

Cooperatives as tools of resistance of *catadores* in São Paulo, Brazil

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A Thesis  
In the Department of  
Political Science

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
For the Degree of  
Master of Arts (Political Science) at Concordia University  
Montreal, Quebec, Canada

September 2022

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CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY  
School of Graduate Studies

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Master of Arts in Political Science

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## Abstract

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*Catadores* are crucial actors in the solid waste management and recycling systems in the Global South. They collect, bundle, and sell materials recovered from waste in the informal and formal markets. However, waste-pickers are still marginalized and held in a disadvantageous social and economic position. I proposed to investigate how waste-pickers resist chronic and structural violence in their workspace and how and why being part of a bottom-up cooperative impacts waste-pickers strategies of resistance. I also argue that the mere integration of top-down or bottom-up MBOs in the formal waste management system is not enough to improve the livelihood of this marginalized group. I used online interviews and observations, employing digital communication and social media platforms to engage with waste-pickers in São Paulo through open-ended interviews using the chain referral sampling method. My findings indicate that the primary source of chronic workplace violence happens through financial violence perpetrated by buyers of recyclable materials and that organizing into bottom-up cooperatives and mobilization of bottom-up cooperatives and associations in networks has been two critical strategies to mitigate its effects. Through bottom-up cooperatives and associations, and networks of bottom-up cooperatives and associations, they have been able to sell their materials at higher prices, avoiding *ferros-velhos*, and, consequently, improving their income. Bottom-up cooperatives and associations have also allowed waste-pickers to successfully reframe themselves as workers and environmental agents to resist psychological violence perpetrated by the population. These findings represent a significant theoretical contribution by identifying waste-pickers everyday resistance strategies not present in the literature.

## **Acknowledgements**

To Dr. Jean François Mayer and Dr. Tina Hilgers, I am deeply grateful for the countless opportunities and your constant guidance, patience and support, without which this thesis would not have come to fruition. You are the reason my academic experience has been so enriching and positive. Thank you!

To the *catadores* who participated in this research, thank you for taking me in and trusting me with your testimonies. I have learned much and more during our conversations and am humbled by your strength and resilience. Lastly, thank you, Manuel Rosaldo and the Social Justice Center, for the insightful discussion during the Social Justice Graduate Fellows Lunchtime Seminars.

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## Introduction

Waste-pickers (*catadores*)<sup>1</sup> are crucial actors in the solid waste management and recycling systems in the Global South (Coletto and Bisschop 2017, Dias and Samson 2016). They collect, bundle, and sell materials recovered from waste both in the informal and formal markets. Waste is defined as discarded materials that are underutilized and can have embedded value (Holt and Littlewood 2017).

In the era of consumption, connected with the increasing levels of urbanization in the Global South, dealing with waste is becoming a significant challenge for all government levels (Brooks et al. 2018). The reduced amount of raw materials available and the environmental impacts of discarded materials make recycling a primary policy that needs special attention from the authorities (Coletto and Bisschop 2017).

Estimates show that around 15 million people work on informal waste management throughout the Global South (Coletto and Bisschop 2017). Waste-picking is a significant income stream for these families and plays a vital role in municipal solid waste management systems (Holt and Littlewood 2017). The informal work of waste-pickers is responsible for collecting and sorting a major part of the recyclable materials in the region. However, waste-pickers are still marginalized and held in a disadvantageous social and economic position (Coletto and Bisschop 2017).

Informal waste-pickers work in similar unsanitary and hazardous conditions with low or no recognition by their governments, collecting from dumps and on the streets (Millar 2018, Schenk et al. 2019, Dias 2016). On the dumps, they are at risk of being run over by trucks and bulldozers and exposed to toxic gases produced by organic waste (Millar 2018, Schenk et al. 2019). On the streets, they are susceptible to harassment by the police (Thieme 2013, Millar 2018). In both spaces, waste-pickers are at risk of injuring themselves with used needles, broken glass and sharp metal due to the lack of appropriate protective equipment (Millar 2018).

Case studies of numerous cities in the Global South unveil the lack of state capacity to collect and recycle waste (Dias 2016, Silva, Goes, and Alvarez 2013, Yu et al. 2020, Zon et al. 2020). This lack of capacity occurs “mainly due to the burden on municipal budgets and the lack of knowledge and skills of the officials responsible for waste management” (Schenck et al. 2019, p. 80). There is no household collection provided by the government in several cities, especially in informal settlements, and waste pickers are the sole provider of such services (Dias 2016).

Brazil is no different. The country still has more than 4000 dumps and controlled landfills, although policies prohibiting this type of waste destination are in place. Less than 50% of all solid waste generated is appropriately discarded, and only 14% of the municipalities have selective collection services (Polzer and Persson 2016). Besides, 90% of the recycled materials are collected and sorted by informal waste-pickers (Silva, Goes, and Alvarez 2013, Dias 2016, Polzer and Persson 2016). Present estimates from the Instituto de Pesquisa Econômica Aplicada – IPEA (Institute for Applied Economic Research) shows that, in 2013, there were roughly 400,000 *catadores* in Brazil. And, approximately 56% of those *catadores* are women (Dias and Ogando

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<sup>1</sup> Both of these terms will be used interchangeably throughout this research.

2015). They generate a value of approximately R\$ 950 million<sup>2</sup> (USD 172 million<sup>3</sup>) per year from recycling, with a potential to generate R\$ 13.2 billion (USD 2.39 billion) per year if all recyclable material were collected (Lisboa 2013). They also provide jobs for themselves and others and help the environment, significantly impacting the pursuit of UN Sustainable Development Goals<sup>4</sup> (Dias 2016, Gutberlet 2021). Even with this vital role in waste management systems, waste-pickers remain marginalized and are the most fragile actors on this recyclable value chain. Thus, in several cases, they are not recognized for their work by governments (Silva, Goes, and Alvarez 2013, Dias 2016).

São Paulo, the largest and richest city in Brazil and Latin America, has 11 million inhabitants and produces around 18.000 tons of solid waste daily. There are no operational dumps that serve the city, and all the collected waste is destined to two landfills, except the waste collected through selective collection services. Formal door-to-door selective collection services serve around 40% of the households. The other 60% have to voluntarily deposit their separated waste in scarce collection points spread throughout the city if they want to give a proper destination to their solid waste (Polzer and Persson 2016). The low coverage of selective collection entails an estimated economic loss of R\$ 1.44 billion<sup>5</sup> (US\$ 261 million<sup>6</sup>) annually, with materials buried in landfills (Jacobi and Besen 2011).

The recyclable waste collected by São Paulo's formal waste management services is destined to 22 top-down sorter cooperatives (Polzer and Persson 2016). However, the amount of waste collected by the city's official selective collection program represents only 1% of the total amount of waste collected every day, about 120 tons (Jacobi and Besen 2011). Bottom-up waste-pickers cooperatives and associations resort to materials collected on the streets and the voluntary points of selective collection. Thus, they are allowed to provide services to collect recyclable materials in large companies and condominiums.

São Paulo has around 20.000 *catadores* working in the urban area, and approximately 10% are organized. In the late 1980s, a group of eight homeless *catadores* started to organize with the help of a group of nuns to share space, tools and sell their materials collectively. They founded the first bottom-up cooperative of waste-pickers in Brazil, the Cooperativa de Catadores Autônomos de Papel, Papelão, Aparas e Materiais Reaproveitáveis – COOPAMARE (Association of Autonomous Collectors of Paper, Cardboard, Parings and Reusable Materials) (Rosaldo 2022). They also started negotiations with the municipal government to provide them with space, equipment, and technical support. COOPAMARE sparked the creation of other bottom-up cooperatives in the city and throughout the country (Grimberg 2007, Rosaldo 2022).

