men. Finally, I interviewed two scientists, Pablo Schamber, at the time employed at the national Secretary of the Environment and Sustainable Development, and Veronica Paíva, a scientists at the time employed at the University of Buenos Aires, and two employees at the City Council for the Environment and public space. Most of the total thirty-three interviews were done individually, but 5 were conducted as group interviews. In order to achieve trust and involvement from my informants, I needed to participate to some degree in the conversation and contribute where it seemed necessary.

All interviews (except one) were recorded using an Mp3 player and all of them were later transcribed onto a text document. Generally there were no objections, but tone of my male informants refused to be recorded. It was important for me to have everything on tape, so that I could fully concentrate on the conversation we were having and then read up on the text later. The interviews I conducted varied in length from 30 minutes to more than an hour, depending on the informants' willingness and interest to talk. I ensured them their anonymity and

have hence given them fictitious names, although anonymity was not necessary for most of them.

Methodological challenges

Participant observation gave me a better chance to study the conversations, actions and body language used by my informants; this gave me a different insight from what the interviews could have given me. But it is important to point out that I was fully aware that my positionality and presence in itself influenced the interaction (Kvale & Benjaminsen, 2009). All ethnographers are positioned subjects and will from early on be assigned a role. The fact that I was a European, educated, young woman affected how my informants interacted with me. Several of the young men turned out to be difficult to obtain relevant information from, since they either refused to talk to me or only wanted me to go out with them. I also experienced that people did not take me seriously, for example during one of the interviews with one of the scientists I was interrupted all the time, since he claimed that my Spanish was too weak. I never heard this from anyone else, and therefore ascribe his behaviour to a very traditional and expanded male dominance, were young women are expected to act according to the men.

When doing fieldwork abroad, the language will often prove itself to be a methodological challenge (Scheyvens and Storey, 2009). Since I speak Spanish, I decided to conduct all of the interviews on my own, and take use of a translator for the transcription process. This could have affected the sampling in a negative way, since Spanish is not my mother tongue, and I therefore could have missed out on important and relevant information. But I also see that this gave me an advantage in the sense that many of my informants found me trustworthy and hence opened up to me more easily. I did consider the use of a translator, but it

proved to be too expensive, and I believe I would have lost my informants' confidence and a lot more information in the translating process.

The topics that I was interested in talking about, such as the environment, recycling industry and garbage pickers were topics that people related to in various degrees. Some had well-considered opinions and talked willingly, while others did not really understand why this was interesting for a Norwegian student coming from a country where the recycling industry already is a lot more organized.

3. Garbage economy

"Collecting garbage is seen as a dirty and necessary job" (T. Hylland Eriksen, 2011; 30).

It is near impossible to read a single piece of research concerning the Argentinean and Buenos Aires governments, cooperatives or informal recycling, without coming across a reference to the economic crisis of 2001. Taking its point of departure in the argument of Nymark (2008) and Paíva (2008) that the development of the economic crisis is related to decades of poor governance, labour market reforms and the implementation of structural adjustment programmes, this chapter explores some of the structural and social consequences of the 2001 crisis. After the economic crisis the city's inhabitants found themselves in a ghost town of abandoned factories and mass unemployment, and one of the results of this was a vast increase in the number of *cartoneros* coming to the city to scavenge through the waste left on the streets. Against this backdrop the chapter therefore empirically examines the emergence of garbage economy and situates the *cartoneros* within the waste system. The chapter then proceeds, inspired by the writings of Bundgaard (2003), Appadurai (1986) and O´Brian (1999), to analyse how waste is given different values depending on status and how this vary according to location. The closer one is to directly handling the garbage, the lower status one receives, and less economical profit is gained. With this in mind we now turn to an empirical example that will give us a deeper insight to an everyday life of a *cartonera* and point to various difficulties, which the *cartoneros* encounter. The case is based on my time with the *cartonera* Lucía. We spent nearly every day together for nearly two months, and I learned and experienced a lot about the *cartoneros* situation by following Lucía around and asking her question of this and that. The case will demonstrate an ordinary day in Lucía's life.

Young *cartonera* on one of her garbage collecting routes

She usually wakes up before the sun rises, she then gets up and makes breakfast for herself and her husband. The breakfast usually consists of biscuits, "medialunas"(sweet rolls), and coffee or maté (bitter tea). She is only twenty years old but has already been married for a couple of years, and is already used to her daily routines and chores. She works in a cooperative as a cartonera during the day, while the rest of the day is spent taking care of their home. They live in a worn down house made of brick and cardboard. The house is poorly isolated, and gets very cold during winter. Her mother and sisters keep nagging her for grandchildren and nieces, but because of their financial situation Lucía and her husband have decided to postpone having children. Lucía's mother has already lived through two coups, one

bloody political purge, and fifteen years of hyperinflation. Her mother, also a cartonera, often talks about how the only thing one could do during the crisis was to stock up on US dollars and canned food and wait for the crisis to pass. But even this often proved difficult, which is one of the reasons why she started as a cartonera. Still, she wants Lucía to bring children in to this world. Lucía on the other hand is not so certain, and wants to wait until she feels that they are in a financially more secure situation.

One Monday after breakfast, Lucía gets ready for work and runs to catch the train that leaves for the centre of Buenos Aires at 5.30 am. She only just makes it. She does not go by the "white train" [el tren blanco] anymore, since the government decided to shut it down a couple of years ago. The white train went to the central station, Retiro, and was established by the company Trenes de Buenos Aires (TBA) in 2001. Its goal was to transport the cartoneros in to the city from the provinces of Buenos Aires. The idea was that the cartoneros should be able bring their materials on the trains without disturbing the other passengers. But in 2008 the company decided to shut down their services on the basis of accused vandalism performed by the cartoneros, As a result the cartoneros lost their means to transport their materials and thus sustain their livelihoods. This contributed to huge demonstrations, where both MTE [Movimiento de Trabajadores Excluidos] and El Ceibo were involved. In the end, the result of the fighting and demonstrations was that that little by little trucks replaced the trains. But the trucks only transport the waste, and not the cartoneros.

It takes Lucía about two and half hours to get to her job in the affluent area of Palermo. The office is located on Nicaragua Street, and mornings inside the worn down office are usually slow. The office is located in an old building, which from the outside looks acceptable, but the entrance to the office reveals that it is not Palermo's residents who frequent this building. The door is broken down and

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there is water everywhere as you step inside because of a broken toilet in the bathroom. The bathroom has no door, and this often makes Lucía uncomfortable because she usually changes her clothes at the office, and because she is the only young girl working there. The electricity system is not working well either, so the light can only be turned on occasionally.They have no heater, so during winter the brick walled office is icy cold.

That Monday she greets her boss and her co-workers when she arrives, while one of her male colleagues hands her the second maté for the day. While they wait for the trucks to arrive they sit down to sip their tea, smoke and talk about what happened during the weekend. The trucks come two times a day, first in the morning to give them the bags they need to collect waste, and then in the afternoon to bring the garbage to the sorting station. While they are waiting and drinking maté, "reggaton" music is played on two or three mobile phones at the same time. The noise can be quite loud, but she has gotten used to it by now. They talk about their gathering at one of the villas´ bars that weekend, and about the people they had met, the dancing and all the drinking. One of the boys brags about a girl he had met, and even though all of them know he is married, no one comments on it. She thinks to herself that it is an unspoken understanding about infidelity in most of Buenos Aires. It is one of those things a lot of people do, but nobody ever talks about. She gives one of her colleagues a quick glance and hopes nobody has figured them out.

After a while the truck arrives with the big bags, and she takes her trolley and heads off to her designated streets. Cardboard, in which some 70 percent of the world's consumer goods are packaged, is one of the things she collects from doorsteps and streets. She greets the neighbours that recognise her, and only nods her head politely at the ones who do not want to acknowledge her. She especially likes one of the neighbours on her Monday route because she gives her

biscuits and tea, which is usually her lunch. The work can be rough and challenging, depending on the weather and the amount of garbage collected. She is not a particularly big girl, so the load can get quite heavy . The looks and the comments she receives throughout the day makes her work mentally stressing as well. When all of the garbage is collected, and she has sorted out the items she wants either for herself or for some of her co-workers, family or friends, she returns to the office. Then the waiting begins once again. The truck drivers never come on time, but she usually just enjoys talking to her colleagues and this time she gets to relax.

When the truck drivers get there, they start loading the trucks with today's catch. The trucks bring it to local sorting stations, where the waste is sorted once again by garbage sorters before the garbage is sold to industrial middlemen. The industrial middlemen turn the pulp back into paper, which again is sold for packaging manufactured goods in industrialised settings. The price of cardboard and related materials depends on the market, and thus the incomes of the cartoneros fluctuate with global market demand. That Monday the price of a kilo of paper is ten cents and a kilo of cardboard is five cents.

On the way home from work she starts to worry about their financial situation and poor living conditions. How will she make ends meet this month? She earns about hundred and twenty pesos a week, but the rent for their house in the "villa" [shantytown] alone is thousand pesos a month. Additionally, the "villa" is located near a land filling; a fact that gives her further worries about the health threat that surrounds them. She has heard several stories of people getting sick from the chemicals that have made their way into the drinking water. She has even heard of people getting cancer from the heavy chemicals. Thankfully her husband is still employed, even though he is doing "changa" [work on a day-to-day basis], which makes their income very unstable. At least for now they get

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by on their joint income, but it is not always easy. Many of her friends move regularly because they are evicted for not paying the rent on time. Some of them have tried to apply for governmental welfare services, but it is hard to receive. There is a lot of paperwork involved, and most of them do not have the possibility to waste important work hours on filling out welfare forms. Life is challenging when one does not know if one has work the following week, or if one can afford rent or food. In the end she is content that she has what she considers to be a stable and dignified job. Because we will never stop producing garbage, she thinks to herself.

The empirical case illustrates the economical and social difficulties of being a *cartonero*. The repeated crises experienced in Argentina have had severe negative social and economic consequences, especially for the middle class and the poor. High unemployment rates forced many citizens into unstable and insecure jobs with low and irregular salaries, such as scavenging. As a result many are forced to live in worn down houses in hazardous-to-health slum areas. The shantytowns are often situated near a land filling, which are a great threat to people's health. Many land fillings contain toxic groundwater contaminants, including nitrate, ammonia, PCBs[7] and heavy metals. Once these substances reach groundwater, the contamination can be very damaging, particularly if it reaches drinking water wells (Schamber, 200). In addition, the *cartoneros*, in connection with their work of sorting and separating the garbage are generally the first to be in contact with it, and therefore run an even greater risk health wise.

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[7] PCBs: Polychlorinated biphenyl; classified as a persistent organic pollutant, and banned by the United States congress in 1979.

In addition, Lucía's story indirectly brings to light how politicians involve themselves in the garbage industry and how this directly generates consequences for the *cartoneros*. For example, the government's decision to shut down the "white train" forced thousands of *cartoneros* to reduce their amount of garbage collection. As a consequence, the monthly income of many *cartoneros* dropped considerably. Furthermore, the case above demonstrates Lucía's insecure situation. The lack of a stable and reliable income, absent governmental welfare services and her living conditions, reveals a challenging life situation. The governmental policies and implementations will be further addressed in the final chapter.

Situating the cartoneros within the waste system

The formal waste sector

Buenos Aires does not have a formalised recycling program, though its inhabitants generate about 4,500 tonnes of waste every day, an estimated 11 per cent of which is disposed of by the *cartoneros* (Rodriugez, 2010). Garbage collection in Buenos Aires is almost entirely privatised. The city government contracts six trucking companies, five private and one public. These companies are responsible for collecting the waste on the streets and hauling it to transit point or directly to CEAMSE[8]. CEAMSE is in principle a governmental company, created during the military dictatorship in 1978. Today the company is a municipal and regional government fusion with private affiliations, all funded by the government to dispose of waste in their landfills. Since the trucking companies are paid on the basis of the weight of waste received, they have little incentive to reduce the quantity of waste sent to landfill (Baillie et al., 2010).

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[8] Spanish: Coordinación Ecológica Area Metropolitana Sociedad del Estado/ English: Ecological Coordination Society of the State Metropolitan Area; Argentina.

Within this formal waste system, one also finds the garbage collectors. The garbage collectors are employed at one of the government's six contracted trucking companies. Each company is assigned to a different district, and the garbage is taken either via a holding point or more often directly to a landfill. The city has only one remaining landfill, Norte III, which is operated by CEAMSE.

The informal waste sector

The numbers of *cartoneros* increased during the financial turmoil, when the hitherto marginal activity of the *cartoneros* in many ways became normalised. Eventually the work of the *cartoneros* was no longer considered a contravention of the law, but instead came to be seen as informal work(Rodriugez, 2010). The informal sector is divided into two groups of *cartoneros*, namely the scavengers and the garbage recyclers. The municipal government created a *cartonero* program, the aim of which was to provide the *cartoneros* with essentials such as gloves, trucks and vaccinations. In addition, the municipal program aimed to formalise the *cartoneros* through, for example, registration. The program also promoted the formation of cooperatives as safer and more productive environments for families to work in.

The first category within the informal sector consists of the scavengers. Both adult and under aged scavengers work in teams all night, rushing up and down the streets separating garbage until their bags are bulging with recyclables. Since the garbage is usually left on the streets in the evening, and not collected by the garbage collectors until the following morning, the night gives the scavengers a chance to separate and collect the material that has value to them. However, the fact that they work during the night contributes to the stigmatisation of the marginalised groups of both scavengers and garbage recyclers. This will be further addressed in the following chapter. In addition to unfavourable work

hours, the scavengers are not organised, nor are they members of a cooperative. Instead they operate on an individual basis and are only paid according to what the individual scavenger is able to retrieve on any given day. After a long night's work, they ride public trains, or walk dozens of blocks back to their homes in the shantytowns and poor neighborhoods.

Lucía belongs to the second category of *cartoneros*, namely the garbage recyclers. They have organised themselves into more socially sustainable cooperatives within the informal sector. They mostly work during the day and most of the recycling waste that is collected is taken to different sorting stations, before it is sold off to commercial industries. In contrast to the scavengers, recyclers do not search through the plastic bags left on the streets, but go from door to door to collect recyclable material from upper or middle class residents. In Palermo, immense actions had been actuated to convince the residents to involve themselves in the separation process. Accordingly, some residents have decided to be directly involved in sorting and separating the garbage. The garbage recyclers started this whole course of action by knocking on the doors of the residents, arguing the possible environmental and social contributable factors. In chapter five I further investigate the reasons as to why the middle class residents chose to contribute and start separating their garbage into recyclables. There is generally very little interaction between the formal and informal waste systems. Not only is the latter not officially acknowledged, it is in fact quite often directly obstructed by the municipal government. However, we will now take one step back and turn to the question of how the garbage economy emerged as a consequence of the crisis in 2001.

A typical sorting station

The emergence of garbage economy

The most recent financial collapse can be traced back to the dictator Jorge Rafael Videla, who took out large loans from international institutions in the 1970s. The crisis later escalated with the structural adjustment program initiated by the Carlos Menem government in the 1990s (Nymark, 2008). It is argued that three different factors contributed to the crisis that peaked in 2001. Firstly, in order to bring inflation down the government introduced the Convertibility plan, pegging the peso to the US dollar on a one-to-one ratio. This led to a decrease in Argentina's foreign investment and exports. Secondly, the expansive borrowing

by the same government meant that both foreign and domestic debt grew (Baillie et al., 2010). It was rumoured that the loans were spent on purchases of imported consumer goods and on the political party of Carlos Menem, and that additional billions were lost in huge corruption schemes (Nymark, 2008). Thirdly, the 1990s witnessed an upward spiralling in domestic prices and a downward spiralling in domestic demand. At the same time, the privatisation done by the government led to a rise in unemployment by over 20 per cent. These high rates of unemployment in turn made the recycling industry far more lucrative (Baillie et al., 2010).

