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*Review Essay*

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**Rethinking the Affirmative Value, Politics and  
Materiality of Waste on the Urban Periphery****Tatiana A. Thieme**

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**Kathleen M. Millar, *Reclaiming the Discarded: Life and Labor on Rio's Garbage Dump*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018. 248 pp. US\$ 25.95 paperback.**

**Rosalind Fredericks, *Garbage Citizenship: Vital Infrastructures of Labor in Dakar, Senegal*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018. 216 pp. US\$ 24.95 paperback.**

**INTRODUCTION: WASTE TROUBLES**

References to waste conjure up images of things being thrown away, which raises the questions: what is being thrown away, where and by whom, and which bodies are most exposed to the potential toxic residues of waste? Over the past two decades, scholars from across the disciplines have together contributed a rich repertoire of research and writing that highlights the material, discursive, relational, spatial, temporal and political registers of waste as it becomes increasingly clear that there is simply no 'away' involved in the throwing. To mention a few examples, Scanlan (2005) shows that, conceptually, 'waste' is a relatively arbitrary moment in the life of an object that signifies what is valued and, more notably, what is no longer valued. Others have argued that the contemporary phenomenon of 'waste', its accumulation and its flows, is an expression of the excesses of modernity's unsustainable consumption (MacBride, 2011; Minter, 2014; Moore, 2009) that grew out of the post-war years in the second half of the 20th century (Strasser, 1999). As material decays, waste has come to be discursively associated with forms of disorder and filth (Douglas, 1966/1984). By extension, the labourers who handle household and municipal refuse may be simultaneously stigmatized and deemed vital to the functioning of cities (Gill, 2010; Nagle, 2013), as waste labour and the multiple stages of value involved in waste collection,

recycling and resource recovery are of increasing importance to the sustainable future of cities (Myers, 2005).

Even as waste can express different stages of value (Hawkins and Muecke, 2002), its potentially hazardous composites have become a material and spatial manifestation of environmental injustices associated with industrial capitalism, as evident in forms of toxic dumping that have continued to take place near vulnerable communities (Bullard, 1990; Moore, 2009). Increasingly, given density of urban habitation and high rates of consumption associated with the advancements of urbanization and industrialization, waste is most concentrated in cities, while allocations of resources and basic services are often highly uneven across the global North (Kinder, 2016) and global South (Myers, 2005). Thus, as an interdisciplinary body of literature, *discard studies* does not just consider waste's composition and whether or not practices such as recycling are sufficient, but also sheds light on the relationships between the materiality of waste, the cultural practice of discarding, the social and economic classification of things no longer in use or in circulation, the environmental injustice of waste flows, and the politics of waste labour.

Two recent books make a remarkable intervention in this emerging field: Kathleen Millar's *Reclaiming the Discarded: Life and Labor on Rio's Garbage Dump*, and Rosalind Fredericks' *Garbage Citizenship: Vital Infrastructures of Labor in Dakar, Senegal*, both published in 2018. This essay aims to review each of these books in turn, and then set them in conversation with one another and in relation to wider themes that lie at the nexus of discard studies, urban geography and anthropology of work: value, precarious labour, agentive struggles at urban peripheries, and modes of collective self-organization. Both books use waste as an empirical and metaphorical lens through which to examine the politics of labour and basic urban services in contexts of 'peripheral urbanization' in the global South (Caldeira, 2017). Given that these books differ in their style of narration, thematic foci, and attention to field methods, it is especially valuable to read them together, and to reflect on their respective contributions.

Millar explores the life histories of wageless workers whose subjectivities and stories as *catadores* ('waste pickers') reveal how discards represent a source for making a living and moulding particular lifestyles. In contrast, Fredericks explores questions of urban citizenship and development through the lens of waste infrastructure by tracing key moments in Dakar's recent history in which trash became a platform for political activism contesting both the lack of state services and adequate working conditions for labourers. Both authors show how waste reflects culturally constructed anxieties and social norms that inform how waste is treated, where it flows to, who handles it, when it is hidden from view and when it is deliberately made to 'stay in place'. Though they both raise questions about whose responsibility and role it is to provide basic services in cities, each emphasizes different facets of environmental and labour politics. Millar focuses especially on