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<sup>2</sup> Updated value from October 2013 to current values using the Índice Nacional de Preços ao Consumidor – IPCA (IBGE). The IPCA is the index used to measure the inflation rate in Brazil.

<sup>3</sup> 1 USD = R\$ 5.52 on January 13, 2022.

<sup>4</sup> UN Sustainable Development Goals is a universal agenda adopted in 2015 by UN member states with a set of 17 goals and 169 targets to tackle issues such as climate change, poverty, inequality and access to health and education (UN nd).

<sup>5</sup> Updated value from December 2010 to current values using the Índice Nacional de Preços ao Consumidor – IPCA (IBGE). The IPCA is the index used to measure the inflation rate in Brazil.

<sup>6</sup> 1 USD = R\$ 5.52 on January 13, 2022.

As will be discussed throughout this thesis, in some cases, policies implemented by all levels of government to regulate waste-pickers' activities generated adverse outcomes. These policies can be considered sources of structural violence, with no direct perpetrator, against *catadores* as they negatively impact waste-pickers access to waste and, consequently, their income and livelihood (Millar 2018, Rosaldo 2022, Schenck et al. 2019). Besides those policies, *catadores* also face daily episodes of chronic violence, such as exploitation by intermediaries and the request of bribes (Millar 2018, Grimberg 2007). In order to oppose this perpetrated violence, waste-pickers develop various strategies of resistance, such as working informally, circumventing imposed restrictions and organizing in membership-based organizations. The goal of my research is to study further these and other strategies of resistance.

In this thesis, I proposed to investigate how waste-pickers resist violence, both chronic and structural violence, in their workspace and how and why being part of a bottom-up cooperative impacts waste-pickers strategies of resistance. There is no clear answer in the literature for the puzzle on how waste-pickers resist workplace chronic violence. For this analysis I will use the concept of resistance (Mayer 2021) to identify the overt and covert repertoire of strategies used by waste-pickers to cope with chronic violence and maintain access to their source of livelihood. Based on Millar's (2018) and Rosaldo's (2022) work, I argue that bottom-up cooperatives, created by waste-pickers, are a crucial tool to help waste-pickers develop successful strategies of resistance. I will consider a resistance strategy as "successful" when it allows waste-pickers, individually or collectively, to circumvent policies as well as state and superordinate actors' actions of structural and workplace chronic violence.

Formal forms of participation, such as participating in state-created forums and public policy design, can bring benefits to waste-pickers but are not enough to guarantee their right to work and livelihood, as setbacks can still happen. Furthermore, as will be argued throughout my thesis, some policies implemented, even with the participation of waste-pickers, can restrict their activities to generate income. Scholars who study waste management systems in major cities from the Global South –like Accra (Ghana), Belo Horizonte and Porto Alegre (Brazil), Medellín and Bogotá (Colombia), Durban (South Africa), Nakuru (Kenya), Pune (India), Santiago (Chile) etc.—indicate that local governments utilize similar approaches when dealing with waste pickers. Most of the negotiations between waste-picker representatives and authorities in all levels of government and public policies on waste-picking and waste management systems implemented are carried out in connection with and through membership-based organizations (MBOs), bottom-up and top-down, usually cooperatives or associations<sup>7</sup> (Dias 2016, Zon et. al 2020, Holt and Littlewood 2017, Valenzuela-Levi 2020). And the access to these policies and any benefits requires that waste-pickers become members of those organizations.

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<sup>7</sup> Cooperatives and associations are both membership-based non-profit organizations but created with different goals. According to Brazilian law, cooperatives are centred on developing economic activities and may have economic goals. They are not allowed to have profits as their revenues must be shared through its members or reinvested in the development of the cooperative. Associations can also develop economic activities but may have social assistance goals instead. Associations cannot be created with the sole purpose of developing economic activities (SEBRAE 2019). In Brazil, they are regulated by the Constitution and the Civil Code (Law 13.105/2015). Cooperatives are also regulated by Law 5.764/1971.



My second main argument is that the mere integration of top-down or bottom-up MBOs in the formal waste management system is not enough to improve the livelihood of this marginalized group, especially when cooperatives are created for waste-pickers by local governments – top-down –, but not by waste-pickers themselves – bottom-up. Grimberg (2007) stated that the integration of bottom-up cooperatives and associations in São Paulo formal waste-management system did not tackle the power inequalities between waste-pickers and buyers of the collected material. Intermediaries were still present buying materials from these bottom-up MBOs at lower prices and selling for higher prices for the industry (Grimberg 2007). Thus, although some policies implemented helped improve the livelihood of waste-pickers, as will be demonstrated later in my thesis, and bottom-up cooperatives increased waste-pickers negotiation power, estimates show that only 10% of the waste-pickers have benefited from these improvements (Velis 2017, Rosaldo 2022).

Literature on informal workers' resistance strategies has emerged recently on domestic workers (Mayer 2021), rickshaw drivers (Vargas 2021), construction workers (Tilly and Rojas-García 2021) and others. This thesis contributes to this broader literature by presenting a systematic analysis of the forms of resistance used by *catadores*. I focused on the role of bottom-up cooperatives in the waste-pickers' repertoire of informal resistance strategies. These strategies are an essential resource for informal workers in the fight for social justice. Unlike other informal workers, as domestic and construction workers, waste-pickers have more flexibility on their working hours and workspace since a boss does not define their schedule or place to work, meaning that they can resort to different strategies of resistance. In this sense, it is critical to identify the waste-pickers resistance strategies and their impact on chronic workplace violence to identify new forms of resistance and develop further this literature on informal workers resistance strategies.

My findings suggest that waste-pickers' most prominent resistance strategies are *organizing* and *mobilizing*, both open, collective and non-confrontational strategies. Organizing into cooperatives and associations allowed waste-pickers to negotiate their inclusion on the formal waste management system in the late 1980s and early 1990s, increased their negotiation power when dealing with buyers of recyclable materials, and enabled them to develop other activities to improve their income and, consequently, their livelihood. Mobilization into networks enabled *catadores* to increase their negotiation power further when dealing with buyers of recyclable materials. Through *organizing*, waste-pickers developed the *reframing* strategy to resist psychological violence perpetrated by civil society. *Reframing* reshapes how *catadores* have been seen by the population, from petty thieves and “horses”<sup>8</sup> to workers and environmental agents, and it is also an open, collective and non-confrontational strategy.

My thesis contributes to knowledge theoretically by presenting the impact of collective action, organizing in cooperatives and associations and mobilizing, on everyday resistance strategies, based on Mayer's (2021) typology, and with new data on waste-pickers in São Paulo. In the following pages, I first present the literature review and theoretical framework to situate the notions of waste-picking, chronic workplace violence, cooperatives and resistance. I then present

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<sup>8</sup> Waste-pickers used to be called “horses” or “donkeys” as they usually pull carts with their recyclable materials on the streets.

the methodology employed to guide my research. I later identify and analyze types of violence *catadores* are subject to and their resistance strategies.