Tens of thousands of people [9] became *cartoneros*, scavenging the streets for recyclable materials to sell. Even though today, ten years later, the number has diminished, there is still an estimated eight thousand to forty thousand *cartoneros*, who collect, separate and sell waste as their sole economy (Baillie et al., 2010). As Lucía most of these unpaid informal workers live in outlying shantytowns, but move into the city with their carts at all times of the day, collecting and recycling an estimated 90 percent of what is being recycled in Buenos Aires (Rodriugez, 2010). An average income earned by the individual *cartonero* is, according to Baillie et al., 34 per cent below the official 2007 government poverty line of 914 pesos a month (Baillie et al., 2010). The salary can be somewhat higher amongst the organised *cartoneros*. Lucía, for example, earned about 480 pesos a month, a salary evidently well below the poverty index.

All of my informants explained that it was essentially the economical factor that forced them into a life of garbage collecting. Lucía for instance grew up in a shantytown and she did not feel that she had many options besides collecting garbage since *"they needed to put food on the table",* as she put it. Similarly

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[9] Reported numbers vary

Rosita, a fifty-year-old *cartonera*, had experienced the social and economical effects of the recurring crises in Argentina:

"I used to have a job as a cleaning lady and I had four children to look after. And as long as I had a job, we had a home. But I had an alcoholic and abusive husband. He worked as a head chef, but because of his hard drinking habits he got sick with cirrhosis of the liver and finally he died. In addition, because of the troubled times, I lost my job. The first two months the government paid my rent, but that was that. And eventually we were evicted and lost our home. We had to go live under a bridge right under Avenida J.B Justo and Niceto Vega. And in order to feed my kids and send them to school, I had to go out on the streets to look for newspapers and cardboard just to earn some money. I had to collect a lot only to get about thirty pesos a week".

The quote above demonstrates some of the effects of the recurring crisis which has characterised Argentina through the years The following citations are generated from such experiences, the following being from a *cartonera* friend of Rosita:

"I used to work for the city administration, but because of the financial instability, I lost my job and had to start going out on the streets searching through the garbage".

And in another interview, thirty-three year old Antonio who worked as a building constructor before the crisis, offered a very similar story:
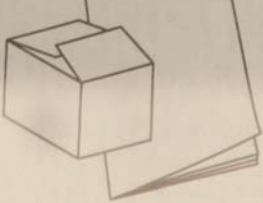
"As I had lost my job, I could not pay the rent anymore. So I rented a room at my aunts' apartment. But now, as I have a job, I am saving money to rent an apartment on my own. And now I can support my sons and send them money for food and clothes".

So far this chapter has demonstrated how the emergence of the economical crisis turned thousands of middle class and poor residents into a society of vast unemployment and economical and social difficulties, thus forcing many of them to begin scavenging. Additionally, it has given an introduction to the daily lives of the *cartoneros* by introducing facts and figures about the waste collection system. A normal day of a young *cartonera*, Lucía demonstrated the daily challenges and obstacles, which the *cartoneros* encounter. The case argued that unreliable incomes, lack of governmental policies and health risky shantytowns has contributed to thousands of people living in poverty. Now the chapter will give a further insight into the waste collection system of Buenos Aires and examine the value of waste. It will investigate how value arises and differs amongst different social groups. On a general basis, one can state that in the eyes of a well off upper or middle class resident based in the northern hemisphere, waste is usually seen as useless and worthless material without any function. In contrast, the following section argues and demonstrates that waste is perceived and utilised quite differently by and amongst the *cartoneros*.

The social life of garbage

Following the argument of Bundgaard (2003), Kopytoff (1986) and Appadurai (1986) that solid waste matters as a resource, I argue that for the *cartoneros* garbage has a positive symbolic value. Today we witness a trend towards a circular economy where secondary materials – waste or residue, rather than primary, raw materials – become the first stage in the process of manufacture. This indicates that waste has been given a new meaning and a new area of application. Over the last two decades, and especially since the mid-1980s, rates of household recycling and sorting have increased noticeably (O'Brian, 1999). In the North this is more often than not a form of labour undertaken inside different homes. But in many countries in the South this has taken on another form and turned into an activity and commodity of value.

According to the perspective of traditional economics, an economic exchange is required for an object to become a commodity or to take on value. However, Appadurai argues that the value of an object is not simply a process determined by demand and supply. Instead the value of an object is decided by the judgment made about it by subjects or social groups (Appadurai, 1986). Material objects and the meanings invested in them change from status to status and location to location. The same object can in some locations be viewed as nuisance or worthless, while in others as beautiful or useful (O'Brian, 1999). Consequently, the value of resources, or in this case garbage, can be conveyed in to a chain of value, which illustrates the "social life" of waste. Within this value chain each transaction from one social group to another results in different values associated with the object (Bundgaard, 2003). The different values ascribed to waste means that different people are defining waste in different ways, and in accordance with their social status and situations. For example, a plastic bottle can be given many different values and meanings in accordance with the person who is holding it. A

-Sobres comunes o de papel madera.
-Remitos, facturas, formularios, legajos.
-Folletos y guías telefónicas.
-Carpetas, cuadernos.
-Cajas de cartón.
-Tetra brick.

de golosinas).
-Celofán, papel tissue.
-Papel de fotografías, planchas de etiquetas.
-Papel sucio: servilletas, papel de cocina, envases de comida
-Vasos de cartón encerados.

-Botellas y envases de alimentos.
-Bebidas.
-Vasos y platos.
-Frascos.

-Focos y tubos fluorescentes.
-Lamparitas.
-Vidrios laminados (autos).
-Espejos, lentes.
-Loza y cerámica.
-Vidrios rotos.

-Aluminio: latas.
-Hierro.
-Metales fundidos y aleaciones.
-Plomo, zinc, cobre y bronce.

-Pilas comunes y alcalinas:
*Pilas recargables, y baterías de celulares (llevar a centros de recolección de las respectivas marcas).
*Pilas botón (Llevar a CGPC).

-Botellas.
-Envases de alimentos y de bebidas.
-Cubiertos descartables.
-Sillas.
-Bidones, bolsitas de nylon.

-Bidones con restos de agroquímicos o fertilizantes.
-Bidones o envases con restos en su interior no descriptos en el envase

Variuos recylable materials.

middle age, middle class person may see it as worthless after finishing his soda, while a middle class child may see at as money, which can contribute to the new bike she is saving up to buy. A homeless person might see it as a potential contribution to food, while a recycling company sees it as profit. In Buenos Aires, amongst the *cartoneros* the bottle would be seen as recyclable plastic, which will generate income for the day.

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In accordance with the different values given to a material and its usefulness, I argue that within the waste collection system of Buenos Aires this value chain begins the moment the material becomes useless and worthless to one of the upper or middle class residents. Subsequently the garbage and the worthless recyclables are removed from the household, and waste bags are disposed of and left out on the street for the garbage collectors or scavengers to collect. The residents usually leave their garbage on the streets during the evening, while the garbage collectors employed by the government collect the garbage the following morning. Furthermore, this value transaction can additionally take place when the waste is handed directly over to a garbage recycler, i.e. one of the cooperative members. When the waste is in the hands of the garbage collectors or *cartoneros* the object instantly changes into something of value, namely money. As demonstrated above, the *cartoneros* bring the bottles, cardboard and plastic to different industrial middlemen, who later pass it on to commercial industries. Different kinds of materials have different values to the *cartoneros*. This is because not all types of material are sellable, so to them, it is only materials such as cardboard, paper, plastic and glass, which are valuable and sellable. During one of our walks collecting garbage, Lucía told me that cardboard for example was more valuable than paper and that plastic was the best-paid material. These prices were stable as long as I was there, but the value of the material varies according to market demand. Other items can also have value, because it is something they can take to use straight away. I witnessed Lucía collecting clothes or containers of left over toilet requisites, which she would bring home in order to save money. Other items such as cartons with left over food were taken home to eat on a later occasion. In other words, waste had transformed its value on its journey from one owner to another.

More value is added when the waste reaches the commercial industries, because these are the people who make the real money out of garbage. The industrial middlemen add 20 percent to the price paid to the *cartoneros* before they sell the bulk to larger recycling collectors, who add another 100 percent before they sell

it to mills as raw material, who themselves sextuple the price when they turn it into finished products that they sell into the public market (Baille et al., 2010). In other words, and as demonstrated in Figure 1, garbage is not a neutral object but is endowed with different values given to the objects by different social groups, and what began as worthless matter to a middle class resident becomes a valuable resource to the *cartoneros,* and the commercial industries (Appadurai, 1986). The case of the *cartoneros* and the larger recycling industry demonstrates the processes that give value and significance to a seemingly worthless object, namely garbage. Figure 1 is an illustration of the process of waste value and the alterations in the ascribed value that occur along the way.

Social groups		Waste
Middle class residents	→	Worthless and useless
Cartoneros/scavengers	→	Value +
Industrial middlemen	→	Value ++
Commercial industries	→	Value +++
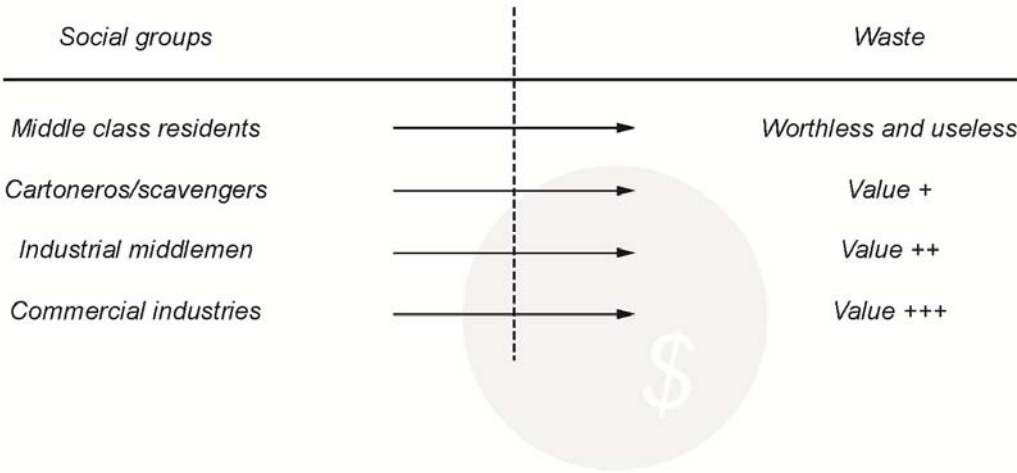
Figure 3: The process of waste value

Summary

This chapter has demonstrated some of the structural and social consequences of the 2001 crisis. I have demonstrated how suddenly thousands of lower and middle class people found themselves unemployed, and were forced to find alternative employment, for example scavenging. People were forced out into the waste industry, with no one to rely on, but themselves. The case of Lucía, gave us an insight to a normal day of a young *cartonera*. The case demonstrated the daily challenges and obstacles of the *cartoneros*. The case argued that unreliable incomes, lack of governmental welfare services and health hazardous shantytowns has contributed to thousands of people living in poverty, and consequently working as garbage collectors/scavengers. The chapter then proceeded to demonstrate how waste was given different values depending on status and location. Different materials, such as plastic, cardboard and glass were given more or less value in accordance with status and need. Hence, I argued that the closer one is to directly handling the garbage, the lower status one receives, and less economical profit is gained. The following chapter will explore how the closeness to garbage handling additionally contributes to the *cartoneros* being compared to the garbage in it self, and therefore to a process of stigmatisation

Cartoneros at a sorting station, pressing cardboard that is intended for sale to industrial middlemen.

4. Managing a life in waste

Waste's association with dirt and impurity makes it dishonourable work in a wide range of cultures. Scavenging and garbage collection became associated with despised castes: Zabaleen in Cairo; Gelandangan in Indonesia; Dalits in India (Helen Silver, 2009).

The introductory quotation puts into words the social dilemma of identifying oneself as a *cartonero*. The quotation can make one question why some people choose to become *cartoneros* when it is so often understood to be a stigmatised line of work. A large part of the answer as to why people in Argentina become *cartoneros* is structural, and, as we have seen in the previous chapter, it is undoubtedly the socio-economical background that has led to so many people being involved in the garbage industry. After the crisis in 2001, several industrial plants were closed, and there was a generally diminished need for labour (Paiva, 2008). Many middle class inhabitants found themselves without work, and needed to find an alternative. Suddenly, garbage in the streets was seen as a resource through, which they could make a living. It is a paradox that the *cartoneros,* who are the ones who recycle and make a living out of environmental consciousness, do not do this because they are environmentally aware. Instead they do it for entirely different reasons, such as poverty and lack of other possibilities. It is obvious that the *cartoneros* experience ambivalence in connection with their work. As Helen Silver argues, scavenging is a stigmatising and poorly paid job; yet several of my *cartonero* informants nonetheless took pride in the work they were doing.

This chapter takes its point of departure from the quotation of Silver, and looks at the correlation between garbage as dirt and subsequently ascribed assumptions and perceptions of the *cartoneros.* The chapter explores the second research question, and asks how is life as a *cartonero* experienced, and why do people choose a life within the garbage economy? I will argue that the upper and middle class resident's negative assigned assumptions and associations of waste are transmitted to the *cartoneros* themselves. Following the argument of Tim Cresswell, that in the same way as one dissociates oneself from objects and regards them as garbage, one can dissociate oneself from actions and people that do not comply with society's different norms (Cresswell, 2004). In other words the following empirical cases will demonstrate that people, i.e. the *cartoneros,* living in shantytowns, surrounded by violence, with unstable employment, are viewed with scepticism and are understood as a disturbance in Argentinean society. Thereafter, the chapter will focus on the *cartoneros* as a contested category, and will investigate the *cartoneros'* perceptions of themselves. Finally, the chapter will, by following the story of Antonio, give an insight into the ambivalence the *cartoneros* feel towards their work and look into the different reasons given as to why the *cartoneros* chose to become waste pickers in the first place. We will see that it is not environmental concern, which drives people to collect garbage. Nor is it only the economical factor as demonstrated above. Instead the chapter will argue that feelings of dignity and social contribution are equally motivating.

Pure and impurity – a categorisation of garbage and people

Garbage's association with dirt and impurity implies that the hierarchical structure of waste management is directly connected to the status one receives. This indicates that there is a direct connection between the degree of a person's involvement with garbage and his/her salary and status. In Buenos Aires the employees who are directly responsible for disposing waste are relatively well paid and enjoy quite high status, but this cannot be said of the people who

actually carry out the work involved (cf. Bundgaard, 2003). Mary Douglas and Helle Bundgaard address how people and objects often are categorised, and how something will be regarded as better or nicer than the other, and how this contributes to stigmatisation and suppression. Douglas states that in every society that makes a fundamental distinction between "clean" and "unclean" (Douglas, 1997), direct contact with other people's waste leads to very low status, if not stigmatisation (Bundgaard, 2003). For example during my meeting with Carlos, a head director at CEAMSE, and with Pablo, from the private trucking company, Olivos, it was obvious that they held a completely different status compared to that of the *cartoneros.* They wore nice clothes, lived in upper or middle class areas and went to Europe for vacation. These resources and opportunities were far from the range available to the *cartoneros.*

According to Mary Douglas, dirt is a matter out of place and it involves two conditions, namely a set orderly conditions and a breach of that order. Where one can find dirt, one can find a system. Consequently dirt is a byproduct of our systematic classification of objects, meaning that we reject the things that do not belong. Our perception of "clean" and "unclean" is a reaction that condemns each object or idea that contravenes our already established classifications (Douglas, 1997). We categorise objects based on our needs and what we perceive as useful and/or aesthetically beautiful. Anthropologist Liisa Malkki has argued that there is a tendency and a need in the modern world to locate people and identities within particular boundaries (Malkki, 1992). It is our persistent desire to divide the world up into clearly bounded units, which produce a categorisation of the objects and people that surrounds us.

In Buenos Aires, as in almost every society in the world, waste is associated with dirt and impurity. Through various incidents and interviews it became clear that the *cartoneros* often were classified as "unclean" and "out of place". Since they

were directly involved with the handling of garbage and perceived as something, which contravened the established classifications. It was during just another normal day spent with Lucía, in the streets of Palermo, that we experienced an incident with a upper or middle class resident, The following empirical case and incident demonstrates the categorisation and stigmatisation of the people closely connected to garbage and who thus experiences low status and scepticism.