the ‘cultural logics’ of labour (Gidwani, 2008) that catadores form as they affirm themselves outside the false promises of both state services and the wage. Fredericks focuses on the importance of holding the state accountable and directing claims towards the state to contest the erosion of basic services and uneven development in the city. Both authors highlight different historical moments in the social and political life of waste labour in cities of the global South that are contending with their respective colonial pasts, uneven geographies of development and investment in the present, and particular cultural norms informing the perception of waste in its material form. Their empirical and conceptual orientations complement one another but diverge: Fredericks shows how waste illuminates structural injustices and inequalities in a post-colonial African city, while Millar shows how waste offers a highly toxic and precarious *but* important ‘form of living’ that challenges conceptions of value and productivity. The following sections summarize each book in turn, and then aim to draw the books into dialogue with one another.

### RECLAIMING THE DISCARDED

Millar’s book sits at the nexus of discard studies and economic anthropology, speaking to debates about the spaces and temporalities of value, where both material and human values are contingent on particular relations, perceptions and experiences. The book starts on the garbage dump — a mound of municipal trash — immediately rendered familiar, personal, and full of material and human biographies. Millar invites readers to see *matter*, as well as *what matters* and *who matters*, differently: the refuse heap and those whose livelihoods depend on it are not portrayed as the material and human discards of the capitalist, neoliberal city, but rather as the place where objects that have lost their perceived value come to be reclaimed, repurposed and remade in some way. Those whose labour re-inserts use or exchange value into discarded materials are not depicted as human discards relegated to sort through putrid matter of little worth out of desperation, but rather labourers whose orientation towards everyday life and work takes on a *form* in its own right. This labour is neither waged employment nor described as merely informal. If informal labour is the converse of waged work rendered legible through state taxation and regulation, the labour of these catadores re-describes (Simone and Pieterse, 2017) a way of being in the world. Although the extreme conditions and health risks are underscored from the beginning, the book depicts the agentive struggles of catadores who carve out a life and a living on the urban periphery, as an alternative form of production of urban space (Caldeira, 2017) and an alternative politics of work (Gidwani, 2008).

Millar locates her own intellectual intervention along the chronology of literatures focusing on urban precarity over the past few decades. While

her work speaks to themes of marginality, informality and precarity, her conceptualizations of life and labour on the urban periphery seem to deliberately stay away from certain familiar theories including notions of marginality that came out of the 1960s and 1970s (e.g. Perlman, 1976), or theories of informality that emerged in the 1970s, starting with Keith Hart's ethnography of small-scale trade in Accra (Hart, 1973). Millar also moves beyond theories of social exclusion that emerged in the 1990s in tandem with a language of 'empowerment' and participatory development (Hickey and Mohan, 2004), and she points out but takes distance from the 21st century scholarship focused on 'disposable life'. Ultimately, her book aims to challenge narratives of scarcity and negation (Roitman, 1990) that pervade literatures and policy accounts of communities living and working in precarious environments. Rather than seeing catadores as desperate, wageless workers handling refuse in the absence of other viable options, Millar depicts them as independent workers and environmental stewards with under-appreciated local knowledge and skills that courageously draw out the value in discarded materials and the value in sorting through these. This is labour rendered otherwise invisible and cast to the periphery, labour exposed to extreme conditions, toxic fumes and myriad other potential harms. Exploring Millar's crucial question, 'what values, social relations, subjectivities, lifeworlds' are produced by their labour (p. 8), we start to understand how life is liveable when it deals in waste and facilitates the metabolic flows of the city to shape its own environmental politics and connections to worlds beyond the dump.

The book thus examines the identity of the catadores and their mode of self-provisioning through an ethnographic account of different temporalities of labour and their relation to the dump. A key thread that runs through the chapters is the experience of *return*. Millar draws on migration and refugee studies, not so much to conceptualize returning to a place (in this case, the dump), but rather to the *condition*, what she calls 'the form of living'. This condition, she stresses, is not just a survivalist strategy or merely an act of resistance; it is both a livelihood and a way of life. Framing the labour and subjectivity of catadores in this way resists deploying the language of informality to describe precarious unregulated work outside the purview of the state (Hart, 1973; Myers, 2005). Instead, Millar's ethnographic writing and play on words suggests that this form of wageless work and the architecture of everyday conditions and circumstances render this kind of labour a preferred way of *being in the city* against the odds.