## 1. Literature Review

Most studies on Latin American grassroots organizations and resistance focus on resistance against the political-economical systems in place and prominent neoliberal policies. Furthermore, most scholars focus on disruptive grassroots movements such as the Piqueteros in Argentina (see Dinerstein 2010, Alcañiz and Scheier 2007), the Zapatistas in Mexico (see Inclán 2009, Swords 2007), and grassroots organizations such as the MST in Brazil (see Issa 2007, Carter 2010). All these studies focus on popular resistance and mainly use the new social movements approach to understand these grassroots organizations' formation, strategies, and tactics to deal with state institutions, further their demands, and resist neoliberal policies. The new social movements framework shifts focus from class-based Marxist movements, such as unions, to identity-based social movements and new forms of collective action, such as women's and green movements (Johnston et al. 1994). However, although the new social movements framework is a critical tool for understanding these new movements, there is no focus on how these same movements contribute to their members' daily lives. In this sense, there is a gap in the literature on how these grassroots movements and bottom-up organizations function as tools of everyday resistance to resist violence. Both everyday resistance and violence concepts will be discussed in the next section.

Regarding bottom-up cooperatives, more specifically, although the new social movement framework is not widely used, the focus also consists on how these bottom-up organizations help their members to resist neoliberal reforms and the capitalist system (see Wiksell 2020, Robin King et al. 2012, Raffaelli 2017). According to the International Cooperative Alliance – ICA, a cooperative “is an autonomous association of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly-owned and democratically-controlled enterprise” (ICA nd). Thus, cooperative values must be based on self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, equity and solidarity (ICA nd).

“Friendly society” organizations began to emerge in the XVIII century. During the industrial revolution, small businesses had to close, and workers had to move to town looking for work or find new ways of doing business. In the XIX century, more precisely in 1844, the Rochdale Society of Equitable Pioneers, a cooperative of poor artisans, was founded. The Rochdale Pioneers is considered the first modern cooperative, and its principles still influence cooperatives today (Fairbairn 1994, Pitman 2018). The Rochdale principles are open membership, democratic control, distribution of the surplus to the members in proportion to their transactions, limited interest on capital, political and religious neutrality, cash trading and promotion of education (Fairbairn 1994). Fairbairn (1994) points out that the Rochdale cooperative was created not only for economic purposes but also as a movement seeking social reform, with a culture of working-class activism and ideological outlooks (Fairbairn 1994).

Okem (2016) divides cooperatives into four broad categories based on their main activities - consumer, worker, producer, and financial cooperatives. Consumer cooperatives focus on collective buying to get reduced prices. Worker cooperatives are formed by workers aiming to improve their working conditions, wages, and productivity by offering their services collectively.

Producer cooperatives rely on sharing facilities and selling goods collectively in order to reduce transaction costs. Lastly, financial cooperatives provide financial services through capital sourced from their members' contributions (Okem 2016). Waste-pickers bottom-up cooperatives can be categorized as producer cooperatives. Waste-pickers organize to share machinery and space to gather and process their collected materials and sell collectively at higher prices.

Although cooperatives share the same principles and have both economic and social reform focuses, their commitment to each goal varies. Jaumier et al. (2017), based on a study conducted with French workers' cooperatives, identified three ideal types of cooperatives based on their primary focus, economic gains or social reform, which are *pragmatic*, *reformist* and *political*. Pragmatic cooperatives have primarily economic goals, focusing on financial gains for their members. Pragmatists see cooperative organizations as compatible with the capitalist model. Reformist cooperatives take an intermediary instance between economic and social reform goals. Reformists aim to reduce the harmful effects of capitalism, such as exploitation, instead of replacing it. And the third ideal type presented by Jaumier et al. (2017) is the political cooperatives. Political cooperatives have a primary goal of social change, proposing an alternative system to capitalism based on cooperativism and advanced democracy (Jaumier et al. 2017). Jaumier et al. (2017) consider these three categories as “ideal types” since cooperatives do not perfectly fit one category. Thus, he found variations in the goals of cooperatives from members of the same cooperative. In that sense, cooperatives will lie better in one category, but not entirely.

Based on Jaumier et al.'s (2017) categorization, Wiksell (2020) points out that cooperatives “may practice resistance to different extents, depending on how they relate to the capitalist context, the very same context wherein they must survive in order to practice constructive resistance” (Wiksell 2020, 203). It is important to point out, however, that, to some extent, all cooperatives have a social reform goal. This social reform goal can be as timid as improving members' livelihood (Robin King et al. 2012) or more radical goals of overthrowing the capitalist system (Jaumier et al.'s 2017).

Wiksell (2020), in a study with five cooperatives in Sweden, argued that the mere existence of cooperatives is a form of resistance. Sustainable cooperatives existing over time show that an alternative to the Capitalist model, based on principles of shared ownership and their way of organizing, is possible and inspires others to do the same. In the Swedish context, the cooperative's capacity to share knowledge on this alternative model is limited, as cooperativism is nascent in the country and cooperatives are still considered unreliable forms of business. But, in other contexts where cooperativism is more developed, like in Brazil with the MST and Spain with the Mondragon, collective efforts made by cooperatives enhance the resistance potential to the Capitalist model (Wiksell 2020). Raffaelli (2016) presents similar findings in a study conducted with cooperatives in Argentina. Raffaelli (2016) argues that cooperatives functions as both a palliative to the Capitalist model, helping the poor to alleviate the struggles created by neoliberalism, and as a resistance strategy to show that an alternative model is possible.

Robin King et al. (2012) affirm that neoliberal trading models and privatization of land increased inequality and negatively impacted the livelihood of the rural workers in Mexico. Through exploratory research conducted with two rural cooperatives in the regions of Guanajuato and Oaxaca, Robin King et al. (2012) discuss how grass-roots cooperatives functions as a tool of

resistance to these impacts brought by neoliberal policies and to provide a sustainable livelihood to their members. The agricultural cooperative in Guanajuato has helped the rural poor by creating jobs, selling organic goods collectively and improving access to the local market. And the housing cooperative in Oaxaca has increased its members' livelihood by constructing houses and developing green, self-sufficient communities. In both cases, besides the economic gains, the cooperatives' primary focus is to challenge the neoliberal model, present a valid alternative way of living and improve its members' livelihood with a more people-centred sustainable alternative. In the following section, I will discuss the concept of livelihood in more detail.

Although Wiksell (2020) and Robin King et al. (2012) articles are relevant to further the literature on bottom-up cooperatives and how these organizations help improve their members' livelihood, they do not explore resistance against chronic workplace violence. I will further add to the literature on cooperatives and resistance by exploring the importance of bottom-up cooperatives on waste-pickers' repertoire of everyday strategies to circumvent the barriers imposed by the neoliberal policies implemented in the early 2000s in São Paulo, such as difficulties accessing waste, which would now be collected by waste firms and directed to top-down sorter cooperatives. I will also discuss the differences between bottom-up and top-down cooperatives. The differentiation between bottom-up and top-down cooperatives is important in my research since my focus is to study the role of cooperatives on the *catadores* repertoire of resistance strategies, and the state is one of the foremost perpetrators of violence against waste-pickers with the implementation of policies that restrict their access to waste and impact negatively their income and livelihood. In this sense, my analysis will be restricted to bottom-up cooperatives.

My research also proposed a perspective that differs from the ones presented by Dias (2016) and Rosaldo (2022), which will be discussed further later in this thesis. Both Dias (2016) and Rosaldo (2022) studied waste-pickers bottom-up cooperatives with a focus on the formal forms of participation, such as contributing to the design of public policies, for example, as is the case for a significant part of the existing literature on waste-pickers bottom-up cooperatives. I will focus, instead, on the role of bottom-up cooperatives in the waste-pickers' repertoire of informal resistance strategies.