"In place"/"Out of place"

Cachivache? What does it mean, I asked her. It means all the rich, hip people that live here. Those are the cachivache. Lucía the young cartonera we met in previous chapters, explains to me the different meanings of the slang she uses everyday. The way she speaks and lives is new to me and I have many questions. We walk through the streets of the hip neighbourhood of Palermo, where we stand out considerably while pulling the trolley behind us. But despite our differences we laugh and ask each other numerous questions. It is a sunny day and we are out collecting garbage. But the class separation between Lucía and the neighbours of Palermo is very much visible, and it makes me uncomfortable and proud at the same time, walking there with her. The class difference surfaces itself poignantly when we ring the doorbell of yet another of the fashionable and big houses of Palermo. The woman inside does not even open the door to greet us, but shouts through the door "Vení a la ventana", come to the window. The window is covered with great big bars, and Lucía stands on the outside, holding on to the bars, looking in and waiting for the woman to hand over her garbage. Afterwards I keep up with the questioning, but this time the questions are more difficult to ask. I want to know how she felt in that moment, standing outside waiting, looking in. It is a beautiful kitchen and it will never be mine, she replied, and asks me if I ever cheated on my boyfriend. We were back in our carefree twenties again.

The case illustrates one of my first days spent with Lucía, and gives us yet another insight into the *cartoneros´* livelihoods. It demonstrates the active class distinction that exists between the upper and middle class and the *cartoneros.* The more resourceful upper and middle class is often sceptic and at times scared of the less resourceful *cartoneros,* who often lives on the streets or in the shantytowns in the provinces. This case demonstrates how the woman was evidently worried about letting Lucía into her house; therefore she preferred giving the garbage to her through the window. I experienced the woman's harsh behaviour as intentional and as a way of avoiding any direct contact with Lucía. Especially interesting about this case was our conversation about wealth and disparities. The answer she replied was short and concise, but the way she said it to me still gives us an idea about how acutely she felt this disparity. It was obvious she did not want to talk about it, it was a delicate matter and she felt uncomfortable. Regardless of whether she felt ashamed or just experienced it as a silly question, it still gives us an insight in to her discomfort about the situation, and demonstrates how *cartoneros* in different situations and by some people are categorised as "in place/out of place".

Tim Cresswell, like Douglas, categorises objects as "in place" and "out of place" and accordingly defines garbage as "out of place". Instead of Douglas' structural approach, he emphasises the importance of studying the transgressions that take place when something has been judged to be "out of place" (Cresswell, 2004). Transgression means crossing a line, which means that the same object can be valuable to one person, but completely worthless to another. In other words, as were demonstrated in the value chain in the previous chapter, the meaning, or value of dirt is dependent on the person handling it. According to Cresswell it is such a transgression that identifies categories made about objects. He develops the theory even further by expanding the concept to include people. He states that as with objects, certain groups in society can experience stigmatisation because

they are assigned a role as something, which does not belong and thus seen as "out of place".

"The idea that people with certain characteristics are dirty is very often found as part of the attitudes of dominant group towards a less powerful one" (Cresswell, 1996: 39).

The quotation underlines what was demonstrated in the case with Lucía earlier in the chapter. Cresswell makes the example of graffiti painters who are associated with disorder because they spray paint on buildings and make a mess out of an otherwise orderly city life. According to Cresswell this contributes to the graffiti painters being perceived as second-rate and "out of place" (Cresswell, 1996). The case of the graffiti painters can be translated to the *cartoneros,* since one of the detrimental facts of working with garbage is that people will compare you with the garbage itself.

The case below elucidates how the *cartoneros* at times were perceived as second –rate or "out of place". The incident happened during another day spent with Lucía, and during our walk back to the cooperative office. The case illustrates the reaction of one woman in the presence of Lucía and it underlines my arguments of a stigmatisation process towards the *cartoneros*.

"One Monday I was out collecting garbage with Lucía. We were pulling the cart behind us and just about to stop and ring yet another doorbell, when a woman approached us. It was obvious that she started to hurry along when she saw us, and she was about to cross the street, when the strawberries on the top of her shopping bag fell out and into the street. Lucía ran towards the woman and

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began to pick up the strawberries from the ground. The woman automatically pulled away, and ruthlessly yelled; "no tiene que ayudarme, no es necessario" [" you do not need to help me, it is not necessary"].

The incident demonstrates one woman's anxiety of getting in contact with a *cartonera.* The woman pulled away and waved Lucía back so that she would not touch the strawberries. It was evident that the woman disliked that Lucía touched her food. The case exemplifies the ongoing stigmatisation towards the *cartoneros* in Buenos Aires, and how they often are perceived as outsiders and "out of place". On numerous occasions during my fieldwork I experienced comments that characterised the *cartoneros* as messy and filthy, so the woman's harsh reaction did not surprise me.

Different comments received from informants and incidents such as the one above contributed to that the overall impression I saw amongst many of upper and middle class people: that the *cartoneros* were associated with dirt and disorder. Upper and middle class people would make judgements based on their own experiences and resources. Consequently the *cartoneros* became something unknown, different and dismal, and therefore became categorised as an inferior and "out of place" group.

The mess in the streets left by scavengers were a returning topic in my conversations with all of my middle class informants. The upper and middle class residents complained about the mess that the scavengers left on the street after sorting through the plastic bags looking for material to sell. Several residents pointed out that their street had been in a disastrous state the few last years. Eva, a 43 year old middle class woman living in Palermo, exclaimed during an interview:

"It is awful how they produce more filthiness than there initially was. They open the bags, just take what they need and the remains are left all scattered so the city looks disastrous".

I argue that the *cartoneros* were not only compared with the waste itself, but they were also blamed for the mess they produce while scavenging. In contrast, it was striking how none of the residents blamed the private companies or the municipal government for the dysfunctional waste management system. In stead I witnessed a tendency to blame those who actually and personally handle the garbage. The following part will further demonstrate, through additional empirical cases and citations, how the *cartoneros* were classified as "out of place" and thus experienced stigmatisation.

Stigmatisation – the cartoneros as an undesirable and shameful group

According to Goffman's theory of social stigma, stigma is a behaviour that is socially discrediting in a particular way. The behaviour causes an individual to be classified by others as an undesirable, rejected stereotype rather than as an accepted, normal one (Goffman, 1963). In a meeting with a stranger, their appearance will likely cause us to anticipate her category and attributes, or her "social identity". Subsequently, we transform these anticipations into normative expectations and make certain assumptions as to what we think the person ought to be (Goffman, 1963). We may assign distinct attributes that make her different from others within our categorisation. The assigned attributes may differ from positive, usually characterised by similar attributes as one has oneself, to negative attributes, usually unknown and contrastive to our own. Stigma occurs when negative attributes are assigned and the individual is reduced in our minds from a normal and accepted person to a discredited and tainted one.

As already demonstrated, I frequently and repetitively experienced negative classification of the *cartoneros* throughout my fieldwork. For example, during a random taxi ride from one interview to another, I experienced the stigmatising assumptions of the taxi driver. We both noticed several *cartoneros* along the way, so I started asking him about his general thoughts about the *cartoneros:*

"There are schools, you know, things one needs to move forward. But they [the cartoneros] prefer to earn 50 or 60 pesos a day, and spend them on beer and go dancing during the weekends. They do not think of the life they are carrying. And they buy themselves clothes and nice trainers... and sometimes you look at them, and they have nicer trainers than you".

The manner in which the taxi driver said those words made it apparent to me that he experienced the *cartoneros* as lazy and inferior to himself. He did not approve of the way they "chose" to lead their lives, and obviously implied that they could change their course of life if they wanted to. Consequently, he did not have any sympathy for the *cartoneros.* In the car I did not present myself as a researcher on the topic, because I do not believe the taxi driver would have shared these thoughts with me, or as directly, if I had. This is because I experienced very few informants who would admit these kinds of thoughts. It appeared to be politically incorrect to admit to these associations or perceptions, but most of the informants agreed that there was stigmatisation towards the *cartoneros*. It cannot be disregarded that it might have been my person or position that influenced what thoughts people admitted to have, and that it might be that these thoughts were discussed more freely in more friendly settings.

This thesis has so far demonstrated that stigma occurs and happens when the residents of Buenos Aires assign their negative attributes to the *cartoneros.* It has been argued and demonstrated that several people amongst the upper and middle class do not perceive the *cartoneros* as normal or accept them as an equal part of society, but, rather, sees them as abnormal or "out of place".

The following conversation about the different perceptions about the *cartoneros* with Julia, a 44-year-old upper class doctor living in Palermo, illustrates her perceptions and experiences of the stigmatisation process happening in their society:

Me: What are your thoughts about the *cartoneros?* What is it that first thought that comes to mind?

Julia: *"I think they are discredited"*

Me: Why do you think they are discredited? Have you ever seen them being discredited?

Julia: *"Yes, I hear bad comments about them all the time. Comments such as; "they are blocking the traffic", "look at these people, look at the way they dress themselves", "they are robbers"…and so on. In general, cartoneros are discredited because people think that if the cartoneros come close to them they will harm you. People look down on them, and see their line of work as denigrating".*

The conversation reveals comments that Julia said she experienced habitually. The comments demonstrate that the *cartoneros* were perceived as a nuisance and people who brought about disorder. They were experienced as different, often in negative terms. But they were also at times seen as dangerous and dismal, someone to keep at a distance. The negative attributes assigned the *cartoneros* are further demonstrated in the conversation with Carlos. He admitted that he would be embarrassed to work as a *cartonero.* During my conversation with Carlos, a middle class chef at the age of 34 who worked at a restaurant in Palermo, but lived in Valera, a province outside of Buenos Aires, we touched upon the subject of working as a *cartonero:*

"I would feel embarrassed doing that line of work. Especially after being head chef, which is a job that gives me a salary high enough to support myself and my family, and not forcing me to go through garbage in order to find food…for me…that would be demeaning".

Carlos admitted that if he were forced from his work as a chef, something which he obviously took pride in, into sorting and collecting garbage, he would have felt shameful and demeaned. At the same time he did stress the importance of acknowledging that it [scavenging] was just another job, and that it had emerged as a result of the crisis in 2001. But in the end, to Carlos it would have been demeaning, since "*most people see this [scavenging] as a bad thing...denigrating" [Carlos],* but if he had been unemployed it would have been an *"option for him to overcome his needs" [Carlos].* Carlos has a one-year-old son, and said that if it were required of him to be able to feed his son and send him to school, it would not have been a question of what to do, no matter how demeaning and shameful he would feel.

The middle and upper class informants gave me various stories and statements that demonstrated the stigmatisation of the *cartoneros* in the Argentinean society. *"People are scared of them", "they are filthy and lazy", and "they are looked upon with suspicion"* were assertions that were repetitively stated amongst my upper and middle class informants. Additionally, during a conversation with Leandro, a nineteen-year-old boy living in Caballito, when talking about the general perceptions and the different opinions about the *cartoneros,* he explained that:

" The cartoneros are not officially recognised by the government, even so, they are part of our city life. It is like...as if they were invisible. People just walk by them, without even looking at them"

By referring to how the *cartoneros* were not yet officially recognised by the government, Leandro refers to how scavenging is still not recognised as formal and legal work on a governmental level. We will return to this in chapter six, but for now it will suffice to comment that this could also be a contributing factor as to why the *cartoneros* were associated with something disorderly, illegal and scary, and therefore not accepted as a contributing actor and part of the city life picture.

So far, this chapter has analysed how waste's association with dirt and impurity implies that the more people are involved in it the more they are compared by others to garbage itself. The categorisation made about what is seen as "in place" and "out of place" decides how we perceive objects and people around us. Through different empirical cases we have seen how this leads to stigmatisation of the marginalised group of *cartoneros*. The following case will further analyse the complexity of the stigmatisation process the *cartoneros* experience. I argue that there exists a multiple stigmatisation towards the *cartoneros*. On one hand they experience stigmatisation because they are seen as different or "out of place". Among the different reasons for this, is that they often are compared to the garbage in which they are directly involved in handling. On the other hand, as will be demonstrated, they experience stigmatisation because they live in highly insecure and violent conditions, which contribute to distrust and fear amongst the upper and middle class residents. This fear, as already touched upon in the conversation with Julia, contributes to even more stigmatisation.

Villa 31 – fear and distrust towards and amongst the cartoneros

One afternoon I headed out to meet and interview the president and the secretary of the cooperative Copacyt. The cooperative was located a bit in the outskirts of the city, but not enough to make me consider that I actually was going into one of the shantytowns on my own. I changed buses a couple of times before I reached my destination, bur since I never had been there before I had no idea were I was going. Subsequently, I started asking people for directions. Since I did not know I was going to a shantytown I asked about the whereabouts of the street Villa 31. Several people were involved without really being able to help me. But I did notice that people looked a bit surprised and sceptical when I asked them for directions. Finally I came to a military base, and asked military men about Villa 31. They looked at me with suspicion; looked at each other and asked me what was my purpose was going there. So I told them that I was meeting someone and that I just wanted to know where to go from there. Their reaction was intense and deterring and they told me that they would not advise me to go there on my own. Then, finally, I realised where I was going: Villa means shantytown in Spanish, it just had not crossed my mind at that point. The men seemed genuinely concerned about me going into a shantytown on my own and clearly stated that they would not have done so. Still, they pointed me in the right direction, and again I was on my way to my meeting. This was my first time going into shantytowns on my own since earlier I always had someone with me or I went in a group. A couple of year's back, while I studying at the University of Buenos Aires, I volunteered as a teacher in the shantytowns. We were warned against going there on our own, and insistently told to stick with the assigned group while being there. This was because of all the violence happening within the shantytowns, and I was told that it was just stupid to take unnecessary risks. But this time I figured I was already there, and I wanted to keep my appointment. Not long after, I met the members of the cooperative and after a resourceful meeting the secretary walked me out. We

took a different route this time and he told me I should never walk the other route
(the route I actually came in).

The experience of going into the shantytown did not really scare me at first. It was not until a few hours later that I realised it actually could have been a very stupid thing to do. Normally, nothing would have happened, and nothing did, but still I am aware of the bad statistics. During the last few decades, armed robbery, theft and violent mugging have become quite common in many shantytowns and the numbers of victims involved has risen. Today many of the upper and middle class residents are afraid of going into shantytowns and some are equally afraid of the people who live there. Based on stories that are told in articles they read in the newspaper, the middle class residents make their own assumptions about the people living there. Additionally, numerous inhabitants of the shantytowns are frightened of their own neighbours, and with this violence come isolation. Incidents of salesmen who sell milk, soda and bread getting robbed keep these salesmen from entering the area (Auyero, 2000). These perceptions and incidents make the middle class anxious towards people such as the *cartoneros* who live in shantytowns. This is a perception well illustrated in the following statement from Christian, a 23-year-old middle class student:

" In general, people are scared of them [the cartoneros], because they come into the city from the shantytowns, and because they come from a different social class".

The invasion of drugs and the high unemployment rates are the dominant concerns in the shantytowns. The spread of drugs, alcohol and unemployment fuels the self-perpetuating cycle of distrust and violence. The cycle, having neither clear purpose nor clear origins, pervades the whole perception of the

shantytowns (Auyero, 2000). Isolation from the rest of society and the violence intensifies the already present stigma, as demonstrated above. Numerous *cartoneros* informed me that they experienced feelings of being socially isolated and that they felt alienated from the institutions and services that middle and upper class residents took for granted. I will return to the *cartoneros*' own experiences and perceptions later in this chapter when analysing their reasons as to why they become a *cartonero*.

These empirical cases and details should sufficiently show that many of the people in Buenos Aires categorises the *cartoneros* as a norm-breaching group. Subsequently they are considered as threatening and their work as shameful. From this we can conclude that the *cartoneros* do experience stigmatisation, something that evidently complicates their everyday life. In the following chapter I examine more closely the relationship between the upper -and middle class residents and the *cartoneros* while focusing on the reasons why people choose to recycle. Now, this chapter will move away from the upper- and middle class resident's opinions and turn to how the *cartoneros* perceive themselves and the work they are doing. How do *cartoneros* deal with a life in waste and stigma? And to what extent do they internally differentiate.