While the book travels across the city, the key ethnographic site is the dump, serving as the central scene where new garbage mounds arrive, the place that catadores leave from and return to. The dump therefore becomes a kind of place-making protagonist, despite its toxicity and hazards, stigma and precarious properties. The dump is in Jardim Gramacho, a peripheral neighbourhood on the outskirts of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, which became one of the largest landfills in the world starting in the early 1970s.

Though Millar describes Jardim Gramacho as spatially peripheral to the city, it is not positioned as cut off from the mainstream metropolitan area or marginalized by its concentration of municipal waste. Indeed, if we suspend for a moment the assumption that waste is deemed filthy ‘matter out of place’ (Douglas, 1966/1984), little epitomizes the circulation of materials across the life course of things more than the very residues of extraction, production and consumption. By extension, the labour involved in disposing of these remains and managing their afterlives is inextricably tied to the logics of capitalism’s ‘spatial fix’ (Harvey, 1996), where the management of landfills is inextricably tied to the continued practices of making, selling and wasting more. Thus, Millar shows that Jardim Gramacho is connected to local and global spheres through the medium of waste, echoing the recent work of Caroline Knowles (2014) who followed the journey of the ordinary flip flop to explore the material, spatial and temporal backstories of globalization from production to landfill recovery.

Millar’s central analytical frame is what she calls ‘a form of living’, which couples two prosaic expressions that are carefully unpacked throughout the course of the book. Firstly, a form of living includes the practice of ‘making a living’, comprising the economic pursuits involving sustenance and constructing a livelihood, but detached from the normative imperative of waged employment as the main (and only acceptable) standard of work. Secondly, a form of living includes ‘a way of life’ that infers an agentic mode of *being* in the world. This framing departs from conceptions of citizenship as a de facto recognition by the state that is granted through legible modalities of waged labour. The notion of what is ‘legible’ is tied to what is governable (Scott, 1999), and thus to resist legibility, in the case of the catadores, is to resist the disciplining regimes of both the state and waged labour norms. Drawing on E.P. Thompson’s notion of the ‘art of living’, where work has been part of what informs people’s experiences and perceptions of time, rhythms and their everyday life (Thompson, 1967: 95), Millar looks at the ways in which work beyond the wage shapes life experience, and how this work shapes particular conceptions and practical struggles involved in the pursuit of a ‘good life’. So, ultimately, how to *make a living* from waste ends up also saying something about how this work conditions and becomes *the* way to make a living, chosen over wage labour.

Millar might elicit some criticism here for potentially romanticizing wageless work in an age when the casualization of labour is undergoing severe scrutiny, as the ‘uberization’ of the economy over the last decade has sharply increased insecurity for labourers across the labour market (Meagher, 2018). Yet, Millar’s argument offers a compelling response to Ferguson and Li’s recent (2018) provocation calling for a rethinking of the ‘proper job’ beyond the ‘20th century labouring man’. The book questions fixed vocabularies that have tended to classify types of labour as either self-organized or governed by bureaucratic institutions (Hart, 2009). In a way, Millar is responding to Keith Hart’s reflections on the concept of the

informal economy, where he asks what social forms organize informal activities, rather than focusing on what the ‘unemployed’ do to earn a living (Hart, 2009). Indeed, Millar uses the etymological root of the terms formal and informal to examine ‘the specific *form* that work takes’, which thus shapes her expression: a form of living. Moving away from formal/informal binaries means Millar stays attuned to the spectrum of organizational forms and associational life surrounding waste work. Her study documents the activities of recycling cooperatives, but also pays attention to the other waste collectors not integrated into cooperative activism. In so doing, she studies the range of everyday realities amongst catadores to question what constitutes a ‘politics of labour’, and thus contributes to ‘projects of representing economy differently’ (Gibson-Graham, 2008: 615), through a recognition of the plural formations of ‘productive actions’ that challenge dominant notions of work and attachments to a capitalist logic of production.