## **2. Theoretical Framework**

In order to go beyond the scope of previous studies on how bottom-up cooperatives contributes to the resistance against the neoliberal system and discuss the role of these bottom-up organizations in everyday resistance strategies, I will present in this section the main concepts necessary for my analysis.

In studies of waste-pickers, the concept of livelihood, which is not only a source of income but also “a much wider range of activities, such as gaining and retaining access to resources and opportunities, dealing with risk, negotiating social relationships within the household and managing social networks and institutions within communities and the city” (Beall and Nanzeen, 1), is essential. This concept vastly permeates the literature on this subject. Interviews in Bellville (Yu et al. 2020), South Africa, and ethnographic work in São Paulo (Rosaldo 2022) and Rio de Janeiro (Millar 2018) shows that waste-picking was not only a job but a “form of living”, which is broader than a form of income generation (Dias 2016). The freedom of deciding on the shape of the workday is shown as the essential aspect of waste-picking. Yu et al. (2020) found that waste-

pickers were able to work fewer hours and have similar incomes as other informal workers, which means more free time to do other things. Yu et al. do not specify what “other things” waste-pickers do but highlights that 32% of them work less than eight hours per day (Yu et al. 2020, p. 991).

Millar (2018) states, however, that this is not only because waste-pickers prefer to work less. But, because of the *everyday emergencies* inherent to the precarity of their living conditions, they needed this flexibility (Millar 2018). She witnessed and heard various stories about days that were disrupted by floods, fire, and medical emergencies that forced workers to leave in the middle of the day. Also, due to the lack of funds readily available, they could work more to pay the expenses related when those emergencies happened. The unpredictability of their lives makes steady monthly payments, and even weekly payments, not frequent enough (Millar 2018). Millar (2018) uses the “form of living” framework, a concept that does not separate work and life and explores the way of life and livelihood of a studied population, to analyze the waste-pickers perspective on waste-picking and contests the hypothesis of waste-picking as a last resort strategy.

The concept of livelihood, which is part of the form of living, also allows us to discuss what can be considered work. Collins (1995) argues that the concept of work should be broadened to encompass varied types of activities, waged or not, as multiple sources of livelihood. This inclusive concept of work "moves away from a purely economic conception of work to one that sees it as a meaningful activity, structured by social networks and intrinsically tied to individual and group identity" (Collins 1995, p. 43). Browne (1995), from ethnographic work in Martinique, argues that the combination of formal and informal activities is a strategy of the poor to maintain their livelihood and of the wealthy to increase their income (Browne 1995). In this sense, policies that only consider formal activities as the only acceptable form of work exclude informal activities crucial for the poor to secure their livelihoods. My research proposes to analyze informal activities performed by waste-pickers to resist violence and maintain their livelihood.

The discussion on informal activities needs to be preceded by a debate about what is formal and informal. Hart (1973), in a seminal work based on his ethnographic study of the labour force in Accra, Ghana, introduces the term informal sector. Hart argues that the difference between the formal and the informal sectors is whether they are regulated (formal) or not (informal) by the state. The discussion around formality has evolved to a lesser binary typification on sectors since then. The lines that divide both sectors become more blurred and more focused on formal/informal practices and how they are intertwined (Portes and Haller 2005, Millar 2018). Thus, informal activities are not restricted to the poor but encompass all levels of the society (Polese and Morris 2015).

A more practical separation of formal/informal relates to being registered (or not) with authorities, which will be the conceptualization used in this research. In this sense, the formalization process consists of registering an organization or an employment contract with local authorities (ILO 2021). Formalization can be analyzed in two different instances: formalization of work relations between the organization/enterprise and its members/employees and formalization of the organizations/enterprises. The formalization of the work relation refers to registering with local or national authorities a formal contract between the employer and the employee according to the local labour regulations, which gives the employees access to state-guaranteed rights and protections. The formalization of organizations relates to the registration of those organizations with the respective authorities, which may or may not imply the formalization of the employment

relations (Chen 2006). This differentiation is important since, as demonstrated by Rosaldo (2022), they can produce different outcomes for waste-pickers, which will be discussed further in the “Analysis” section.

In order to discuss resistance against violence, I need first to define the concept of violence used in this thesis. Violence is a broad multidimensional concept that goes beyond direct, intentional attacks from identifiable perpetrators. Galtung (1969) presents violence as the cause of the difference between someone's actual and potential realizations, and that it has at least six dimensions. The first dimension relates to the distinction between physical and psychological violence. Physical violence occurs when the perpetrator hits and hurts another person. Psychological violence refers to acts that serve to "decrease mental potentialities" (Galtung 1969, 169), such as, but not limited to threats, lies and indoctrination. The second dimension correlates to positive and negative incentives to influence someone's actions, as the perpetrator can induce the desired behaviour through punishment or rewards. The third dimension refers to the existence or not of direct action against an object. In this sense, demonstrations of power could be considered violence, as they are intended to "constrain human action" (Galtung 1969, 170), even when no one is hurt. The fourth dimension relates to the presence or not of a direct perpetrator of the violent act. The first case is defined as personal or direct violence and refers to situations when a perpetrator can be identified. In contrast, in the latter case, the "violence is built into the structure and shows up as unequal power and consequently as unequal life chances" (Galtung 1969, 171). This type of violence is defined as indirect or structural violence. The fifth dimension refers to intended and unintended violence. Galtung (1969) argues that an act can be considered violent, even when it is unintentional. And, the last dimension indicates two levels of violence, manifest or latent. Manifest violence refers to observable acts of violence, whereas latent violence is associated with unstable scenarios that could quickly degenerate into highly personal or structural violent acts (Galtung 1969).

Based on these dimensions and how and when violence manifests, various types of violence can be defined. One type of violence brought by Pearce (2007) is chronic violence. Chronic violence is a type of violence that is “persistent and recurring [...] measured across time, space and level of intensity” (Pearce 2007, 7). And, as introduced by Passos de Oliveira and de Oliveira Nunes, workplace violence is voluntary actions performed by individuals or groups of individuals against individuals or groups of individuals that cause psychological or physical damage and occurs in the workplace, are related to work activities or occurs in work relations. Workplace violence also includes deprivation or infractions related to fundamental rights and labor and social security rights (Passos de Oliveira and de Oliveira Nunes 2008). Mayer (2021) presents chronic workplace violence as acts of abuse, threat, intimidation, or assault that are “recurring and entrenched in the workplace environment” (Mayer 2021, 4).

Mayer (2017) presents three possible, usually interrelated, categorizations for workplace violence; financial, psychological and physical. Financial violence relates to actions that deny or impact proper compensation for work, including contributions towards social security. Psychological violence can manifest through any type of verbal and written threats, humiliation, harassment, denying periods of rest. And, physical violence includes, but are not limited to, physical attacks; physical confinement; sexual aggression; threatening behaviour; etc. The categorization of chronic violence is important as it facilitates the examination of the different strategies of resistance utilized by waste-pickers.

Chronic workplace violence against waste-pickers can be perceived in numerous situations. Requests for bribery by local security agents and exploitation from intermediaries paying way less than the actual value for the collected materials, for example, can be categorized as financial violence. Another category of chronic workplace violence, as presented by Mayer (2017), is physical violence. Parizeau (2015), for example, shows that, in a study conducted in Buenos Aires with 397 waste-pickers, 31% of the respondents reported violent conflicts with the police. An analysis of psychological violence in waste-picking, as a source of chronic workplace violence, such as described above, is not present in the literature.