A contested category – differentiation between you, them and me

As with the upper and middle class residents, the *cartoneros* categorise objects and people according to their own thoughts, ideas and life experiences. They also made the distinction between "clean" and "unclean", "in place" and "out of place", but their assumptions and perceptions were distinctly different from the ones made by the upper and middle class. Marisol De La Cadena's ethnographic work in Peru tracks the history of "the mestizos", and looks at the process where

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the categories of "Indian" and "mestizo" are reproduced and contested by working-class Cuzco residents. She demonstrates that the same ethnic group can be given different meanings in different settings and that it equally can differ from one person to another. Strikingly, from the point of view of the rich upper and middle class, the cartoneros were a more or less homogenous group, but as De La Cadena argues such categories are not homogenous. They are contested and disputed.

Among the *cartoneros* in Buenos Aires I experienced how this dichotomy of scavenger and garbage recycler was present amongst many of my informants. *"I do not see myself as a scavenger, but as a garbage recycler",* was a statement I was told on several occasions. The statement shows the internal stratification of *cartoneros.* It was better to belong to the category of the garbage recyclers, than the category of scavengers. The statement was further exemplified one day when I was out collecting garbage with Lucía and we saw some scavengers sorting through the plastic bags in the street. I asked her if she knew them, and if there was a difference between what she was doing and what they were doing. She quickly corrected me and said that she *"was nothing like them. I am organised, and a member of a cooperative and therefore have a regular income and do not live on a day-to-day basis like them".* To convince me additionally, she added *"I do not poke around garbage, and make a mess of things".* Interestingly, Lucía's statements demonstrate that the same principles, of how people who work with dirt is perceived as dirt, or seen as "out of place", are additionally at work amongst the *cartoneros* themselves. Lucia, who the middle class ridicules for her dirty work, herself similar ridicule and looks down upon the scavengers. Seen from the outside, Lucia and the scavengers belong to the same category, but seen from the inside this is not the case. Subsequently, distinction and stigmatisation work at many levels, but according to the same principle.

During my fieldwork I witnessed how the *cartoneros* gave themselves different meanings in different settings and how it could differ from one person to another. For example, one of my other female informants, Rosita, emphasised the difference between the *cartoneros* and the garbage collectors, and not the garbage recyclers and scavengers as Lucía did. Hence, there equally exists a differentiation between the employed and the unemployed:

"We are not cartoneros. We are " recuperadores", or recyclable material collectors, and we should get paid the same salary as the workers at Cliba (commercial garbage company). We are garbage recyclers, but we are doing the garbage collectors job.

The citations and small case above shed light on how the *cartoneros* differentiate themselves. A *cartonero* is not just a mere *cartonero;* it obviously depends on the one who is making the judgement. A *cartonero* could be a scavenger or a garbage recycler and the status they receive not only depends on their involvement with garbage, but also whether they are organised in a cooperative or not. Consequently, it has been demonstrated that judgements and perceptions about the *cartoneros* is not merely happening from above and down, but that categorisation also is done amongst the *cartoneros* themselves.

"Changa" and dignity – reasoning about garbage life

"To some extent material deprivation can be alleviated through redistribution schemes (Welfare provision), but this does not address two additional elements of oppression that occur as a result of being marginalized: the dehumanising aspects of being dependent in advanced capitalist societies, and the lack of self– respect and usefulness that full participation in society both brings and valorises" (Waterstone 2010:424).
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Despite the stigma one can encounter as a *cartonero*, when global market downturns, restructuring or financial crises leads to plant closures, jobless workers who cannot find regular employment often turn to "shadow work" or informal survival activities such as scavenging. From this we can conclude that regardless of the stigmatisation involved in this sort of work, there are still many who choose to do it, and this is clearly the case in Argentina. In Buenos Aires today the self-employed, self-organised *cartoneros* are doing the city's dirty work, and they are amongst the few who are currently preventing the entirety of the waste from going to the landfill. I found that there exists no single explanation as to why people choose a life of garbage picking, but it is clear that environmental consciousness is not very prominent in Buenos Aires. As seen previously, almost all of the *cartonero* informants emphasised the economical factor as the main reason as to why they started scavenging or recycling garbage.

Still, there are several other important reasons as to why they preferred scavenging to "changa" [unstable work], prostitution or stealing. Self-respect, dignity and the ability to keep a job, were of particular importance. The feelings of being useful and participating in one's own society are reasons that should not be overlooked. Feelings of usefulness and complete participation were important to the *cartoneros*. These feelings made them feel worthy of something and gave their work meaning. Usefulness and social participation can also contribute to the alleviation of some of the concerns and challenges of being part of a marginalised group as Waterstone argues in the quote above.

It can be seen as a paradox that those who actually recycle in Buenos Aires and therefore contribute to environmental conservation do not actually care about doing so. Environmental concern or awareness was not one of the reasons that were mentioned often. Although Sebastian, an organised *cartonero* employed at

the cooperative El Ceibo, emphasised the environmental aspect in one of our many conversations:

"I want to take care of the environment, it means a lot to me. It makes me feel good. I know that I am contributing to clean air, and that I contribute to less pollution".

However there are several other factors that were stressed as far more important than environmental concern in the *cartoneros*' choice of work. Evidently, as stated before, the economical factor was the most important reason for why somebody chose a life in garbage. The fact that collecting or sorting garbage could maintain the *cartoneros* with a stable income made it more satisfactory and dignified than other types of irregular and illegal jobs. Several of the informants stressed the element of having *"a stable income to rely on"*. And this is something that the cooperatives I talked to were noticeably very proud of. The following comments are from my conversations with the cooperative, El Ceibo and COPACYT.

"In many different cities in the world, the environmental work that we are doing is handled by great, big enterprises supported by the government. Our government does not pay us anything, and still we are managing to maintain work and a stable income for over 100 families".

"We give jobs to people that really want to work. We employ youth that has been addicted to drugs; we give them a way out, and the possibility to make decent money. We rehabilitate people. We rehabilitate the kids that have been to jail and which society rejects. We give them a new chance, a chance to feel useful in society".

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A verification of that one was contributing to something good for someone else, was important to many of my informants. The quotations demonstrate additional motivations, besides a stable and reliable income for working in the recycling industry. Work ethic, dignity and solidarity were among the factors frequently mentioned. In accordance with the comment above, made from one of the employed *cartoneros* at El Ceibo*;* work ethic and the fact that an organised *cartonero* was seen to have a sense of duty and morality, also motivated people. This not only motivated people to collect garbage, but also to organise themselves. Thus, in accordance with the findings earlier in the chapter and the differentiation happening between the *cartoneros*, it seemed like garbage recycling were preferable to scavenging. Moreover, the quotations demonstrate the importance of feeling useful, either to someone else, in line with solidarity, or useful to the society in general. Feelings of a contribution to the local society in form of cleaning the streets or helping young kids helped to give the *cartoneros* feelings of dignity. The following citations from two of my main informants, Antonio and Rosita, further demonstrate the importance of a socially meaningful job and that full social participation are just as important as the economic rationale.

" I like it. I like this job because it makes me feel useful. I clean the streets, and I take care of the environment. I do something beneficial to society and at the same time I make money. And that makes me feel good. What makes me feel good is being employed…. knowing I am good at something" [Antonio].

"In the past they [the upper and middle class] looked at us as poor little things, but now they look at us as entrepreneurs" [Rosita].

We see that to Rosita this was no longer just a job; suddenly it made her feel important and appreciated. During several of my conversations with Rosita, it

was revealed that she felt that they [the *cartoneros*] had, in the eyes of the upper and middle class residents in Palermo, transformed themselves from a marginalised and pitied group, to initiators of a recycle campaign. Hence, she felt that their presence in the neighbourhood and their routine procedure to collect garbage had contributed to a better relation between the upper and middle class residents and the *cartoneros*. I argue that this does not undermine the stigmatisation process demonstrated earlier; but that it only illustrates that various perceptions and experiences can happen simultaneously. The citation from Julia, the female doctor living in Palermo, underlines what Rosita was saying and the concurrently perceptions.

"People look down on them, and see their line of work as denigrating. I on the other hand look up to them…they are working people, and they have found a way to survive the 2001 crisis. There are whole families that are cartoneros, and I think it is admirable but hard work. They are part of our society and a part of what we generate as a society".

This statement confirms what we have seen from previous statements from Julia, where she argued that she experienced negative assumptions, and thus a stigmatisation process towards the *cartoneros*. In this statement she confirms this, but simultaneously she emphasises the fact that she, on the other hand, admires and looks up to them. In line with Rosita's quotation, it demonstrates an improved perception of the *cartoneros* and as Rosita states, this may have something to do with the introduction of organised recycling in the neighbourhood. Although, I must stress that during my time spent it Buenos Aires, it was only Julia who talked about the *cartoneros* in such an admiring way, and are therefore just one woman's view, and not general opinions amongst my informants.

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During my time as participant observer I understood that collecting garbage often were chosen as a preference to other lines of work or activities. Frequently I heard comments, which stated that it was better to collect garbage than "to prostitute one self", or "to beg in the streets" or " to rob people". Changa was one type of economical activity that was often mentioned as something worse than scavenging. Changa is irregular and unstable work where you receive your salary on a day-to-day basis, and it can consist of everything from administrative work to painting someone's house. This line of work is very insecure and you can never be sure if you have work the next day. There appeared to be a lot of stigmatisation attached to *changa.* Hence, several of my informants preferred scavenging to *changa.* At least scavenging was perceived as *"decent and honourable"*. Antonio, a 34-year-old *cartonero,* working at the cooperative El Ceibo, exemplified this further in our conversation about his earlier experiences with *changa*:

"With changa, they hire you for a couple of days, and then they fire you. And then maybe another hires you for a month or something…. before he fires you. And they laugh at you, and discriminate against you".

Summary

This chapter has further explored the life and experiences of a *cartonero* and explored some of the motivations for choosing a life within the garbage economy. It has investigated the interconnectedness between the lower and upper and middle class level, and has shown how the upper and middle class inhabitants perceived and experienced the *cartoneros*, and finally how the *cartoneros* perceive themselves. The chapter has established the correlation between the *cartoneros* and garbage as dirt. Empirical cases and statements have demonstrated how the upper and middle class residents' negative assumptions

and associations of the *cartoneros* and waste influence the way in which the *cartoneros* are perceived. Consequently, the closer the correlation between the *cartonero* and the garbage, the lower the status the person receives and the more stigmatisation he/she can experience. Additionally, the chapter focused on the *cartoneros* as a contested category and demonstrated how even amongst the *cartoneros* themselves they perceived and interpreted each other differently. From the outside the *cartoneros* were seen as a homogonous group who were directly compared with the garbage they were handling, and the scavengers and the garbage recyclers were understood to belong to the same group. However, when examined from the inside, this turned out to not be the case. The garbage recyclers similarly differentiated amongst themselves. The job as a scavenger was more demeaning than a job as organised garbage recycler. Finally, the chapter explored the ambivalence felt amongst the *cartoneros* in regards to their own work. On the one hand, it was experienced as a stigmatising and shameful job, but on the other, the *cartoneros* took pride in their work, since in the end, it was better than alternative criminal activities. Moreover, the work made them feel dignified and useful, and we saw that simultaneously with the stigmatisation process, there was some admiration of the *cartoneros* amongst the upper and middle class residents. The following chapter will further investigate the local actors involvement in the social life of waste. Only, now it will be examined from an upper and middle class level, and explore their motivations for recycling.

5. Why Recycle?

It is with garbage as it is with housework: you do not notice it until the regularity of it does not function properly. Since most northern countries do not experience completely dysfunctional waste systems, and are already used to sorting their garbage in different containers of, for example paper, plastic and metals, most people do not appreciate or consider the organisation and structuring of waste. Nevertheless, there are many southern countries that struggle with achieving an environmentally friendly, well organised and functional waste system. Argentina does not have an institutionalised recycling program in the same degree as many European countries. As a result, I experienced that a lot less people recycle at home because recycling was not enforced by the government, they lacked information on how to do it or they did not see it as lucrative, since *"it all ended up in the same container anyway"* (stated by José, a forty one year old architect during an interview in his home). Subsequently, most of the waste separation was done by the *cartoneros.*

As demonstrated throughout this thesis, it is not sufficient to investigate only the organisation of garbage companies or the sorting stations and their function, nor just the *cartoneros* and their motivations for recycling. It is equally important to explore the whole social life of waste. Therefore, this chapter explores the third research question, which asks; why do the upper – and middle class residents choose to recycle? It examines the upper and middle class' recycling practices and demonstrates how culture, here in form of religious and political values, influence people's will to recycle. In the previous chapter it was demonstrated that amongst the *cartoneros*, environmental consciousness as a reason for why they chose to work in the recycling industry was not very prominent. This chapter will explore the motivations for recycling amongst the upper and middle class residents. In order to explore why people choose to recycle, and if and how

much environmental concern is emphasised, I chose to analyse two specific cultural aspects, namely political and religious values. The empirical cases examine the Argentinean culture of politics and religion and how it influences the residents' attitude and behaviour towards recycling and waste management.

Cultural determinants to environmental awareness and recycling behaviour

Earlier research done on how environmental awareness and behaviour can be culturally related reveals, that if one overlooks how a society relates to environmental issues without looking at the cultural influence, one can miss out on important elements. In accordance with Agrawal thid chapter question the presumption that environmental action emanates from environmental concern (Agrawal, 2005), and looks deeper in to the cultural reasons for environmental action. The work of Hal Wilhite, where he investigates energy behaviour in the two different cultures of Norway and Japan, demonstrates how energy culture influence energy behaviour by arguing that a simple change in electricity prices would not be enough to change people's energy behaviour. His study demonstrates that Norwegians are concerned with lighting in their homes so that they can have a "cozy" time, while the Japanese use a lot of electricity upholding the historic tradition of bathing. Consequently, he concludes, a cultural change is equally needed in order to modify energy behaviour (Wilhite; 2001). Tanja Winther exemplifies the influence of culture within the technological solutions to environmental and development issues, and shows us the importance of cultural consideration when introducing new technology. During her fieldwork to Zanzibar, Tanzania, she experienced and observed the introduction of electricity, and learned that introducing new technology does not always have the implications one may first assume. She witnessed a change in the inhabitants' cooking habits but learned that this was not altered because electricity simplified their cooking, but because the introduction of electricity lead to increased time watching TV and essentially less hours spent on cooking (Winther, 2005).

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Inspired by Wilhite and Winther, I investigated the cultural influence on environmental behaviour within waste management and recycling in Buenos Aires.

Cultural definitions

Culture is a very complex and dynamic concept (Allen and Thomas, 2000), and therefore in order to be very clear about the use of the concept in this thesis, I will start by giving a clarification of different definitions of the term. Geertz emphasised culture as the search for meaning, and understood the function of culture as to impose meaning on the world and make it understandable. His work used elements of a phenomenological approach and the practice of thick description, which means not just looking at what people were doing but looking at the cultural elements themselves and in that way try to explain the reasons behind human behaviour. For example, if within a group of people winking were a communicative gesture, he would first try to determine what kinds of things a wink might represent. Then, he would try to find out in what kinds of contexts the wink were used and if this would differ from culture to culture (Geertz 1973).

As Geertz, the anthropological definition listed by Bocock is also concerned with describing and understanding different cultures. Within this approach, culture is understood as the meanings, values and ways of life of a particular group. In accordance with Bocock's definition of culture, this thesis will place emphasis on defining culture as social practices and values that produce change. This definition draws on the work of the French anthropologist Lévi-Strauss and the term structuralism. Structuralism states that human culture is to be understood as a system of signs and values, and that by analysing these signs or values, it is possible to reveal the underlying structure and norms of a culture (Schech and Haggis, 2000).

The main example in this thesis is the small recycling culture in Palermo. Palermo is a district dominated by an enlightened upper and middle class, who clearly have a social consciousness. Most of the people living there have good jobs and more than descent incomes. The neighbourhood is mostly inhabited by artists and by academics with a political background from the left wing, namely Peronism.[10] During the last ten years, the recycling culture in Palermo has experienced great changes in waste structures. The residents have become more involved in sorting the waste at home before it is handed over to the garbage recyclers. As a product of the door-to-door activity done by El Ceibo, more and more neighbours sort for example cardboard, paper, glass and metal in their homes. In the late nineteen nineties, El Ceibo started a massive recycling campaign aimed at changing people's sorting behaviour in their own homes. The garbage recycler walks around the neighbourhood several days a week and collects the already sorted waste directly from households. Our earlier meetings with Lucía have illustrated the personal aspect of these routes through the neighbourhood. The increase in *cartoneros* since the crisis in 2001 influenced the upper and middle class perceptions of scavenging. Suddenly it became evident that unemployment could strike anyone at anytime and accordingly the empathy with the poor and unemployed rose. Consequently, the empirical cases and analyses below reveals that it was not environmental concern that motivated the upper and middle class to recycle. Instead, it was religious and political values that were part of changing the waste management and recycling structure.