## GARBAGE CITIZENSHIP

Fredericks’ book is set in Dakar, Senegal, and explores city politics through a series of garbage crises that demonstrate how trash has become a central lever for contesting state provision of basic services. Fredericks brings together literatures that haven’t typically converged, on urban labour, urban infrastructure and urban citizenship, also drawing on post-structuralist urban studies which stresses the everyday urban improvisations and adaptations to uncertainty and adversity. Situating her work within geographical scholarship that aims to rethink African urbanism in the 21st century, Fredericks examines the extent to which the confluence of elite politics, uneven development and citizenship claims are reflected in these garbage crises in Dakar. The book deploys notions of labour infrastructures and citizenship to advance an argument about how marginalized groups contest authoritarian regimes in post-colonial contexts through the politics of garbage protests. While Fredericks poses a critique of neoliberal regimes in post-colonial African contexts, she makes clear her intention to avoid a totalizing narrative of neoliberal urban change on a mass scale. Instead, she aims to expose the differentiated effects of neoliberalism at play; how it affects households, institutions, individual lives in Dakar — a city at the centre of post-colonial electoral politics and a symbolic site for contesting the role of the state in public services given that it was also the West African French colonial centre, and is now an influential centre of development administration.

The empirical starting point of the book is the accumulation of garbage in public spaces of Dakar during 1988–89. Echoing Mary Douglas’s conception of dirt as ‘matter out of place’, Fredericks draws attention to the accumulation of garbage as a ‘material expression of political disorder’

(p. 9) and a powerful material and metaphorical mechanism for rendering the (im)mobility of garbage visible. This opening scene draws attention to the wider context of municipal budgetary constraints in Dakar that were symptomatic of austerity measures put in place in line with structural adjustments.

Fredericks' central conceptual contribution is threefold. First, her book emphasizes the role waste plays in the material relationships embedded in urban infrastructures, which are performed at both formal (municipal and planned) and informal (self-organized and citizen-led) cityscapes. Second, she exposes how household waste has become a material manifestation of a neoliberal era, as its collection and containment are increasingly subject to changes in the relationship between state actors and individual urban dwellers. Third, she positions 'trash work' (including the act of withdrawing one's labour) as a reflection of particular claims to urban citizenship. Indeed, the title of the book, *Garbage Citizenship*, refers to the claims for fair pay for waste labourers and affordable access to waste collection and services for urban residents, and is underpinned by an appeal to Islamic morality that articulates an ethical and spiritual critique of the state's neglect.

By positioning urban waste labour as a grounding for citizenship claims, Fredericks offers a persuasive lens through which to examine the urban political ecology of Dakar. She critiques mainstream tropes of African urbanism and the way that garbage crises feed into narratives of technical failures or corruption as explanations for why garbage 'stands in place'. She situates her book within critical urban scholarship (e.g. Comaroff and Comaroff, 2012; Robinson, 2006), which contest Eurocentric articulations of theorizations from the global North that have long regarded the global South as the source of myriad development problems (Ferguson, 1990). Thus, Fredericks seeks to 'make theory from the south', and contributes to the interrogation of representations that have systematically pathologized cities in the global South in terms of 'what they are not yet' (Roitman, 1990: 674) and how they might be fixed (Ferguson, 1990; Li, 2007) rather than for what they say conceptually about what cities are and might be (Myers, 2011). Fredericks grounds her theoretical intervention within Africanist scholarship to examine socio-environmental relations in an African city and advances existing theories of urban infrastructure and urban citizenship through the concept of 'garbage citizenship' to challenge normative assumptions about how citizenship claims are made and by whom. Whether this constitutes 'making theory from the South' is subject to debate. One could argue this book is making theory from the North about the South.

More convincingly, the book offers a crucial example of innovative reworking of urban governance *from the South*. In an age of widespread public sector cutbacks across African (and indeed global) cities, and growing labour casualization in the global North — with post-industrial economies now increasingly resembling the conditions of insecure labour that have

existed in post-colonial African cities since the 1970s — *Garbage Citizenship* offers an affirmative story of labour bargaining. It is remarkable that the trash strikes of 2012 finally led to outcomes such as trash unions set up in 2014, and the establishment of formal contracts, better salaries and benefits for waste workers. In this sense, the shifting modes of urban governance described by Fredericks offer a vibrant counter-example rooted in the *global South* to the presumed globalizing trend towards a post-wage economy with diminished bargaining power for increasingly precarious workers. It also reaffirms the powers of public protest and the tangible effects of the ‘politics of outrage’ (Castells, 2012) that have spread over the last decade across the Middle East and African countries where youthful majority populations (from Tunisia and Cairo in 2011, to the most recent protests in Sudan and Algeria) are expressing their disaffection against power-hungry political elite octogenarians.