Dias and Ogando (2015) studied psychological violence with female waste-pickers through exploratory participatory research. The gender perspective is paramount in studying violence due to its intersectional aspect (Dias and Ogando 2015). Gender, race, and class identities overlap, generating different oppression sources and increasing inequalities. Dias and Ogando (2015) present how patriarchal, sexist and heteronormative culture is embedded in bottom-up cooperatives and, along with a persistent asymmetrical division of household activities, put women's waste-pickers in an even more marginalized position than waste-pickers in general and increase gender inequalities (Dias and Ogando 2015). Although this is a critical viewpoint, it is not particular to waste-picking and workplace violence. Thus, the article discusses building gender awareness but does not discuss women waste-pickers' strategies to tackle gender-based violence in the workplace. Although I recognize the intersectionality of violence – based on race, gender and social class – my research focuses on violence restricted to the waste-picking activity.

Although I have separated structural and chronic violence as two different types of violence, they are not entirely separated from one another. Scott (1995) and Bayat (1997) present how structural changes in pursuit of "progress" have significantly impacted the daily lives of marginalized populations, especially in the Global South. Privatization, public sector reforms, and deregulation have caused social exclusion, unemployment, underemployment, and informality. When justifying studies on everyday resistance, both authors, Bayat more than Scott, discuss the importance of those strategies from the poor to advance their claims to improve their living conditions (Scott 1995; Bayat 1997).

Waste-pickers developed several resistance strategies to resist chronic and structural violence. The focus of my research, as presented before, is to identify these resistance strategies. This research will proceed from the concept of everyday resistance brought by Scott (1985). Scott (1985) presents his results from an ethnographic study about class relations in a Malaysian village from 1977 to 1980 to rethink the concept of hegemony. He examines why peasants do not rebel against their situation through organized mass action and whether this is because they accept the dominant ideology. Scott uses Gramsci's concept of hegemony as the "process of ideological domination" (Scott 1985, 315). He argues that ideological domination is not based on alienation, as proposed by Marxists, but on accepting a perceived inevitable reality. Also, he claims that class differences must not be understood as conflicts but as general interests that are useful not only for the elites but also for the subordinate classes. Scott presents the symbology of the *gifts and loans* provided by the elites and how important they are to reinforce the benefits to maintain the *status-quo*, and how the subordinate classes use this situation for personal gain in the form of a portion of the crop, feasts and others, providing legitimacy to the relation. He uses his findings from the fieldwork to present how peasants are cognizant of their situation of poverty and their position in power

relations but use their knowledge of the institutions in place (culture and power structures) to resist exploitation and secure small personal gains.

Scott (1985) defines everyday resistance as “informal, often covert, and concerned largely with immediate, de facto gains” (Scott 1985, 33). Everyday resistance is informal as it happens outside the formal sphere of institutionalized politics. It is often covert instead of overt acts of confrontation against power structures and actors in order to avoid the rapid and violent responses from superordinate actors (for example, the state, landlords) brought by overt resistance (Scott 1985, 33). And, it seeks immediate, modest de facto gains as these acts of resistance do not pursue revolution but ways to mitigate exploitation from superordinate actors (Scott 1985).

Scott (1985) presents everyday resistance as individualistic reactive actions to counter exploitative actions. However, Bayat (1997) argues that Scott’s concept of everyday resistance is not adequate to study the urban poor in the developing world. Bayat (1997) explains that, differently from peasants, urban poor strategies of resistance are not only individualistic and reactive, but they can also be proactive and collective (Bayat 1997, Mayer 2021). Marginalized groups utilize individual and quiet actions to secure better working and living conditions and will resist collectively when governments attempt to take away those gains (Bayat 1997).

For Katz (2004), opposite practices need to be taken towards positive changes in people's daily hardships to be considered resistance, and she offers three typologies of resistance; *resilience*, *reworking* and *resistance*. *Resilience* refers to individual acts perpetrated to survive with some level of dignity. *Reworking* are quiet strategies aimed to change socio-economic relations and "recalibrate and/or redistribute resources" (Katz 2004, 247). *Resistance* are overt strategies intended to transform socio-economic and undo uneven power relations. Katz (2004) acknowledges that these three typologies overlap but are important to situate each practice of resistance.

Building on the work of Scott, Bayat and Katz, Mayer (2021) proposes a more inclusive concept of resistance. Mayer conceptualize resistance as

individual and collective, sometimes overt but often hidden strategies undertaken by low-income and marginalised people, which aim at guaranteeing survival (i.e. physical and psychological preservation), promoting contextual adjustment (i.e. attenuating oppression and improving access to resources), and/or causing positive transformation in structural sources of abuse. (Mayer 2021, 5)

I will consider a resistance strategy as "successful" when it allows waste-pickers, individually or collectively, to circumvent policies as well as state and superordinate actors' actions of structural and workplace chronic violence.

Based on Foucault’s (1984) claim that space is fundamental to the exercise of power, Johansson and Vinthagen (2016) argue that “resistance is always situated somewhere in socialized space, simultaneously making the social spatialized” (Johansson and Vinthagen 2016, 427). This spatial analytical dimension is important to understanding how waste-pickers perceive and occupy space and adapt their strategies of resistance for different spaces (streets, cooperative sites, dumps). This dimension also allows for the identification of actors that are the source of chronic violence in each



of those spaces. As presented by Narayan and Chikarmane (2013), waste pickers are "physically dispersed, have no employer, many work long hours, and they are socially shunned" (Narayan and Chikarmane 2013, 208). The cooperatives' physical space serves as a communal site to gather, to work and to promote social events, which are opportunities to exchange knowledge and, possibly, strategies of resistance.

As space, time is also an important dimension that affects waste-pickers repertoire of resistance; as a form of control and as a constriction on their income. Foot dragging, boycotts or strikes, as discussed by Bayat as possible forms of resistance (Bayat 1997), are not viable options, for example, since the waste-pickers themselves would most feel the negative impact of those strategies.

Learning from interviewees' lived experiences and building from Mayer's (2021) work, I further contribute to the literature by identifying *organization* and *mobilization* as waste-pickers' main collective resistance strategies to workplace violence. Mayer (2021) focuses mainly on individual resistance strategies developed by domestic workers when facing violent situations perpetrated by their bosses. Unlike domestic workers, waste-pickers have more flexibility on their working hours and workspace since a boss does not define their schedule or place to work, meaning that they can resort to different strategies of resistance. In this sense, the resistance strategies identified in Mayer's (2021) work are not entirely suitable for *catadores*.

Mayer (2021) identified exit and voice as domestic workers' main resistance strategies. Exit consists in leaving the workplace to stop chronic workplace violence, and voice consists of negotiation or confrontation or a mix of both to address workplace abuses by their bosses. Due to the nature of their work, waste-pickers do not have a boss and voice, as presented by Mayer (2021), cannot be directly translated to their situation. Although they also negotiate with buyers of recyclable materials, these negotiations mainly occur collectively, rather than individually, as domestic workers do. Furthermore, instead of focusing on negotiating for better prices for their collected materials, waste-pickers mainly gather their materials to avoid smaller buyers that pay lower rates entirely and sell directly to bigger buyers that pay higher rates. Also, waste-pickers work on the streets and exit is not a viable option. Although they could momentarily leave a particular situation of violence by moving to another place, they would still be vulnerable to chronic workplace violence by state agents working on the streets and the population. Rather than exiting violent situations on the streets, waste-pickers have negotiated, with the help of intermediaries, to resolve those episodes when dealing with State agents, and repositioning themselves as workers and environmental agents when perpetrated by other citizens, as will be presented in detail in the next section. The negotiation with State agents is possible due to the *organization* strategy and the repositioning happens through a strategy that I identified as *reframing*.