This chapter has so far investigated the meanings and definitions of culture and it has argued that culture is actively and reciprocally influencing society and our environmental concerns. Retaining a conception of culture can be valuable if it directs our attention to the interconnections between things, and since the main purpose of this thesis is to examine the roles and experiences of different sets of

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[10] Information received by Kristi Anne Stølen, through personal contact.

actors who are involved in the production and processing of waste, it proved important to explore the cultural influence on waste management. Or more specifically as in this chapter, the cultural influence on recycling behaviour. I found it important not to study only waste management in practice, but to examine the social practices and perceptions in the local community as a way to discover the motivations behind recycling.

Pros and cons

I found that there existed no single explanation as to why people in Buenos Aires chose to sort through their garbage before handing it over to the *cartoneros*. Politics, religion and their social environment were important factors in influencing how people responded to and thought about recycling. It demonstrates that the way we treat garbage depends on who we are, what our backgrounds are like, where we live, what we do and how we respond to different impulses. When asked about their reasons for not recycling, informants provided many different answers. Five out of the twelve who said they did not recycle claimed to not do so because they did not see the relevance. Other informants emphasised that they did not recycle because *"it all ended up in the same container anyway",* or stated, as the informants quoted below, that there was a general lack of information. Kati, a 27-year-old assistant teacher for deaf children stated:

"I do not know how to do it."

Or as Eva, a 61-year-old chief nurse at a private clinic said:

"There is not much awareness about waste separation. Basically because most homes, shops and restaurants lack knowledge about how to do it and the significance of giving people a job in recycling; instead there is much discrimination".

Seven out of nineteen upper and middle class informants stated that they recycled, subsequently less than half of the group. Naturally, I asked several of my friends and acquaintances throughout the city if they were recycling, but very few said that they recycled any materials besides perhaps paper. I suggest that the lack of information and recycling implementation could be part of the reason as to why so few of my informants and friends recycled.

When the informants who did recycle were asked about their motivations for waste sorting, they too provided many different answers. What they considered most relevant often depended on their political and religious environments. For example, only one middle class female informant emphasised environmental concern as her main motivation, while most other informants were more likely to emphasise such motivations as values of sympathy and poverty relief.

Consider, for instance, Victoria's comment from an interview:

"I do worry about what is happening to the environment, but I mostly separate garbage because I think about the people involved".

Victoria, the 32-year-old seamstress, was by no means the only one praising the environment; yet most other informants disregarded the environmental factor and
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placed emphasis on empathising with the *cartoneros*. Throughout the interviews with the upper and middle class who did recycle, the empathetic considerations were widespread and reiterating – consider, for example, the following statements:

Carlos: *"They are collecting what this society generates. And that is admirable, but I think it is hard seeing them because they make poverty so evident.... it is right there in front of your eyes. I see them at night, during winter, in the cold weather...carrying their kids...their hands purple because of the cold. It breaks my heart. It is really difficult to see that people are suffering like that and have to do that to be able to survive".*

Victoria: *"We are lacking education and information, and we are not accustomed to recycling. But we do it because we want the cartoneros to have another opportunity besides being criminal. We want to help them. In this way I can contribute to them having an option outside of robbing people and using drugs".*

The two latter comments bring us back to some of the reasons given by the *cartoneros* for choosing a life as a garbage picker. Namely the lack of better options, and the fact that it was at least better to sort through garbage than to participate in criminal activities. By implication, I demonstrate that it is for the same reasons the upper and middle class bothered to recycle.

The following comment of an 18-year-old garbage recycler, Marcelo, underlines and supports the comments above.

"The lady on Honduras Street waits for me with a "matecido" (hot beverage prepared with yerba), and the other lady on Cordoba Street usually give me a "alfajor" (a cookie). Sometimes they also give me shoes, clothes or other useful items. They are really good to me".

I argue that amongst the upper and middle class there were simultaneous processes of stigmatisation and solidarity towards the *cartoneros, w*ith none of the processes excluding the other. As demonstrated earlier and as Eva was quoted on above, the *cartoneros* experienced negative attitudes and their work was categorised as demeaning. However, there were many of my informants who stressed the element of solidarity and who did not intuitively compare the marginalised and discriminated group with something terrifying and negative. Instead I witnessed, heard and experienced feelings of sympathy amongst the upper and middle class residents. Poverty relief and the thought of helping those less fortunate than themselves were important reasons for why they recycled. The economic crisis in 2001 built up under this line of thinking, since the main difference between before and after was that the *cartoneros* gained public sympathy as people realised how easily they could find themselves forced into the same unstable situation. But where does this empathy come from? What are the contributing factors to the notion that helping the poor is so essential? I argue that the Catholic idea of working towards your own salvation by doing good and historical political values of social commitment has influenced several of my upper and middle class informants' motivations to recycle.

Recycling, religion and repentance

Catholicism is the main religion in Argentinean society today and there are an estimated 33 million baptised Catholics in Argentina (Source). The Catholic Church teaches that, immediately after death, the soul of each person will receive

a particular judgment from God, based on the deeds of that person's earthly life (ibid.). The weight of this coming judgment encourages the believers to behave in manners, which will ensure them entrance to heaven. Consequently, doing good and caring for others becomes especially important since such behaviour can contribute to eternal life. I experienced through participant observation, hanging out with friends and interviews, that religion still was considered very essential in my friends and informants' everyday life, and that, surprisingly, this was what many of my upper and middle class informants considered as the main motivation for recycling. So how does this work? How can religion be the main motivation for environmental concern and thus recycling? The explanation lies in the characteristics and beatitudes of Catholicism, in unity with the reasons given by the upper and middle class.

The Catholic idea of working towards your own salvation by doing good is strongly embedded in the Catholic characteristics. The saying goes that *"Protestants eat well, while Catholics sleep well"* (Weber, 1905; 41) and thus implies that Protestants are more concerned with materialism and high standard living than Catholics. Max Weber, in his book "The Protestant Ethic and Spirit of Capitalism" describes the typical Catholic as more frugal, modest, quieter and preferable to a life in security (Weber, 1905). Zygmunt Baumann argues that Catholicism gives an especially important function to its poor (Baumann, 2005). The poor are considered to be like everyone else – an indispensable link to God and a part of Gods creation (ibid.), and therefore should be treated as everybody else: with respect. However, Baumann states that the suffering of the poor has a more specific function; namely as repentance for original sin. The idea was that Catholics could, through helping those who suffered, receive a clear consciousness and subsequently be one step closer to a direct entrance to heaven.

"The presence of the poor was God's gift to everybody else, an occasion to practice self-sacrifice, to live a virtuous life, to repent sins and earn heavenly bliss" (Baumann, 2005; 109).

Pablo, a 47-year-old priest, differentiates between Protestantism and Catholicism and underlines Baumann's argument about the poor and their role as repentance for the upper and middle class.

"In Protestantism the chosen one is the one who makes progress, the one who has the most goods and the one who makes progress is the one that can consume the most, while the Catholic beatitudes are about being poor and learning to live with what you have".

I argue that since religion is still given such an important role in Buenos Airean society, the different characteristics of Catholicism will influence the conscience of a believer. The corner stone of Catholicism is the motivation of being good to ones neighbour out of love and a pure heart. Consequently, one can expect God to have mercy with the ones who live by his commandments. Hence, they choose to help the poor by recycling and thus giving them better and various options.

Politicised societies – Peronism and social commitment

Peronism arose in the 1940s and is still the leading political ideology of Argentina. It is equally loved as it is hated, and includes everything from socialism, fascism, capitalism and liberalism (Borello, 1991). Peronism is named after the militant Juan Perón who was elected president in 1946 with the promise of " building the new Argentina". What was so special about peronism was that the basis of power was located in the working class and that it was dominated by both genders – Juan and Evita. Peronism was a national movement that aimed towards independence. Its core element was social justice (Nymark, 2008).

Evita is still remembered for her social commitment, and it is said that she received people at her office until four or five in the morning to help solve their problems: everything from ill parents to unemployment (Borello, 1991). I argue that one can see echoes of peronism and Evitas solidarity with the poor throughout the city of Buenos Aires today. Through own experiences, I witnessed a very politicised society, where political discussions happened almost all the time. When I was out drinking coffee with friends, they discussed politics, when going on the bus I overheard political discussions, in a taxi, the taxi driver would almost undoubtedly start to talk about politics. Not least the universities were very politicised, where it seemed that every student belonged to at least one student organisation. During my fieldwork, I did not specifically interview people about their political sympathies, but I talked to several of the students about it, and they were all in varying degree engaged with politics. Because of a long history of peronist academics, one can see post peronist generations today. The ideologies of peronism have through history transferred from one generation to another and especially amongst the intellectual types.

The neighbourhood of Palermo, as illustrated earlier, is home to many of the upper and middle class residents. The characteristics of the people living there are that they are often academics, artists or designers, and they have often a critical eye on society. The residents of Palermo are known for being classical left winged sympathisers, namely Peronistas. [11] Therefore I will argue that it is very probable that my informants adhered to peronism too. In accordance with this, I furthermore argue that since it has been demonstrated that social justice and commitment were imperative elements in the movement of Peronism and since Peronism is still considered the leading ideology of Argentina I argue that it influences people on a daily basis. Hence, I argue that it serves as an additional

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[11] In English: Peronists

motivator for the residents when taking on responsibility for those less fortunate than them selves.

Summary

This chapter has examined the upper and middle class' recycling practices and has argued that environmental consciousness is not an important consideration when it comes to what motivates the upper and middle class residents to recycle. Instead we discovered that culture, in the form of religious and political values influences people's motivations. The chapter demonstrated that it is simply not enough to examine recycling in practice if one attempts to discover the reasons as to why some people choose to recycle. On the basis of the argumentation and empirical cases above, I argue the necessity to address the cultural aspect in order to reveal the real motivations behind recycling. To initiate better recycling systems throughout the city of Buenos Aires it would not be enough to inform the residents about the mere practicalities of sorting waste, but it could be helpful to emphasise the residents' empathy with the poor.

Waste seperation in the outskirts of Buneos Aires

6. Garbage as politics

The argument that environmental concern is not the main drive behind recycling and waste management in Buenos Aires has been explicitly addressed throughout this thesis. Thus, whereas the focus so far has been on waste management and the relationship between the *cartoneros* and the upper and middle class, this chapter will have a more macro-structural perspective on waste management, with its main focus on the link between the *cartoneros* and the state. Since the main purpose of this thesis is to examine the roles and experiences of different sets of actors who are involved in the production and processing of waste, I decided that it was important to explore waste from different perspectives amongst the residents, and additionally from different social levels. This chapter explores the fourth and final research question; namely, what are the local barriers to recycling? In order to examine this question a macro-structural focus was needed, as I quickly learnt that most of the barriers were related to the practices and policies of the government. It was unanimous amongst the cooperatives located throughout the city that a better and more efficient recycling system was needed and that the waste sorting starting in households would make their work more efficient. In order to uncover the hidden barriers to more efficient and better recycling systems, this chapter will examine the relation between the *cartoneros* and the state. As the case below illustrates, I was into my fieldwork only a few days before I discovered that the relationship between the municipal government and the cooperatives /*cartoneros* was often dysfunctional and strained.

Demonstrations outside the City Council for Environmental and Social Rights (El Gobierno de la Ciudad del Ambiente y Espacio Público).

Santilli – be hold!

One Monday in October I turned up as usual at the El Ceibo cooperative. There was a lot of activity going on and it was obvious that something was about to happen. The cartoneros were talking loud and moving to and fro all the time. They were smoking and drinking maté more heavily than usual. I was quite confused when entering the old, tired building, and very curious about what was about to take place. It was soon explained that we were going to demonstrate at

the City Council for Environmental and Social Rights (El Gobierno de la Ciudad del Ambiente y Espacio Público).

Some of us, a few of the cartoneros that did not have to work and I, pressed ourselves into a taxi and headed off to meet the other cooperatives from around the city. We all met up at the corner of Rivadavia and Florida, in the downtown area. People showed up with drums and homemade banners, and from there we walked over to the city council building. Once there, we divided ourselves into two groups. One stayed outside, trying to get as much attention as possible from both the public and the city council employees by pounding drums and shouting slogans. The aim of the noise was media attention. The other group entered the building and demanded to talk to the head minister of the Environment and Social Right Department. The present head minister was Diego Santilli, a man mainly known for his good looks. The garbage recyclers specifically told the employees that they had no intention of leaving until this demand was fulfilled.

The general concern, and why they demanded to see Santilli, was the promises they were made by the city council in 2008, promises that had not been fulfilled. The garbage recyclers around the city had been promised money, uniforms, trucks and other useful tools. Once inside, the atmosphere was very distinct from what I had imagined on my way going there. Evidently many of the city council employees and the garbage recyclers already knew each other well, and everybody started chatting and catching up on what had happened since the last time they saw each other. This was quite surprising to me, as I had expected that we would be thrown out immediately after entering the city council. It was obviously not the first time they were there demonstrating. Almost everybody working on the fifth floor stopped his or her activities when we occupied several of the offices on the floor. Soon all of the employees and the garbage recyclers were sharing maté and smoking while they were waiting for Santilli to arrive.

And so the hours went by with nothing really happening, except all the noise that the others were making outside.

At first I found it all extremely interesting. I had several questions I wanted to ask and spent time talking to many of the people present; but after nine or ten hours of demonstrating, I must admit my interest faded some. And I could imagine how it might be for those who did this on a regular basis. And I was told that this demonstration was very short lived!

Joking aside, the cartoneros frequently stage demonstrations like this without achieving their demands. The demonstrations rarely lead to big changes or allocation of the objects much needed and demanded. The lack of subsequent actions from the city council forces the garbage recyclers to repeat the procedure on various occasions. Finally, the garbage recyclers decided to go to Santillis´ office without an appointment. Unfortunately, I was not allowed to tag along, since they had been told that he would only see one or two at that time. A few days later I asked Rosita if they had heard anything, or if they had achieved anything at the meeting. Not so unexpectedly, she replied: "Nothing really happened, we did not get anywhere with him [Diego Santilli], the head minister only thinks about himself".

The empirical case above demonstrates the ongoing conflict between the garbage recyclers, cooperatives and the state. Although none of the informants distinguished between the different levels of government as illustrated by the quoted informant below, I will from now on focus primarily on the municipal government when addressing the relation between the *cartoneros* and the Argentinean state. The case illustrates the cooperatives' constant struggle with the municipal government for more money to cover the operative cost of their work. As demonstrated earlier, it is the *cartoneros* who handle 11 per cent of the

4,500 tonnes of waste recycled in Buenos Aires every day (Baille et al., 2010). Even though they do almost all of the recycling throughout the capital, it seemed as though the cooperatives lacked governmental support. The conflict is further exemplified in the following citation from Antonio:

"We [the cartoneros] do not want the government to bury the material that can help us generate our own salary. The government wants everything to be buried and thereby keep poor people out of a job".

Antonio refers to the frequently stated argument that most of the waste collected by the private or state owned garbage companies were actually sent directly to various land fillings in the provinces. Additionally, other informants added that the waste was often collected before the *cartoneros* even had a chance to sort through the garbage and collect what was valuable to them. Consequently, the result is higher unemployment rates for the *cartoneros,* and less recycling in general.

In accordance with these statements, various other *cartonero* informants and different NGOs such as Greenpeace and Waste for Life argued that the laws and policies passed were not being implemented as they had hoped, and that the new government administration was showing dangerous attempts to cut citizens' participation by incinerating municipal waste. Rumours suggested that the municipal government was more interested in saving money and winning votes than actually trying to fulfil their commitments towards recycling and the *cartoneros*. Private companies were chosen above the *cartoneros* when negotiating contracts related to waste management in the city, and it turned out that most of the waste was incinerated instead of making use of the *cartoneros'* manpower and skills. This chapter will now further elaborate on the different

challenges the cooperatives met in their efforts to improve their own situation. It will first investigate more thoroughly the ongoing conflict between the *cartoneros* and the local government through the eyes of the scholar Veronica Paíva, and the NGO Greenpeace, before moving on to a presentation of different policies and laws for waste management, which the municipal government intended to but in practice failed to implement.