### READING MILLAR AND FREDERICKS TOGETHER

Both books situate their ethnographic study of garbage against particular political backdrops that speak to common concerns with neoliberal modernity, the (changing) roles of the state in providing basic services and welfare, the effects of uneven urban development, everyday precarious labour, and self-organization against conditions of adversity and exclusion. But in addition to their different empirical settings, the authors diverge in their methodological sensibilities and writing, the ideological inflections regarding waste regimes, and their framing of waste labour and its relationship to the state and the wage.

The first notable contrast between the two texts concerns the authors’ methodology, as each takes a distinctive approach to ethnographic writing and research. This is reflected in the representation of their subject matter (waste) and their interlocutors (waste labourers) along with their expressed positionality within their field site. Millar is an anthropologist focused on Latin America, while Fredericks is a geographer and Africanist. Their cognate disciplines share numerous theoretical and empirical approaches, and both authors advance disciplinary areas that map across post-colonial urban studies, environmental politics and political ecology, and development studies. But these two books read differently. Perhaps the key difference in these ethnographies of waste is the way in which Millar writes herself into the text, while Fredericks has chosen for the most part to write herself out of it. This reflects different methodological sensibilities and deployment of theoretical engagement. While Millar’s ethnographic writing embeds theory into storytelling, Fredericks uses empirical material to *make* theory.

Millar starts her book with an empirical vignette, recalling a moment from her fieldwork, which draws attention to her own familiarity and involvement with the waste labour she writes about, but also renders her subject familiar.



She introduces key interlocutors by name and writes in segments of dialogue from these researcher/interlocutor encounters that resemble conversations between friends. In contrast, Fredericks' introduction refers to a set of historical events in Dakar that provide a poignant but less personal empirical lever to make the connection between garbage crises and contested post-colonial urbanism. Her book includes little explicit mention of her own ethnographic process, subjectivity and reflection, where and when she stayed in Dakar, how she accessed her interlocutors, indeed what their names were in many cases. The choice to name or refrain from naming interlocutors is equally valid from a research ethics point of view, depending on one's own methodological code, but it shapes a different tone and style of narration and representation.

Fredericks writes about being ethnographically attentive to place 'and socio-historical contingency of power relations', and calls her approach a 'materialist ethnography of waste infrastructure' (p. 14). In contrast, Millar writes about her embodied waste labour, showing an ethnographic practice attentive to the relationality of fieldwork through which she seeks to understand the epistemologies and subjectivities of her interlocutors by engaging with the physical 'matter' of waste and noting its effects on the body. Clearly for Millar *doing research* involved becoming a *catadora* to appreciate the different properties of matter at hand that most people might otherwise regard as undifferentiated waste mounds. This affords Millar a kind of epistemic understanding of the physical and material manoeuvres involved in handling garbage. Millar's participant observation also involved living near her place of (field) work, as well as volunteering and working with catadores. She describes the convenience and importance of living in Jardim Gramacho, but it is her admission that dwelling amidst the fumes, black dust and critters was not easy or pleasant that inserts a degree of ethnographic honesty and empathy with her interlocutors.

Although Millar doesn't reflect on her positionality at any length, or on what it actually took to access her space of fieldwork, it is laudable that she doesn't romanticize what is at stake when a person makes a living and a life from the discards of others. Instead, she asks for a re-imagining of both waste as matter, and the labour involved in extending the life of things. She speaks of how 'being a novice' catadora inspired her interest in the embodied experience of work and in the effects of particular experiences of labour on the self. This anthropology of work incorporates her own double labour as academic and 'labourer' in the setting she seeks to study, a methodological and ethical stance I can personally relate to from my own work (Thieme, 2017; Thieme et al., 2017). By extension, her ethnographic writing incorporates a deliberate politics of representation, including names and voices from the field and segments of conversations.

Second, it is worth noting the different representations of waste and waste workers across the two texts. Studies of waste and waste labour have all tended to evoke Mary Douglas's thesis that dealing with garbage (or 'dirt')

is a form of social ordering in response to the culturally constructed sentiment that dirt provokes disgust and offends the senses. Millar shows us that Jardim Gramacho, considered a peripheral zone by most urban residents from Rio and its surroundings, is perceived as 'out of place' and necessarily cut off from the main city. But as Millar learns in the early days of her fieldwork, little is known about what actually happens in Jardim Gramacho, just as too little is written about what happens to Rio's garbage once it is thrown away. It is this 'away' place that Millar explores, the away that is otherwise rendered distant, placeless and invisible. The dump is the 'away', but it acquires a sense of place from the start of the book, and with it a tapestry of lives enmeshed in its materiality make up a constellation of subjectivities, life plans, hopes and everyday happenings that personify the rubbish heap. Millar follows the social life of garbage to show that 'waste matters' (Moore, 2012), and waste work matters too as a form of living in its own right. So, to echo Scanlan's (2005) definition of garbage as a phase in the life of an object that reflects the tension between recognised value and loss of value, the dump is a place at the nexus of discarding and reclaiming, end of life and *making* work and life.