Waste-pickers organize mainly into cooperatives to make their activities economically viable, and this is a phenomenon that permeates the Global South (Bonner and Carré 2013). Bottom-up cooperatives, created by waste-pickers, can be classified as Civil Society Organizations (CSOs). Avritzer (2017) presents the concept of civil society as a tripartite concept that distinguishes between civil society, the state and the market. The market refers to private economic activities, the state as formal bureaucratic organizations and civil society as the *locus* of social solidarity, social process, and voluntary associations (Avritzer 2017). Swift (1999) states that civil society

“involves the activity of citizens in free association who lack the authority of the state” (Swift 1999, p. 4). Pearce (1993) also argue that civil society refers to rights of individuals to associate voluntarily and build organizations to defend their interests. However, Pearce (1993) goes further and presents that civil society must include the poor and the weak. Civil society “must be about empowering the poor and enabling them to fight for their own rights as citizens” (Pearce 1993, 225).

CSOs are, as the name suggests, organizations created by citizens within civil society. Hochstetler and Friedman (2008) conceptualize CSOs as “voluntary associations that promote the interests of citizens in a variety of ways” (Hochstetler and Friedman 2008, p. 4). Considering the separation between civil society and the state, it is important to discuss two types of waste-pickers cooperatives: bottom-up and top-down cooperatives. Bottom-up cooperatives, like Cooper Glicério, ACAMJG and Coopamare, are organizations created by waste-pickers, and top-down cooperatives, as is the case of the sorter cooperatives in São Paulo, are created by governments or state and para-state agents for waste-pickers. In this sense, bottom-up cooperatives are civil society organizations (CSOs), created voluntarily by citizens, and top-down cooperatives, created by the state or para-state institutions, cannot be considered as such.

As Rosaldo (2022) and Millar (2018) presented, these different types of cooperatives can produce different outcomes, as bottom-up cooperatives are sustainable and attract waste-pickers, while top-down cooperatives have limited growth and attract people from other working categories instead of waste-pickers. Rosaldo (2022) analyzes waste-picking through the perspective of co-production. Co-production entails that state and civil society share the process of providing public services. In a co-production arrangement organized groups from the civil society, both formal (NGOs) and informal groups (organized informal workers such as street-vendors, transportation workers and waste-pickers) participate in all the development, implementation and delivery of public services (Rosaldo 2022). Rosaldo argues how co-production can result in "starkly different outcomes" (Rosaldo 2022, 87) depending on how the policy is designed. Rosaldo (2022) found that the policies of co-production designed and implemented by the São Paulo municipal government in the 1980s and 2000s had opposite outcomes. The first was more inclusive and the latter more excluding due to the level of participation of waste-pickers in the policy design process. These differences will be discussed in further detail in the "Analysis" section.

Waste-pickers also develop strategies and tactics to forward their organizing efforts. To identify these organizational strategies and tactics, I will use the framework of *contentious politics* (Tilly and Tarrow 2015). Tilly and Tarrow (2015) classify contentious politics as “interactions in which actors make claims bearing on other actors’ interests, leading to coordinated efforts on behalf of shared interests or programs, in which governments are involved as targets, initiators of claims, or third parties” (Tilly and Tarrow 2015, 7). *Brokerage* is a mechanism in which new connections are produced between unconnected sites (Tilly and Tarrow 2015). This process of organizing led to another mechanism presented by Tilly and Tarrow (2015), called diffusion. Diffusion is the “spread of a form of contention, an issue, or a way of framing it from one site to another” (Tilly and Tarrow 2015, 31). Tilly and Tarrow (2015) present that regime changes also remodel opportunity structures and allow “new actors to make claims on elites” (Tilly and Tarrow 2015, 60).

McCarthy and Zald (1977) discuss how individuals, or organizations, can use strategies and tactics to mobilize supporters toward goal achievement and that those strategies and tactics are influenced by “inter-organization competition and cooperation” (McCarthy and Zald 1977, 1217). Furthermore, the ability of the individuals or organizations to mobilize supporters, and transform them into constituents of the social movement, will depend on the resource they control – money, influence, legitimacy, facilities and labour (McCarthy and Zald 1977).

*Reframing* has successfully helped waste-pickers to reposition themselves as it allowed them to be recognized by civil society as essential workers. Benford and Snow (2000), in a review of the framing process in social movements literature, define that “collective action frames are action-oriented sets of beliefs and meanings that inspire and legitimate the activities and campaigns of a social movement organization (SMO)” (Benford and Snow 2000, 614). Benford and Snow (2000) discuss the concepts and analytical tools used by movement scholars to study framing in SMOs, and introduce the main variables used to analyze collective action frames. These variables measure the type of problem a movement wants to address, the level of rigidity/flexibility and inclusivity/exclusivity of the scope of the frame, and if the frame resonates with other groups or not. On the discussion on rigidity/flexibility and inclusivity/exclusivity of the scope of the frame, Benford and Snow (2000) introduce the concept of *master frames* which are frames that are broad and flexible and can accommodate different movements. Benford and Snow (2000) present four strategic processes movements can use: frame bridging, frame amplification, frame transformation and frame extension. Frame bridging consists of connecting two unrelated frames. Frame amplification relates to connecting a frame with existing values and beliefs in order to resonate better with the targeted population. The frame transformation process is based on changing old understandings about a movement and creating new ones. Lastly, frame extension consists of extending your frame beyond your primary interests, to align it with a presumed more important frame that will bring potential adherents. (Benford and Snow 2000). *Reframing* is a collective, open and non-confrontational resistance strategy that reshapes how *catadores* have been seen by the population through lectures on schools, universities and companies. Those lectures have happened through the cooperatives and were possible due to the organization efforts.

### **3. Methodology and Sampling framework**

The Covid pandemic that took place at the time of researching and writing my thesis limited the methods available. Due to the pandemic, I used online interviews and online observations, employing digital communication and social media platforms to engage with waste-pickers in São Paulo. This research relied on open-ended interviews using the chain referral sampling method, also known as snowball sampling, departing from contacts I previously established with waste-pickers from Cooper Glicério. Cooper Glicério is a bottom-up cooperative created in 2006 with the goal to organize the *catadores* from the Baixada do Glicério region, in São Paulo (Cooper Glicério nd.).

Snowball sampling is most used to study "hidden" populations, which are populations that do not want to be found, due to “moral, legal, or social sensitivities surrounding the behavior in question” (Biernack and Waldorf 1981, 144). Although waste-pickers are not as hidden as other vulnerable groups, like drug users, the current restrictions limit the ability to actively identify and visit cooperatives to use a more direct sampling method. As Mayer (2021) stated, open-ended questionnaires help "minimizing the impact of researcher bias" (Mayer 2021, 7). This

characteristic is crucial to a snowball sampling since one of the main concerns of this method is the bias that can be introduced considering that respondents can refer to other respondents with similar thoughts and perceptions. The number of respondents was not pre-defined and was limited when the variation of responses becomes minimal, in this case when no new strategies of everyday resistance emerge from the interviews. (Biernack and Waldorf, 1981).