Recycling strategies and good intentions

After the crisis in 2001 the subject of *cartoneros* was seen on the political agenda once again. The public, the middle class and the media were some of the actors involved in focusing attention on the negative aspects of garbage collection and thereby forcing politicians to react. As illustrated earlier, the upper and middle class simultaneously stigmatised and sympathised with the *cartoneros*. Nevertheless, directly after the crisis it was mostly empathy that dominated the relationship, as here explained by the sociologist Veroníca Paiva:

"It was the vulnerable economic position and lack of social support structures, together with a new awareness amongst the middle class that brought about the incentives. Suddenly, it was obvious that no one was out of danger and that they all could easily find themselves in the same unstable and insecure situation".

The municipal government felt itself forced into action because of the massive attention given to the *cartoneros* from the middle class and the media (Baillie et al., 2010). Consequently the municipal government passed several laws for the benefit and protection of the poor and other people affected by the economic crisis. For example, the municipal government launched a campaign encouraging residents to separate recyclables in green bags so that *cartoneros* would not have

to rifle through rotten food. Additionally, it started offering vaccinations to protect against tetanus (Baillie et al., 2010). Several laws have been passed, but, as will be demonstrated later, the implementation of these are not being followed up on as first promised. Because the laws both could and should have represented a significant improvement for the *cartoneros* and their working conditions, I will give a short introduction to two of the most important laws regulating waste management and recycling.

The 1854 law - Zero Waste law [Basura Cero]

In 2005, the municipal government of Buenos Aires unanimously passed "Integral Management Of Solid Urban Waste," a Zero Waste law. Greenpeace, among others, was an effective actor involved in implementing the Zero Waste law, which sets goals and milestones to reduce the volume of municipal solid waste going to landfill disposal. The first milestone was a 30 percent reduction of waste to landfill by 2010, which should have been followed by a 50 percent reduction by 2012, and a 75 percent reduction by 2017. The law bans land filling of recyclable and compostable waste by 2020. The law was passed in 2008 after much pressure from numerous cooperatives in the city. The coming about of this law will be demonstrated in one of my conversations with Pepe, when talking about conflicts between the municipal government, private companies, the cooperatives and the *cartoneros*. The overall aim of the 1.854 law is to decrease waste generated in households, to only send waste with no further value to landfill sites and to encourage residents to separate waste at home (Baille et al., 2010).

The 992 law

This law aims to increase awareness and subsequently the status of the *cartoneros* through public education and legalisation of the activities of the *cartoneros*, especially for those over the age of 18, in affect reducing child labour. Additionally, the law aims to provide welfare support for informal workers, including healthcare and training. It also states that it aims to provide the *cartoneros* greater "ownership" over waste. The five private and one public collection companies are thought to collect separated waste from households and communal bins and deliver it to one of the six Green Points, as mentioned above. At the Green Points, cooperatives of *cartoneros* will separate and process recyclables and sell them on to industry (Baille et al., 2010).

After a short introduction to the two laws above, it is clear that a full and successful implementation of the laws would have made significant changes in the lives of the *cartoneros.* Greater ownership over waste would have especially contributed to an improved situation, with clearer boundaries and better opportunities to operate directly with middlemen and therefore increase income.

Yet another promise, yet another conflict

At first glance it can appear from the discussions above, as though the informal labour market is viewed as a problem rather than a solution to garbage collection. Yet, through further investigation I discovered that the municipal government, in addition to passing laws concerning recycling, has in fact been debating different solutions to formalisation. The aim of formalisation was to improve the working conditions of the *cartoneros*. Three different solutions were debated; a door-to-door collection, where the neighbourhood is involved in separation; a legal registration of the *cartoneros*; and employment through Green Points. The only problem I discovered was that this debate had been going on since 2001 and not

much has happened since then. Nevertheless, the postulated solutions were an ongoing debate and something, which if implemented in the future could contribute to great improvements for the *cartoneros.*

The first solution suggests that all *cartoneros* should be a member of a cooperative, and that a door-to-door collection should be set up within all of the neighbourhoods in Buenos Aires. The main goal is for the residents to start the waste separation process in their own households, before the garbage recyclers collect the waste either directly at the doors or in the streets. The main challenge with this solution is that there are many scavengers that do not wish to organise themselves. Some of my informants explained that they did not wish to be a part of a cooperative because of the much needed flexibility that was given when working on their own. The flexibility of choosing one's own work hours meant that one could combine scavenging with other kinds of income generating activities.

The second suggested solution to formalise and thus improve the *cartoneros* situation is a legal registration programme. Here the *cartoneros* would be given an ID card that legalises their work. Unfortunately, there appeared to be additional challenges related to this solution. According to the NGO, Waste for life[12], the scavengers are not overtly interested in this, since they would be forced to spend a large amount of time queuing in order to get the registration done. That would mean spending time waiting in line; time which otherwise could be spent outside working. In addition, the process of filling out the registration form is not something that is suitable to all members of the informal systems, since many cannot read or write properly (Baille et al., 2010). However, none of my

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[12] Waste for life – is a non-governmental organisation, is a loosely joined network of scientists, engineers, educators, architects, artists, designers, and cooperatives working together to develop poverty-reducing solutions to specific environmental problems.

cartonero informants said that they had seen any of these registration forms, nor had very few of them heard of it. Consider for instance Rosita's comment from an interview about the municipals government's promises:

"The government promised we would receive documents which would make us formal workers, but they have not showed up yet. That is one of the many things the government promised, but they never keep their promises. The thing is...I am old, and what if I die some day [....] What will my children do? They will be left on the streets".

The quotation elucidates two of the many worries that *cartoneros* have. The continuing breach of promises from the municipal government to contribute to their struggle for an improved life makes it difficult for the *cartoneros* and the cooperatives to trust the municipal government. Secondly, a frequently rhetorically asked question from the *cartoneros* was 'what would happen to their children and what kind of future would they have if things continued as present'. It was evident that all of my *cartonero* informants wanted a change for the better and wished for the government to deliver on their promises.

The third solution looks to Green Points as a way to organise and formalise the informal work. The challenge with this is that only one Green Point is up and running today. The municipal government is planning to open six Green Points, but each Green Point will only be able to employ about two hundred *cartoneros* of the several tens of thousands of [13] *cartoneros* working in the streets of Buenos Aires. It seems as though this system is already suffering from weak implementation and delays.

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[13] Numbers vary

Lack of belief in the government

The official government website[14] provides large amounts of information about the waste management programs and recycling initiatives. As just demonstrated, the municipal government took on an active role in initiating a recycling system and improving the informal work situation of the *cartoneros*. However, their overall aims, their degree of involvement and their achievements in regards to the planned programs are evasive. In recent years the municipal government has taken action to reduce the amount of waste going into land fillings and in this sense it has been promoting recycling. Nonetheless, as the empirical cases below will show, the achievements, results and implementations have been long yearned for and yet to be seen. The municipal government and the private companies' lack of determination and implementation were exemplified in an interview with Professor Caroline Baille on the implementation of the Zero Waste law:

"Though, on the surface, this [the Zero Waste law] appears to be a desirable outcome, its consequences for most cartoneros whose livelihood depends upon collecting recyclables are potentially problematic. It will be impossible for the government to professionalise the work of the thousands of informal workers and absorb them into "legitimate" workforce in order to fulfil Zero garbage".

This was further exemplified in the interview with Luis, one of the employees at Greenpeace. The NGO was continuously lobbying the municipal government in order to see the law passed:

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[14] http://www.buenosaires.gov.ar/areas/med_ambiente/

"As I see it, the intended recycling laws are not properly implemented. The implementation is done through custom and through regulation. They [the government do not participate much.

Me: *So what happened in the case of the Zero Waste law?*

"The law was passed in 2005 but there were two obstacles. First, the law needed to be regulated before it could be applied, and a proposition was required. And second, it was matter of budget. After a period of delay, the municipal government called for a new proposition, which should substitute the old one. But as the "Basura Cero" [Zero Waste law] regulation was passed, the government decided to keep the old proposition, namely the one that contracted the private companies to collect waste and take it directly to the land fillings. The administration in office did not have the budget tools required to apply this law. [...] thus, the law was not applied because it was not possible... there were too many people with opposed interests who made the whole process complicated and the regulation delayed. It was delayed more than a year and a half. The other problem was budget. There was no budget. The administration did not have the essentials to apply it. The administration could not implement a program of separation at source if there was no possibility of profit from the collection of that material. It made no sense. Several things were tried. There were trial plans in different neighbourhoods [...] but what was lacking and has always lacked is public policy aiming at waste recovery: aiming at re-using waste. It does not exist this public policy... it has always been a last ditch effort or things have been done carelessly. Here we say "jueguito para la tribuna" meaning that, by playing with the ball just to show off, you do not win the match, you just get the audience to applaud. You pretend you are doing things but in the end you are doing nothing".

Time went by and in 2008[15] the present Macri administration replaced the sitting administration. Macri, and, clearly, the policy towards recycling changed. The 1854 law [Zero Waste law] was demolished and something, which I will never understand, happened: the cooperatives were given sole responsibility for everything having to do with recycling. This administration wanted to return to the old proposition. Incentives were initiated to collect waste, paying them by ton etc. Greenpeace opposed this and we managed to propose a new proposition, which has not been applied yet. Our new proposition is divided into two: one for humid waste, which will be catered by a company for certain amount of money; and the second, for dry waste, which will be catered by cooperatives.

The interview demonstrates that weak budgets and problems with implementation made the law fall through. None of the goals and milestones to reduce the volume of municipal solid waste going to landfill disposal have yet been fulfilled (Baille et al., 2010). Opposed interests, weak budgets and regulation resulted in a long delay and it now seems like most people have lost faith in its implementation. Furthermore, as public and media pressure diminished, so did the pressure on the government to take action.

"The government has no shame"

In November 2010, I met up with a young lawyer named Pepe. He was volunteering at the MTE [Movimiento de Trabajadores Excluidos], an organisation that aims to enhance the working and health conditions of the scavengers involved in its program. Since none of the scavengers wish to involve themselves in any of the governmental Green Points programs, the aim is legal formalisation of the scavenging activity.

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[15] The present municipal government with Mauricio Macri as governor assumed office in December 2007

Pepe: "In 2005, the contracts related to waste collection in Buenos Aires were renegotiated. The municipal government started subsidising several private waste companies by paying them 100 million pesos a year in order for them to start recycling. On a whole it cost the city hall administration around 1,200 million pesos a year. The contract was achieved through lobbying exerted by Greenpeace and other environmentalists groups. So during 2005-2007, the municipal government spent a fortune on a new recycling program, whose outcome was, in terms of tons of recyclable material, 400 tons a year, which actually is the quantity the cartoneros gather in less than a day. So, in the end, it was a contract between the municipal government and the private companies that cost the state more than 100 million pesos a year, and which only managed to recycle in a year less than recycled by cardboard collectors in a day. It was a fraud".

Me: "So the private companies and the municipal government did not complete its duties?

Pepe: "No, the companies were paid money to recycle, but they did not do it. They had a contract, which said they should recycle, but they did not do it, whereas the cartoneros did recycle, but did not get paid for it. It was a fraud. In 2007, the Macri administration takes over, a right wing neo liberal administration, which confronts the national government. So, because of this confrontation, the day after the new administration takes over the national government decides to withdraw " el tren blanco" [the white train]... well, the train stops working overnight. So, 1500 cartoneros lose their means of transporting their material out of the city and they lose their source of income. From that moment on and for almost two months there is a period of fighting: there are demonstrations, picket lines and some judiciary actions, where the strongest claim being the one about the contracts with the private companies".

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The organisation MTE works for better social and legal rights and its main tools are used to engage and arrange demonstrations and picketing. Since the municipal government falls through on its promises the *cartoneros* find themselves forced into taking matters into their own hands. The continuous promises by the municipal government about new policies and laws keep the *cartoneros* optimistic, even though, as many informants admitted, it *"felt hopeless most of the time"*. One garbage recycler, Lucas, pinned it down during an interview:

"They promise you equipment and better working conditions but they never keep their promises. One day they will promise you one thing, and they keep their promise for a couple of days, but then they forget all about it".

Or as another garbage recycler, a 55 year old employee at the Coopacyt cooperative, said almost shouting:

"This government has no shame!!!"

During interviews with the garbage companies themselves, it seemed that not even their own employees were convinced that recycling would be implemented in the city. During a conversation I had with one of the employees at CEAMSE while driving home, the employee admitted that there was little talk about recycling, least of all about the Zero Waste law. Furthermore, he admitted that recycling figures were inflated in statistics sent abroad, and he confirmed the rumours surrounding the grand scale waste incineration.

All of the empirical cases above demonstrate the municipal government's lack of will and accomplishment in their efforts to establish a well functioning recycling system in the city, and not least in their efforts to help the people affected by the 2001 crisis. Moreover, they have demonstrated that the lack of governmental will and action has had several negative implications and social effects on the life of the *cartoneros*. It remains to be understood what initiates the bad relation between the municipal government and the *cartoneros*. What are the contributing factors? And what happens within this context?

Distrust – influencing social life

According to sociologist Piotr Sztompka (1999) conflict between the state and its citizens can occur when trust is breached, such as when electoral promises are repeatedly not fulfilled. In place of trust, a relation of distrust between state and citizens can grow and this, as I demonstrate below, can and does produce social effects. I argue that in the Argentinean context, distrust has contributed to the creation of conflict between the *cartoneros* and the municipal government, and therefore has served as a barrier to improved local recycling. Rosita underlines the arguments of Sztompka about how trust can be breached on the basis of repeatedly unfulfilled electoral promises, and transfers them to her own situation and experiences:

"There is distrust towards the politicians, because we have people like the elected mayor, Mauricio Macri, who during his campaign promised an organised recycling system. In addition, he said that the cartoneros would be given uniforms and that social security programs and certain work regulations would be implemented. But now he has been in administration for some years, and he still has not completed ANYTHING!!!".

Statements like the one above from Rosita in regards to the municipal government and the politicians were by no means unique but rather frequently reported by informants during my fieldwork. Consider the following quotations from informants:

"We are sceptic about the politicians in this country. There is great distrust towards all administrations. The politicians promise a lot, but when the time comes to fulfil, they do not follow up. I cannot trust the politicians".

"I think distrust [desconfianza] has to do with the different governments and the administrations we have witnessed over the years. They do not commit to the task, and they do not focus on the important and necessary things: like the human factor, for instance, like poverty and people living on the streets. I do not see the politicians caring about them". [Middle class informant working in a shop located in Palermo].

The citations above confirm my argument about existing feelings of distrust towards the municipal government and again point to several challenges to trust they experience. So far this chapter has demonstrated that there exists a conflict between the *cartoneros* and the municipal government, and that there exist feelings of distrust and lack of belief in the words and intentions of the government from both the upper and middle class and the *cartoneros*. Now this chapter will turn in more detail to the theories of Sztompka in order to examine how this distrust occurs, why it does and what the results are.

According to Sztompka, insecurity and a feeling of distrust arises when certain societal structures, such as consistent social order, weak policy implementation and modest welfare services, are missing. Stzompka postulates a number of

different macro-structural conditions that enable and enhance both individual and collective trust. Conversely, when such structures are weak or absent, trust is difficult to build and maintain and distrust is likely to color or even dominate interactions between citizens and the state. Among the macro-structural conditions identified by Sztompka, the most relevant ones for the analysis that follows below are normative coherence accountability and stability of social order.

In conflict with normative coherence

On a very general level, the state of Argentina does have well functioning normative coherence. By normative coherence, Sztompka means complied laws and norms operating in the city, with legislative and judiciary branches enforcing moral and normative conduct. In Argentina, we do find legislative and judicial institutions that adhere to enforcing the laws passed. Still, as illustrated in my interview with Pepé below, and as stated by the majority of the informants, the citizens do experience corruption and law breaching sufficiently to feel insecurity and anger. This anger from betrayed trust became directed towards the government. A society without normative coherence i.e., where one cannot trust the government to abide by its own laws and procedures, will generate an insecure, disorderly and unpredictable society because the citizens live in an unpredictable state, where they never know what to expect. Or more distorting, they will never expect positive change from anyone but themselves.