Millar stresses that 'not all garbage smells, feels, sounds, moves, rots, shrinks, or weighs the same' (p. 30). She shows that garbage has multiple kinds of matter, and by extension, all matter has form. Millar therefore engages with the materiality of garbage and criticizes efforts to conjure particular affective modes of representation that depict garbage either as epitomizing abject poverty, or as a set of ugly matter that can be transformed into art. She evokes the celebrated work of Vik Muniz and his *Pictures of Garbage* work, and the ways in which the generic dump has become a familiar backdrop for various films showing stereotypical scenes of urban poverty where the dump depicts some kind of dystopian present and future from which protagonists eventually escape. Garbage has tended to be represented as a singular mass (in many languages, it is a singular rather than plural word — *la poubelle*, *la basura*, *o refugio*, *der Müll*). To quote Millar, it is seen as the 'totality of all that society rejects' (p. 30). Through her own experience doing the work, Millar is able to appreciate and emphasize that catadores, along with waste workers in other cities, have acquired the knowledge and expertise of differentiating what materials are worth taking, reselling, reusing and repairing, and deciphering the seasonality and the market value of particular materials.

In Fredericks' work, the politics of waste is presented differently. Waste is presented as material/matter to be governed, which goes from being regarded as discarded, filthy, to acts of cleanliness and purity. Her theorization of waste is also informed by Douglas's conceptualization of waste as emblematic of social ordering and governing. Fredericks argues that, 'governing through garbage is a material practice of power that works through two modes of precarity' (p. 21). These are, first, uneven service provision,

leaving certain parts of the city unattended to, with waste accumulating and a visible sign of state neglect and associated stigma of disorder and filth; and second, enrolling particular bodies into waste labour. Fredericks portrays this labour in its paradoxical modalities, as both a vital form of social ordering and contestation, and as labour that is degrading but crucial in its spiritual function, given the linkages between acts of cleaning and observance of Islamic faith. Fredericks often refers to the 'filth' of trash but also shows how the abject properties of trash are deployed as an effective political device of disturbance.

In contrast, Millar emphasizes waste's toxicity (methane gas, noxious leachate and electronic waste), given her focus on communities whose exposure to garbage is extensive and prolonged. If not contained, this kind of refuse becomes a serious health hazard for all who handle it, live near it, are exposed to its toxins. So its materiality is socially and relationally constituted insofar as different value is ascribed to different matter and there are situated practices of sorting and selling, re-use and bricolage, but its materiality is also entangled with very real urban and bodily metabolisms, leakages and exposure, thus rendering everything from groundwater to a person's skin vulnerable and at risk. Millar thus argues throughout her book that waste is both a form of toxicity that is a health hazard but it is also 'life giving' in the sense that it provides a resource for making a living and making a life. Waste is vital, vibrant matter (not out of place) but matter *tout court* and certainly not worthless or devoid of value. Millar even refrains from calling the catadores 'waste pickers' for she contests the assumption that what they collect is waste. Yet the catadores called their place the dump. Garbage is not that which has no value, but rather the *stuff* through which notions of value and the good life are re-imagined.

Both authors interrogate and challenge why waste has become a vocabulary and metaphor for urban poverty, scarcity of labour and marginality. But conceptually and representationally, they deal with waste in different ways. Millar seeks to challenge discursive and material representations of waste as worthy of disgust and distancing. Her writing adopts a particular style of ethnographic representation that resists the rhetoric of negation and dejection, instead insisting on a tone of affirmation and dignity whilst engaging in continuous thick description of precarious conditions of work and toxic exposure. Fredericks re-affirms the 'othering' of waste to emphasize its association with wider forms of dispossession and exclusion, and continuously stresses the dignified attachment to a wage. Millar justifies and gives room to the 'detachment' of waged work and brings waste itself into material and embodied proximity in her fieldwork, distancing herself from pejorative and abstract conceptualizations of waste. To Fredericks, trash collectors in Dakar (and everywhere perhaps) represent 'geographies of dispossession' past and present. She contests pejorative representations of African urbanism, and the negative associations