I also relied on online research on social media platforms. I have visited and followed waste-pickers bottom-up cooperatives' Facebook and Instagram pages and watched videos on YouTube produced by waste-pickers and NGOs to gather complementary data. I had originally intended to include waste-pickers associated with cooperatives or associations and independent waste-pickers, not associated with any cooperative or association (*catadores avulsos*). However, I had succeeded only in meeting with waste-pickers associated with cooperatives or associations. The interviewees were leaders or part of the administrative board of these bottom-up cooperatives and associations. The leaders of the cooperatives do not work on the streets. In that sense, I captured how working inside a cooperative helped mitigate the violence they used to suffer when working on the streets and how working collectively increases their negotiation power. However, I could not capture the perspective of waste-pickers that work on the streets, collecting waste for cooperatives. Nor the presence of chronic workplace violence that could happen due to the power differences between cooperatives' workers and their leadership and the possible coping strategies workers use to deal with it.

The technological barriers, mainly lack of access to cellphones or smartphones and to the internet, and the impossibility to do in-person fieldwork due to the pandemic, restricted my reach to this even more marginalized population. Due to the focus on the impact of CSOs (bottom-up cooperatives and associations) in waste-pickers resistance strategy, the lack of interviews with *catadores avulsos* was not a major concern. As presented in the analysis below, bottom-up cooperatives and associations are the primary tool and source of resistance strategies on chronic workplace violence. In this sense, I relied on perspectives presented by the interviewees, which are associated waste-pickers, on non-associated waste-pickers and secondary sources present on the literature to complement my analysis.

Discussions were conducted using a semi-structured open-ended questionnaire initially created for research conducted first in Brazil by my supervisor Dr. Jean-François Mayer, and then in Peru by my colleague Anna Calderon and in Medellín by my colleague Audrey-Anne Doyle. Semi-structured open-ended questionnaires allow interviewees to share their unique experiences and provide insights on the studied topic that can broaden the researcher's knowledge (Albudaiwi 2017). Thus, semi-structured questionnaires enable follow-up questions to clarify the interviewees' responses or better understand a specific subject (Omachinski 2017). In this sense, semi-structured questionnaires were used to capture waste-pickers lived experiences better. The questionnaire was designed to study domestic workers' resistance strategies. Modifications were made to adapt the questionnaire to the context of waste-pickers. Discussions were recorded and later transcribed verbatim. The transcriptions are safeguarded in my Dropbox and have been emailed to my supervisor Dr. Mayer. The final version of the questionnaire is available in Annex I.

I conducted 13<sup>9</sup> interviews with 9 different waste-pickers, from 5 bottom-up cooperatives (Cooper Glicério, Cooper-Recifavela, Cooperativa de Catadores Seletivos Parque Cocaia - Cooperpac, Cooperativa Vira-lata e Armazém Fantasma) and 1 bottom-up association (Associação de Catadores Nova Glicério) from September to November 2021. Zoom was the main communication platform utilized, with follow-up interactions made on WhatsApp. The participants' names have been changed to protect their identity. Estimates show that São Paulo has between 70 to 96 waste-pickers' organizations (cooperatives, including bottom-up and top-down, and associations) with a total of approximately 3000 workers (Grimberg 2007). Cooper Glicério was selected as my first point of contact since this research is part of a major ongoing research project driven by my supervisory committee, Dr. Mayer and Dr. Hilgers, with whom they have already initiated contacts. The other cooperatives were contacted through the referrals made initially by Maura, a member of Cooper Glicério.

The smaller cooperative interviewed (Armazém Fantasma) has 10 members and the larger one (Associação de Catadores Nova Glicério) has 118 members. The other four has 30 to 44 associates.

The study focused on São Paulo due to the initial contacts previously made by Dr. Mayer and Dr. Hilgers, but not only that. São Paulo is the economic capital of Brazil and concentrates the greatest number of waste-pickers and waste-pickers cooperatives (ANCAT 2021). Thus, as presented before, São Paulo was the birthplace of the first waste-pickers' cooperative, which sparked the development of other cooperatives in other cities.

#### **4. Analysis**

In this section, I first present an overall analysis of *catadores* and waste-picking. Then, I will analyze and identify the resistance strategies found during my fieldwork. These findings do not pretend to account for all waste-pickers resistance strategies. The central idea is to give voice to waste-pickers and highlight the resistance strategies identified by them to resist chronic workplace violence.

I have divided my analysis by perpetrators of chronic workplace violence, which are the civil society, buyers of recyclable materials and the State. To identify the type of violence and analyze the respective strategy utilized to resist it, I have used Mayer's (2021) categorization presented above, which consists of physical, psychological and financial violence. I have also added Galtung's (1969) category of structural violence when analyzing chronic workplace violence perpetrated by the State. This addition was necessary as Mayer's (2021) categorization considers only direct and intentional violence perpetrated by one's bosses, and violence perpetrated by the State is not always direct and intentional.

##### ***A. Catadores and waste-picking***

###### *i. Cooperatives and associations*

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<sup>9</sup>Two of those interviews were recorded as part of the Video Capsules Project from the Research Team on Inclusion and Governance in Latin America – ÉRIGAL. The video-capsules are available at <https://erigal.org/video-capsules>.

Waste-pickers can be associated with membership-based organizations, both bottom-up and top-down, or not. Waste-pickers that are not associated with organizations are called autonomous waste-pickers (*catadores avulsos*). Thus, associated and autonomous waste-pickers can work on the streets or in dumps.

In some bottom-up organizations (e.g., Copper Glicério), waste-pickers take turns working on the streets collecting recyclable materials while others work internally sorting and packing materials (Maura, Zoom conversation on September 14, 2021). In other bottom-up organizations (e.g., Cooper Vira-Lata), waste-pickers work only sorting and packing materials they receive from companies and buildings. These companies and buildings need to properly discard their waste due to the *Logística Reversa* policy (Wanderley, Zoom conversation on November 2, 2021). A third type of waste-picker bottom-up organization (e.g., Armazém Fantasma) buys materials from autonomous waste-pickers to sort and re-sell them to intermediaries and the industry. I will discuss the difference between this latter type of organization and *ferros-velhos* in the “Waste-pickers and buyers of recyclable materials” section.

Waste-pickers organize mainly into cooperatives to make their activities economically viable, and this is a phenomenon that permeates the Global South (Bonner and Carré 2013). In the 1980s and 1990s, numerous grassroots organizations of waste-pickers emerged (Holt and Littlewood 2016, Dias 2016, Rosaldo 2022). Waste-pickers constituted these bottom-up organizations as cooperatives or associations to increase their negotiation power when dealing with governments and buyers of recyclable materials (Dias and Samson 2016, Millar 2018, Rosaldo 2022).

These bottom-up organizations were able to achieve partial success for some of their inclusion demands in the formal solid waste management system. In cities like Belo Horizonte, São Paulo and Bogotá, for example, waste-pickers started to be formally recognized by their respective governments as actors of the waste management system. They received technical and material support and legal access to waste (Dias 2016, Millar 2018, Rosaldo 2022). This process happened in different times - São Paulo in the late 1980s, Belo Horizonte in the early 1990s and Bogotá in the early 2000s - but in all three cases, the process of recognition started by forming bottom-up waste-pickers MBOs.