In order to shed more light on the Buenos Airean situation and feelings of distrust, I return to my conversation with Pepé. After talking about weak implementation of the recycling laws and policies, we suddenly started to talk loosely about something completely different, namely our common interest in organisational life. Pepe explained how MTE were organised and how the

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cooperative came about. After a while, he started talking about something that was new to me:

Pepé: "There were lots of people working as scavengers after the 2001 crisis, many more than the ones who come into the city today. About 20,000 scavengers came into the city in ramshackle lorries or vans, along with their children. We organised "Ollas Populares", where people who almost had nothing could come and eat and have conversations and gossip with other people. "Ollas Populares" are large gatherings where food is cooked on the streets and is shared with everybody. And so a relationship started among the scavengers, activists, and middle class students, which ended up being this organization, MTE. This organisation is born basically out of a wish to fight the "mafias", which dominate business, namely the Federal Police Force and the Warehouse mafia, or "mafia de los Galponeros".

Me: Mafia? I asked. I had never heard talk about an Argentinean mafia before.

Pepé: "Yes, mafia. Organised crime you know. It is difficult to explain, but you must have heard about it here in Buenos Aires. Here the Federal Police Force is the largest "security" force in the country. But scavengers had to bribe the police in order to carry out their informal activities. The bribe consisted of nearly 20 or 30 percent of their earnings [...] the municipal government, which was a "politically progressive administration", created a parallel police unit, called UCEP (Control of Public space Unit) to repress the scavengers and people living on the street. It was a force formed by civilians who attacked scavengers and stole material from them.

The empirical case exemplifies how networks within the waste industry are established, and demonstrates two sets of networks, i.e., one among the scavengers, upper and middle class and activists, and the second among the police and the mafia. As stated previously, scavenging was made illegal in the 1980s; scavengers could face the imposition of a fine from police officers. Subsequently, they were forced to pay up to mafia to be allowed to do something that is otherwise illegal and punishable. This shows the difficulties of getting by in the informal and semi-illegal economy as one becomes very vulnerable. As demonstrated by my conversation with Pepe, he noticeably dislikes the police, the municipal government, and especially UCEP, and uses strong assertions to make his point. It is true that UCEP became notorious for its violent eviction operation of the *cartoneros* in parks, squares and streets, but it was created mainly to maintain calm and order in public spaces around the city. Regardless of this, several occasions occurred where the unit threatened and abused the homeless and the scavengers and it was accused of facilitating waste collection on behalf of the private waste companies and not the scavengers. At least five incidents of abuse have been recorded on tape, and in February 2011, the Argentina Independent reported that the Buenos Aires Mayor, Mauricio Macri, was summoned to court over the alleged incidents[16]. According to my knowledge, not much has happened with the investigation of UCEP and Macri during the time spent finishing this thesis, and despite its reputation, the unit was not yet officially decommissioned.

As we can see, both police officers and employees of the Public Space Unit breached the law on several occasions. That corruption is part of Argentinean everyday life, it is not something new; this is demonstrated in the fact that the country found itself 105th out of the 178 countries evaluated on the corruption index by Transparency International in 2010, worse than famously corrupt

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[16] http://www.argentinaindependent.com/tag/ucep/

countries such as Egypt, Liberia and Mexico [17]. The conversation about the bribery and beatings done by the police officers and the UCEP employees evoked negative feelings in Pepe, and he became very engaged when talking about it as with many of the other informants. The end result was increased suspicion and distrust towards the police and the UCEP, and consequently the municipal government.

Accountability

The presence of accountability, namely the existence of institutions such as welfare assistance, pension and public legal and health services to which people can resort to if in needed will make people feel safe and assured, which if these are absent or difficult to access, then it consequently facilitates the strengthening of trust. As we have seen in previous chapters the government of Argentina, especially during the period of Menem, privatised many state institutions during the 1990s. Most health services are privatised, and the few that were left public offer a weaker or poorer service. A vast number of my middle class informants told me that they would not want to be admitted into a public hospital. One late night in October, I was out buying ice cream with my Norwegian friend, a medical student practising medicine at one of the public hospitals in the city, and a small group of my middle class informants. Among these were Alejandro, a young actor, and Cristina, daughter of a private doctor. Not surprisingly, the conversation turned to the subject of public hospitals:

Alejandro: *"I would never want to be admitted into one of those public hospitals, the equipment is of poorer standard, the doctors receive lower salaries, something which clearly affects their quality".*

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[17] http://www.transparency.org/policy_research/surveys_indices/cpi/2010/results

Cristina: *"My dad works at a private hospital, but volunteers at a public and says that the difference is huge".*

My Norwegian friend*: "I was surprised about the condition of the public hospitals here, everything is so old, and they do not even use computers when writing reports. Everything is very old fashioned".*

During this conversation the middle class informants clarified the importance of having money, or personal capital, while talking about the public hospitals. Without it, as revealed, you are left with poorer services or none at all. Personal capital can be various sets of things, e.g. education, a stable reliable occupational position and power; the amount of resources to rely on vary in accordance to how many of these factors one possesses (Sztompka, 1999). People who possess such resources will have back up options, while those poor on capital and resources will experience insecurity. In societies where trust is breached on a regular basis, private capital will serve as insurance and lower vulnerability against difficult circumstances, while people with little private capital will experience increased insecurity and distrust since a breach of trust could mean a relative disaster (Ibid.) For example unexpected expenditures on health services can hurl resource-poor families into poverty, since they do not posses the personal capital needed. As a result, the situation described in the conversation above victimises the poor in Buenos Aires since they do not have the capital necessary to be able to buy themselves high quality health services. Again trust is breached on the part of the Argentinean government, and thus, forces its residents into a state of insecurity and unpredictability. The lack of accountability, namely state institutions that sufficiently take care of citizens in need, produces fear in the sense that the residents feel that their own faith rests only in their own hands. Hence, the people in Buenos Aires experience feelings of helplessness, with doubt, suspicion and distrust as a natural response (Sztompka, 1999).

Feelings of stability, security and safety

An important factor in achieving trust is a continuing stability of social order, namely a society where the institutions, organisations and regimes provide feelings of security and comfort (Sztompka, 1999). The lack of security in the Buenos Airean context was additionally exemplified above when people said that in order to feel secure one needed money to. When you are poor, you are consequently insecure. Just consider the following citations from various informants:

Julia, the female middle class informant in the neighbourhood of Palermo, told me that she experienced:

"So much insecurity and a general lack of trust between people. In this country we do not give a damn about anything".

And Natalia, a 20-year-old, middle class, architectural student:

"There is not much feeling of community here in Buenos Aires. Maybe that is why we do not take care of the common spaces. We throw a lot of trash around".

Gabriel, student of 19:

"In this country insecurity is an issue and people are scared of everyone".

As important as feelings of security are durable and continuous institutions, organisations and regimes, something, which will give the resource-poor a notion of predictability and thus generate trust amongst the citizens (Sztompka, 1999). The notion that citizens can rely on the state during difficult circumstances and that the institutions and organisations have a history of helping one out contributes to feeling of trust. Nevertheless, this is not the case in Argentina.

We now turn to my interview with the sociologist, Verónica Paiva in a cafe on the corner of Santa Fe and Fitz Roy, where these feelings of insecurity were discussed:

Verónica Paiva: *"Social insecurity does exist. I mentioned neo liberal policies during the 1990s earlier today. Argentina came from a period of being a strong welfare state, having a large middle class and essential social security. Our social security network did not only ensure a stable job network, but during that time we also reached a four per cent unemployment rate, really low. In 1977, after the military coup, those social security networks began to dismantle. In the 1990s, when Carlos Menem took over the presidency, he ruined the Argentinean economic structure and our social security too. Besides, social security is connected to formal work, where one is guaranteed medical assistance, pension etc.[…] and when the formal work network is dissolved people lose their jobs, medical assistance and their pension. All kinds of jobs under the counter crop up. In that sense, it affected us very much. We reached a 22 per cent unemployment rate after the 2001 crisis. In that context, many cooperatives started to be formed and the number of cooperatives went up".*

An unstable society will occur when there is radical social change, such as revolutions or coups (Sztompka, 1999). In the brief case above two disruptive incidents were mentioned by Paiva. The military coup in 1977 and the economic crisis in 2001, and the state is held accountable in both cases. These two radical social changes have clearly influenced the lives of the Argentinean people

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(Nymark, 2008), and demonstrate the state as an agency with the possibility to victimise people either by revolution, and therefore turning the lives of the citizens upside down, or by not completing its duties according to the welfare of its citizens. The military coup in 1977 was not the first of its kind, and it is said that the elected governments that emerged in between the many coups were scarcely more competent than the military juntas themselves (Nymark, 2008). Argentinean history tells us of a chaotic and often unstable society, which over time caused severe distrust in the state to gradually emerge and solidify. People who are faced with disruptive changes time after time will experience insecurity and estrangement because expectations and certainty are not possible to predict, something that fosters feelings of distrust (Sztompka, 1999).
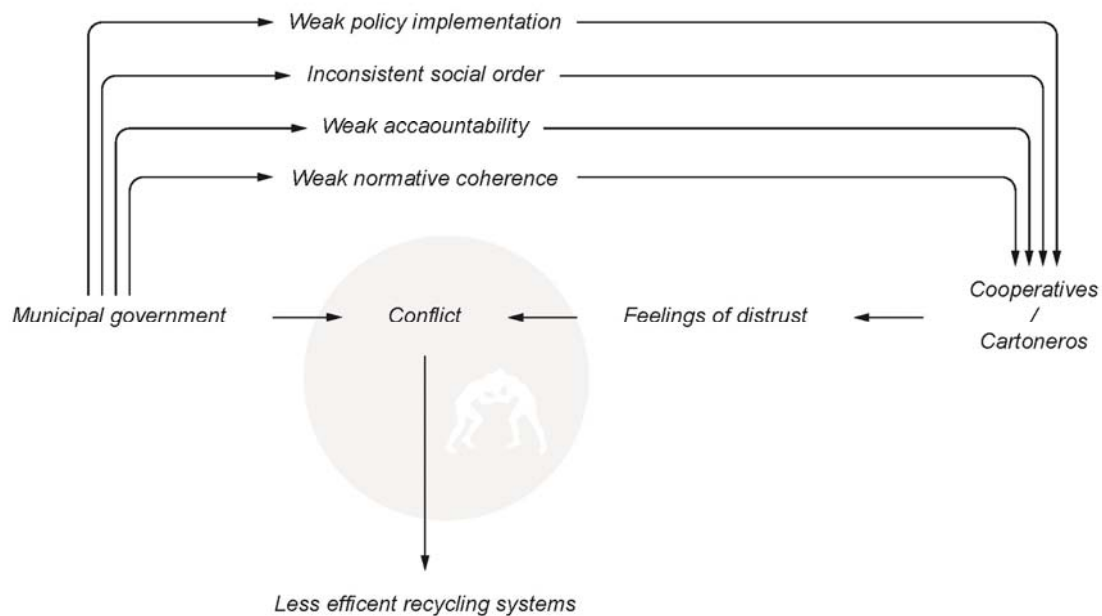
Figure 4: An illustration of Sztompkas three macro-structural conditions for how distrust can arise. Weak policy implimentations, accountability, normative coherence and inconsistent social order influence the cartoneros, and generate distrust towards the municipal governmefnt, which again generate conflict. Subsequently it leads to less efficent recycling systems.

The three different macro-structural conditions postulated by Sztompka illustrate how distrust can arise. The additional empirical cases, citations and statements from NGOs, upper and middle class informants, scholars and the *cartoneros,* highlight how these feelings of distrust arise within the Argentinean society. I therefore argue that distrust can accordingly answer the question of what were the contributing factors to the conflict between the municipal government and the *cartoneros*/cooperatives. Disruptive coups, economical crisis, shortage of welfare services and weak law enforcement and implementation have led to distrust towards the municipal government, and thus, to weak collaboration between the two parts. The feelings of distrust and the lack of belief in the words and the intentions of the municipal government contributed to the municipal government increasingly being viewed as an agency that was not only unreliable, unstable and unpredictable because of its continuous disruptive changes and weak welfare services, but also one that did not fulfil its promises. Consequently, distrust and the lack of belief in the words and the intentions of the municipal government

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generated a conflict between the two groups, and I subsequently argue it to be one of the major local barriers to a well functioning recycling system in the city of Buenos Aires and a hindrance to improved working conditions for the *cartoneros*. Now the chapter will turn to the reactions that distrust generates within the cooperatives and the *cartoneros.*

Cartoneros, doing it for themselves

This chapter has discussed some of the different challenges met by the *cartoneros* in their struggle to improve their own life situations. It has additionally explored the evolvement of distrust as a possible explanation for the existing conflict between the municipal government and the *cartoneros/*cooperatives. This chapter has demonstrated that in this context it proves important to hold private capital in order to maintain a predictable and stable situation. However, as seen previously, the *cartoneros* are on the lower end of the resource scale and it is apparent that higher education and a stable and reliable occupational position is not something that the *cartoneros* have. Many of the scavengers do not even have a regular stable job, but separate waste on a day-to-day basis without being able to foresee the earnings of their daily work. Furthermore, most of the *cartoneros* live in health hazardous shanty town areas and in houses made out off cardboard and brick, and live in a perpetual fear of eviction because of their unstable income and therefore are insecure about managing rent. Subsequently, the *cartoneros* become the bereaved part, with minimum trust towards the municipal government and minimum amount of private capital, left with few opportunities to actually change their own situation. While one might expect resource-poor people to despair and resign, I now show that the *cartoneros* see themselves as agents capable of influencing and improving their own situation.

Spaces of agency and self-help strategies

Despite the fact that the recycling industry is riddled with distrust, I argue that within this situation the *cartoneros* have carved out agency and hold the capacity to make their own free choices and act independently. I see the combination of distrust, lack of belief in the words and the intentions of the municipal government and minimum personal capital as necessitating self-help strategies. When the governments repeatedly fall through on their promises and/or welfare institutions that one can resort to in difficult circumstances, self-help is consequently seen as the only solution. The following examples illustrate self-help strategies and agency on both national and local levels.

The phenomenon of *"casalero"* that happened during the 2001 crisis demonstrates how Argentineans at large took matters in to their own hands, when the government led them in to an economical crisis. People all over the city took to the streets or their balconies and banged on casserole dishes in order to show their dissatisfaction with the structural adjustments/privatisation done by the latest government. It shows that Argentineans have a history of showing their dissatisfaction with the government when found necessary. The Avi Lewis and Naomi Klein documentary "The Take" additionally illustrates the agency that one can find amongst the Argentinean people. The documentary gives us the story of a new movement of workers that are occupying bankrupt businesses and creating jobs in the ruins of the failed system after the 2001 crisis. This shows that Argentineans do not only complain, but that they actively create new opportunities for themselves when experiencing difficult situations. Through various demonstrations, negotiations and the organising of the cooperatives, the *cartoneros* were showing the same commitment and engagement in self-help strategies when they were seen fighting to exert influence. The existence of the cooperatives themselves demonstrates one self help strategy at the local level: it is a case of people cooperating in small groups within semi-trusted networks, with a common goal of improving their own situations. All the cooperatives

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interviewed emphasised the need for governmental help. They all agreed that the municipal government had to provide resources and equipment so that they gradually could have a formalised recycling system and a formalisation of their work. The main goal and reasons given for continued fighting and demonstrating were cooperative driven recycling systems. They wanted the task to be carried out by the cooperatives and managed by the recyclers. This aim was emphasised in one of my interviews with the cooperative Cooycat:

"We want formal participation in the recycling industry. And we want the government to give us a chance to do it. The task of collecting waste from door to door and creating awareness about recycling among the neighbours has a high operative cost. Therefore we want the government to cover that operative cost. We will still just profit from what we collect, but we need the state to help us initiate the task, since we actually are providing a service to the state".