made with the visibility of uncollected waste in African cities. But she also seems to regard discarded material and waste labour as demeaning. In contrast, Millar seeks to shift the lens through which waste is commonly viewed, classified and cast off. She seeks to reframe the material valuation of materials being collected and to reposition the labour of catadores. Millar develops a repertoire of anthropological vocabulary and play on words to rethink anthropologies of work, while Fredericks chooses to engage directly with current vocabularies in geography, providing empirical grounding for those concepts by considering the historical, material, political registers of waste geographies in Dakar. Fredericks points to the 'relational precarities of infrastructures and labour' (p. 17) but her engagement lies especially with notions of labour infrastructures, while Millar pays less attention to the concept of infrastructure, but rather rethinks notions of labour precarity.

Finally, waste workers in Dakar adopt a public performance of labour, protest and public discourse, as well as a public observance of their faith which is enmeshed with moral discourses and the imperative to clean up the urban environment. Fredericks explores themes of infrastructure, labour and citizenship, but stresses the corporeal and spiritual burden of waste labour. Throughout *Garbage Citizenship*, references to the role of the state as service provider are ubiquitous, as is the expectation that a wage is a vital form of labour recognition and dignity. It is part of what Fredericks calls a 'more ethical infrastructure' (p. 154) which includes fairer wages, more equal delivery of public services, and a kind of Muslim fraternity.

The catadores of Jardim Gramacho, meanwhile, are out of view, engaged in peripheralized labour that shapes alternative 'forms of living' away from mainstream metropolitan economic and social life. The catadores who engage in labour politics mobilize as cooperatives but in ephemeral ways. The key themes of *Reclaiming the Discarded* are the politics of labour ('forms of living'), the subjectivities of catadores, the materialities and matter of garbage, and reconceptualizing the value of garbage and the value of waste work as an avenue for rethinking wageless work and work *tout court*. Millar suggests that dignity of work might be rethought beyond the imperative of a wage, and instead reconceptualized in terms of workers' agency to decide how and where they wish to work, and on what terms. Here lies a core difference between the books: Millar suggests that the catadores reflect a kind of valid rejection of a system that privileges certain kinds of labour productivity and ways of life and regards 'discards' as devoid of value. Thus, for Millar, the modes of independent work, and the solidarities forged through a kind of 'relational autonomy', seem more crucial than the relationship to and recognition by the state, and the guarantee of a wage. In contrast, Fredericks suggests that forms of self-provisioning and self-organization are deleterious effects of neoliberal capitalist regimes which have resulted in the

insidious informalization of the urban workforce (King, 1996) and justified the lack of public services across African cities.

## CONCLUSION

Both the texts reviewed here contribute in significant ways to existing scholarship at the nexus of discard studies and global South urbanism. Millar's book achieves this through reconceptualizing labour precarities and the relationship between temporality and place of work. Emphasizing struggle rather than survivalism, Millar advances existing waste ethnographies by tying the social lives of waste workers to wider re-imaginings of the economy. Notions of arrival, return and departure are explored but so too is the peripheralized place-making of the dump itself. Fredericks' book makes its contribution through geographies of infrastructure and materialism, through which labour becomes coupled with political claims to citizenship. Finally, both books end on different notes. For Millar, the dump has closed down, and inevitably an element of melancholia creeps into the final pages, despite a kind of romantic insinuation that 'the garbage never ends'. We are invited to wonder about the remains, what is left after the closure, what traces, what forms of life persist in that space beyond its closure? Fredericks' account, on the other hand, points to the attainments of waste-based labour protests in Dakar, leading to improved urban governance. And, drawing attention to the possibilities for more just infrastructures beyond Dakar, Fredericks notes, 'garbage is a powerful matter of urban citizenship anywhere' (p. 154). Both books leave the reader pondering the fraught but ultimately hopeful and vital politics of waste labour. Both authors are convincing in their argument that garbage may be deemed 'matter out of place', but it certainly matters and it tells a constellation of important stories that will stretch the empirical and theoretical imaginations of scholars interested in the relationship between people, labour, urban space and material flows.

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