The cooperative El Alamo confirmed that they were working towards the same goal, and wanted an immediate change:

"We need all the cartoneros to be working within legal conditions, we need the current policies to be complied with, we need recycling campaigns in the schools and in the streets, we need the neighbours to be obligated to separate waste at home and possibly fines if they do not do so. And we need training, but all of this needs money. We need the government to contribute economically".

The cooperatives were very clear about their demands, but as demonstrated it did not generate much change. I followed up the last question and asked El Alamo about their resources and the activities they initiate for change:

"We demand things all the time, we do not stop. If we have to form a picket line, we do, if we have to demonstrate, we do. We are constantly looking for new ways to make the government comply with their promises."

The will to continue demanding resources and equipment demonstrates agency amongst the *cartoneros*. I argue that if there is agency and a will to change, there also needs to exist some form of trust towards the municipal government. Otherwise the *cartoneros* would not see it as lucrative to continue with self help strategies, such as demonstrating and picketing. The municipals governments talk and promise of new law implementation and policies, and so have kept the *cartoneros* hoping for change and governmental support, although they simultaneously have feelings of distrust. As seen above, the municipal government did pass certain laws and policies but the problem was that they were rarely applied or implemented. However, the law resolutions passed by the municipal government did symbolise some form of action and consequently generated hope, which again generated some form of trust. The empirical cases below will further explore the complex affiliation between the municipal government and the *cartoneros*.

Bonding and bridging

In order to demonstrate the *cartoneros* as agents capable of influencing their own situation, I will make use of Putnam's theory of trust. Interestingly, understanding distrust of the municipal government and little private capital as

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forced initiators to self help as the only solution, shares certain similarities with his theory of bridging and bonding. Bridging trust, understood as outward-looking networks and connections among different kinds of people and bonding as inward-looking networks bringing together similar kinds of people, is transmissible to the Argentinean waste management context (Patulny and Svendsen, 2007). Bridging are people who work up larger amounts of private capital, and therefore have more opportunities than the ones working alone. Bonding is subsequently understood as relations between groups who only trust their inner circles. Even though these bonding networks can arise within higher and richer classes, in this context, the people within this group have very little private capital and very little outside help, something that forces them to only trust themselves or to have only a very small support network.

Even though the cooperatives asserted bridging at times, several of the *cartoneros* could only resort to bonding. Especially for the scavengers were the only accessible help to be found within one's closest network of family and friends or from oneself. Not even education was seen as a way of moving ahead in life, since there were high expenses involved while studying. Student and copying fees, books and other equipment were seen as to expensive among several of the *cartoneros* and scavengers interviewed. Additionally, school was not prioritised among the scavengers, as the children were often brought to work because they could help out and increase the day's earnings. Hence, feelings of distrust and the lack of belief in the words and the intentions of the municipal government led the inhabitants of Buenos Aires to put great emphasis on the value of every man being capable of taking care himself, as Antonio explained when asked about how he became a *cartonero*:

"I used to live in Quilmes. I rented a house and I was working, but then I lost my job and could not even pay the rent anymore. So I came to Buenos Aires to look for a new job, but it took a while. One day I ran into Rosita and I saw the logo on

her back, so I asked her about it. She told me to come by one day, so I did and then she gave me a job. Thanks to her, now I can support myself. "

The quotation illustrates how Antonio, through the lack of private capital and without any governmental welfare aid, was forced to obtain work through his own means. He ended up walking the streets without anything to occupy himself with, trying to rethink his economical situation. The municipal government did not offer any welfare services, and it was not until he met Rosita, from the cooperative El Ceibo, that he was able to financially support himself. Now Antonio is saving up money to be able to rent his own house and he is able to send some money home to his sons who live in the north. During one of my garbage routes together with Lucía, she presented me with a similar story:

"I got married five years ago. My husband is a bricklayer; you do not earn much doing that, so economically I was forced to take on a job as well. But it was not that easy to obtain one, but then I heard of this job from a friend".

In Lucía's example we see that it was through a friend that Lucía retrieved the job at the cooperative, and later she added that welfare was not even seen as an option. She told me that she lived in one of the slum areas outside of the city, and that her mother and sisters and her were forced to rely on each other for help during difficult times.

Despite the emphasis on *cartoneros* and bonding, will I argue that the *cartoneros* were people who both formed bonding and bridging networks. In a sense they were agents in two different ways: they formed their own, small supporting network groups in which they helped and supported each other. In this way they could get by in life. On the other hand they also managed to 'bridge', because they had access to various organisations that exposed their cause to a wider audience. In order to illustrate the workings of the *cartoneros* and their bridging

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and bonding network, I return to my conversation with Pepe about the conflict between the *cartoneros* and the municipal government. His reflections when talking about the public policies and the contracts with the private companies illustrates how the organisation MTE and the *cartoneros* demonstrates agency within a bridging/bonding network:

Pepe: *"In the middle of the fight for better social rights and contracts in favour of the cartoneros, a cancelation of one of the contracts between the private garbage companies and the municipal government was achieved. In addition we managed to convince the recycling department, the one regulating recycling in the city, to organise a program for the cartoneros. It is a program that started around 2008. It consists basically of separation at source and differentiated collection and this is called "Servicio Público y Gestión Social para recolección diferenciada",[the 1.854 law mentioned above]"*.

Me: *Really? I participated in a demonstration with several cooperatives some weeks ago… What is the purpose of these demonstrations would you say?*

Pepe: *"Ok, so what we do at the demonstrations is that we tell the government that they have to implement public policies and laws. And when the government on occasion does implement a public policy, we fight for improvements. So, the public policy applied nowadays in regards to the cartoneros is one we have achieved fighting. In consequence, we now defend it"*.

As stated in the introduction, was it unanimous amongst the cooperatives located throughout the city that a better and more efficient recycling system was needed and that the waste sorting starting in households would make their work more efficient. The case demonstrates how the *cartoneros* exerted influence and

agency, in order to achieve their goal of formalising their activity and thus improve their own situations. Hence, the *cartoneros* are not just poor victims in ongoing conflict. They reclaimed a sense of agency and exerted influence vis–á-vis the municipal government by demanding rights and showing their dissatisfaction with weak law and public policy implementations. Even if there are many barriers because of distrust and lackluster government practice, the last few empirical cases show that there is some kind of ongoing political campaign to improve both the life of the *cartoneros* and the waste management and recycling industry. There is a certain dynamic, which means that things may improve in the future, although the barriers today are many.

Summary

The main focus of this chapter was to explore the relation between the *cartoneros* and the state and thus examine the hidden barriers to more efficient and better recycling systems. It was unanimous amongst the cooperatives located throughout the city that a better and more efficient recycling system was needed and that waste sorting starting in the households would make their work more efficient. Nevertheless, the chapter demonstrated the feelings of distrust and the lack of belief in the words and the intentions of the municipal government as local barriers to a more efficient and well-run recycling systems. Disruptive coups, economical crisis, shortage of welfare services and weak law enforcement and implementation have generated an ongoing conflict between the municipal government and the cooperative/*cartoneros*. The analysis above demonstrated that the *cartoneros* are not mere passive receivers in a continuing and complex society, but dynamic actors with agency, working to better their own situation.

7. Conclusion

The purpose of this thesis has been to investigate the social life of waste, with a particular focus on tracing its circulation through different contexts in Buenos Aires. The point of departure was the current insufficiency of only studying policies, recycling firms or waste practices in relation to one group. Rather, in order to fully understand the workings of waste management one needs to have a broad focus that encompasses the whole social life of waste. Therefore, I have examined the roles, practices and experiences of various groups, classes and institutions involved in the production and processing of waste. In this conclusion I intend to summarise and reflect on the findings of the study as well as present some new details that have arisen from this thesis.

The data that form the basis of this research is based on interviews with 42 informants conducted in Buenos Aires in 2010. About one third were directly involved with handling waste, while the rest of the interviews were with residents from the upper and middle class and other non-governmental and governmental institutions. In chapter two I clarified the methodological considerations that I have made during working on the thesis.

The first research question discussed the social life of waste; it asked what it is, and how it is organised in the context of Buenos Aires. To find out about the social life of waste and its organisation, I first situated the different actors involved within the waste system and addressed the historical background of the emergence of garbage economy. The crisis in 2001 resulted in tens of thousands people beginning to scavenge the streets for recyclable materials to sell. I suggested that it was predominantly economical reasons, such as high

unemployment rates, unreliable incomes and a lack of governmental welfare services that forced people to make a livelihood out of garbage.

In order to provide a deeper understanding and insight into the life of the *cartoneros*, I sketched a typical day of a *cartonera*. The empirical case introduced some of the difficulties and challenges they met within the waste management industry. The *cartoneros* experience many trials in their every day lives. The scarce economic situation forces them to live in poor, worn down health-hazardous shantytowns, which often are located close to a land filling, which contributes to high volumes of toxic contaminants in their groundwater and form health risks.

The chapter then explored the value of waste. I argued that garbage had a positive symbolic value to the *cartoneros* and that household recycling has turned into an activity and commodity of value. Various social groups decide the value of an object, thus, the value changes from status to status and location to location. I illustrated that within this value chain, each transaction from one social group to another resulted in different values associated with the object in question. Therefore the same object, which was seen and judged to be worthless and useless to an upper or middle class resident, could become regarded as useful and sellable to the *cartoneros*. It was additionally demonstrated that the closer one was to directly handling the garbage, the lower status one received, resulting in less economical profit.

The second research question concerned the experiences and challenges of the *cartoneros* and explored additional reasons as to why people chose a life in garbage collecting. I investigated the interconnectedness between the lower and upper and middle class levels, and argued that the upper and middle class residents' negative assigned assumptions and associations with waste were transmitted to the *cartoneros* themselves. This meant that there was an opinion of

garbage as dirt; the degree of a person's involvement with garbage clearly influenced his/her salary and status.

Following the argument of Mary Douglas, I suggested that our perception of "clean" and "unclean" affects our systematic classification of objects. Consequently we reject the things that do not belong, such as waste. I argued, as touched upon in the previous chapter, that the categorisation of objects is based on our needs and what we perceive as useful and valuable. The interviews done with the upper and middle class informants demonstrate that these types of categorisation were transferable to the *cartoneros* themselves. The *cartoneros* were assigned a role as something that did not belong, and were therefore seen as "out of place". I further argued that this categorisation of the *cartoneros* as an "out of place" group generated a process of stigmatisation. The perception of the scavengers and garbage recyclers as a disorderly, messy, lazy and filthy group influenced the upper and middle class' behaviour towards the *cartoneros.*

From the outside the *cartoneros* were seen as a homogenous group who were directly compared with the garbage they were handling, and the scavengers and the garbage recyclers were understood to belong to the same group. However, when examined from the inside through the perceptions of the *cartoneros,* this turned out not to be the case. I explored the *cartoneros* as a contested category and demonstrated how even amongst the *cartoneros* themselves they perceived and interpreted each other differently. For example, it was demonstrated that amongst the garbage recyclers the job of a scavenger was considered to be more demeaning than a job of an organised garbage recycler.

The *cartoneros'* experiences of ambivalence in connection to their work were also discussed. The analysis demonstrated scavenging as a stigmatising and

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poorly paid job; I argued however that several of my *cartonero* informants nonetheless took pride in the work they were doing. Earlier discussions demonstrated that economical deprivation was the main reason for collecting garbage. However, recognition of the work, feelings of self-respect and a sense of usefulness were contributing factors that made the *cartoneros* experience their work as dignified, and these were stated as additional reasons as to why they chose a life as a *cartonero.* Subsequently, I argued that feelings of full participation in one's own society should not be disregarded in discussions about alleviating oppression. Environmental concern, on the other hand, was not regarded as a motivating factor and was only mentioned by one informant. Hence, I argued that a commitment to environmental development was not a contributing factor in their selection of work.

After the review of the current situation of the *cartoneros*, the third research question turned to the upper and middle and asked what it was that motivated them to recycle. I first discussed how culture influenced people's will to recycle. I chose to approach this by dividing the cultural influence into two categories: one was linked to religious values, while the other linked to the political environment in Buenos Aires.

I argued that the upper and middle class' motivations to recycle were connected to their political and- religious values and subsequently their solidarity and empathy with the poor. Even if my informants did not say so explicitly it was evident that Catholicism and politics were still given an important role in Buenos Airean society. Several of the informants considered themselves religious, and attended church regularly'. Feelings of empathy and compassion were the main arguments given when asking the upper and middle about their motivations for recycling. Not so many explicitly mentioned the political aspect as a reason for

recycling, but strong historical traditions of Peronism, with its emphasis on solidarity and social justice, was demonstrated to have clearly influenced their values. Hence I argued that the upper and middle class chose to recycle because they felt empathy and solidarity with the *cartoneros* and therefore, in their own way, wanted to contribute to better their situation. The fact that this also contributed to improved recycling was for them mostly a welcome side effect.

This thesis also discussed the reasons for not recycling. I suggested that the lack of information and weak recycling implementation could be part of the reason as to why so few of my informants and friends recycled. I further argued that it would simply not be enough to only examine the policies or mere practicalities of sorting waste, if the attempt is to discover the reasons as to why people choose to recycle, or not. Instead it could include various cultural factors, such as the solidarity and empathy found amongst the upper and middle class residents when developing a more efficient recycling system.

Finally, I discussed the fourth research question regarding the local barriers to recycling. When analysing the hidden barriers to a more efficient and better recycling system, I emphasised feelings of distrust and lack of belief in the words and the intentions of the municipal government as contributing factors. To address the question I explored the relation between the *cartoneros* and the municipal government. Disruptive coups, economical crisis, shortage of welfare services and weak law enforcement and implementation have generated an ongoing conflict, which hinders the development of an efficient recycling system. It was unanimous amongst the cooperatives that a better and more efficient recycling system was needed and that if waste sorting were to start in households this would make their work more efficient.

I further argued that even though the *cartoneros* do almost all of the recycling throughout the capital, they and the cooperatives lacked governmental support. Many policies and laws had been passed but were yet to be implemented. The analysis showed that the municipal government, in addition to passing laws concerning recycling, had been debating different solutions to formalisation with the aim to improving the working conditions of the *cartoneros*. Three different solutions were discussed: a door-to-door collection, where the neighbourhood is involved in separation; a legal registration of the *cartoneros*; and employment through Green Points. Disappointingly, but not unexpectedly, it turned out to be all talk, and little action. The municipal government's overall aims, their degree of involvement and their achievements in regards to the planned programs, proved to be evasive.

The various empirical cases established that the lack of implementation had consequences for the *cartoneros*' access to health facilities, housing and employment. Throughout the chapter it was made clear that a full and successful implementation of the laws would have made significant changes in the lives of the *cartoneros*. Increased awareness, welfare support for informal workers and greater ownership over the waste would have contributed to an improved situation, with better opportunities to increase their income and health situations.

The conflict between the municipal government and the *cartoneros* was indicated to generate from feelings of distrust. I argued that consistently broken promises, and lack of normative coherence, accountability and stability of social order generated general feelings of distrust and thus were contributing factors to the hindrance of a better and more efficient recycling system. Finally, I analysed the generated results of this distrust and argued that they necessitated self-help strategies. The analysis demonstrated that the *cartoneros* in spite of facing numerous challenges and difficulties were not victims, but dynamic actors with

agency, working to better their own situation.

With this conclusion I have attempted to reflect on the findings and suggest alternative strategies when evaluating waste management and recycling systems. In order to understand and assess waste management practices I have argued that it is necessary to have a broad focus that includes all social levels and all the actors involved in the production and processing of waste. Only in this way can one arrive at a complex understanding of the many motivations at play, the structural and cultural conditions that facilitate or hinder efficient waste management, as well as the politics of waste that contribute to its development.

If one wants to understand the operation of waste management systems, or why and how recycling systems work or fail, there are many factors, which need to be considered. It is not merely enough to examine the policies, or the incentives to recycle, or campaigns to create recycling awareness. In its place one should explore the actually existing waste systems and in great detail, examine their function. One has to examine the policies, true. Yet it is equally essential to examine the motivations, practices and strategies of a complex range of actors involved in waste management, such as the *cartoneros*. Furthermore one has to incorporate the examination of the numerous motivations for recycling. One should study why, or why not, people recycle. Again, focusing only on environmental awareness is not enough, one must also examine prevalent cultural and political values, and see how they facilitate or prevent efficient waste management.

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