In São Paulo, COOPAMARE was able to negotiate with Luiza Erundina (Workers’ Party - PT), mayor of the city from 1989 to 1992, and secure physical space, training, equipment and financial support (Rosaldo 2022). In Belo Horizonte, the Associação dos Catadores de Papel, Papelão e Material Reciclável – ASMARE, created in 1990, started negotiating with the municipal government and were integrated to the formal solid waste management system in 1993 (Dias and Samson 2016). ASMARE worked in partnership with the Municipal Government to be recognized as a service provider and as part of the formal solid waste management system. As stated by Dias;

a crucial component of the success of inclusive programming in Belo Horizonte, Bogotá and Pune is the role of waste pickers in organizing to further their demands for integration into formal solid waste systems and for recognition as key economic actors. In all of these cases, [bottom-up] membership-based organizations (MBOs) were important for facilitating the representation of workers' interests with municipal governments (Dias 2016, p. 382).

Lastly, in Bogotá, the Asociación de Recicladores de Bogotá – ARB (Bogotá’s waste-pickers Association), a bottom-up MBO, also founded in 1990, initiated a legal fight against the Colombian government in 2002. And, in 2003, the Colombian Supreme Court ruled that waste-pickers should be formally recognized and incorporated into the formal waste-management system (Parra 2015).

Rosaldo found that the policies of co-production designed and implemented by the São Paulo municipal government with the participation of bottom-up cooperatives during the 1980s successfully improved the income and work conditions of waste-pickers. Contrarily, the policies designed and implemented without significant involvement of those bottom-up cooperatives resulted in the exclusion of the waste-pickers from the policies that were supposed to benefit them. The discussion of the policies implemented in the early 2000s happened through São Paulo’s Municipal Waste and Citizenship Forum, which included over 85 organizations, such as NGOs, technical experts, state officials, waste-pickers organizations, businesses and universities (Rosaldo 2020, Grimberg 2007). With that, waste-pickers comprised only a small contingent of the participants in the Forum, and the other groups held more weight in the decision-making process (Rosaldo 2022). Rosaldo (2022) explored waste-pickers’ formal forms of participation in both attempts of co-production in São Paulo.

As discussed previously, bottom-up and top-down cooperatives can produce different outcomes. For example, in Rio de Janeiro, the case of Jardim Gramacho, Coopergramacho, a top-down cooperative created by Comlurb, the para-statal company responsible for the Jardim Gramacho dump, had as one of its' primary objectives to regulate the work of waste-pickers and control their access to waste by creating shifts, denying access to *catadores* considered too young or too old and during nighttime. Associação de Catadores do Aterro Metropolitano de Jardim Gramacho – ACAMJG (Association of Collectors of the Metropolitan Landfill of Jardim Gramacho) on the other hand, was created by *catadores* from the dump, who started consolidating in an effort to resist the possible closure of the dump in 2005. Coopergramacho never took off, while ACAMJG became "one of the most important organizations in Brazil's National Movement of Catadores (MNCR) and the most economically viable cooperative of *catadores* in the metropolitan area of Rio de Janeiro" (Millar 2018, 154).

For the case of São Paulo, Rosaldo (2022) highlights the differences between organizations from the 1980s and 1990s and those created in the 2000s. The grassroots organizations (bottom-up) from the ‘80s and ‘90s were able to elevate “the incomes, conditions, and voices of hundreds of waste pickers and sparked a national movement” (Rosaldo 2022, 87). However, the government’s efforts to create sorter cooperatives (top-down) for waste-pickers in the 2000s marginalized *catadores* from these spaces, which were occupied by unemployed people from other, formal work categories. The objective of these new organizations has changed from "helping waste-pickers" to "creating jobs" (Rosaldo 2022, 85).

As argued by Rosaldo (2022) and Grimberg (2007), sorter cooperatives in São Paulo, top-down cooperatives implemented by the municipal government to sort and bail recyclables, are not able to attract waste-pickers since the job posts available are incompatible with waste-pickers livelihood (Rosaldo 2022, Grimberg 2007). Thus, as O’Hare (2020) presents, policies poorly designed can be more prejudicial than beneficial by decreasing waste-pickers monthly income

instead of increasing it. In a study of the policies implemented by the Montevideo Municipal Government on waste management, the wage proposed for waste-pickers to move from their bottom-up cooperative to a top-down cooperative on the Ley de Envases was lower than their actual average income (O'Hare 2020).

São Paulo's new waste management system proposed transferring the collection of materials from waste-pickers to waste management firms, which restrict waste pickers' access to waste, affecting negatively *catadores*' ability to work and generate income. The government also mounted an offensive against cooperatives created by waste-pickers, forcing them to close, through eviction mandates from cooperatives' headquarters, or shift to a sorter cooperative and stop buying materials from waste-pickers (Rosaldo 2022, Grimberg 2007). The municipal government usually justified these evictions under unsanitary and fire hazard risk allegations. However, members of bottom-up waste-pickers organizations stated that the evictions were part of a movement led by conservative mayors to expel unwanted populations from public spaces to make the city "cleaner" (Grimberg 2007). Rosaldo (2022) highlights that these actions against waste-pickers happened concurrently with measures against graffiti artists and homeless encampments, which reinforces the true governmental goal of "cleaning" the downtown area (Rosaldo 2022). Working informally as an autonomous waste-picker or organized in bottom-up membership-based organizations and other informal resistance strategies, which I will discuss below, enable waste-pickers to keep working and maintain their livelihoods outside the formal waste management system. (Grimberg 2007).

## *ii. Formalization into cooperatives*

Cooperatives and associations of waste-pickers, bottom-up and top-down, offer two types of relations with their members: through formal positions with a *carteira assinada*<sup>10</sup> (signed work ID) or as a supportive space for autonomous waste-pickers to collectively sort and sell materials, with no formal contract. Thus, these cooperatives and associations may, or may not, be formalized. It is important to differentiate the type of formalization in each case, formalization of the work relations or formalization of the cooperatives and associations per se, as these may affect the repertoire of resistance and waste-pickers willingness to join those organizations.

Rosaldo (2022) concludes that the policies designed in São Paulo in the 2000s focused more on the formalization of the work relations between waste-pickers and the top-down sorter cooperatives than responding to *catadores* demands of participation in the formal solid waste system and support from the municipal government. The jobs created at top-down sorter cooperatives helped reduce unemployment in São Paulo. However, waste-pickers were not the main beneficiaries of such policies. Workers from other economic sectors filled most of the new positions created in these top-down cooperatives. These workers were already used to formal positions regulated by the Consolidação das Leis Trabalhistas – CLT (Consolidation of Labour

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<sup>10</sup> *Carteira-assinada* (signed work ID) is the official document in which employment contracts are registered in Brazil.



Legislation)<sup>11</sup>, with fixed working hours, limited to 44 hours at maximum and 40 hours at minimum per week, and monthly payments, instead of more frequent payments (Rosaldo 2022).

Waste-pickers were invited to join the sorter cooperatives, but most of them refused. Rosaldo (2022) states that the work on the top-down cooperatives was incompatible with waste-pickers livelihood. The fixed working schedules and the proposed wage, lower than their income working autonomously or on bottom-up cooperatives, made the formal positions on the top-down sorter cooperatives unattractive (Rosaldo 2022). And the majority of the waste-pickers that joined the sorter cooperatives left within a few weeks due to the restrictions imposed (Rosaldo 2022).

As Rosaldo (2022) and Millar presented, waste-pickers organized in bottom-up cooperatives with no formal labour contract were able to increase their income by selling their materials at higher prices due to their increase in negotiation power resulting from their association. Contrastingly, waste-pickers that joined top-down cooperatives through positions with a *carteira assinada* had a negative impact on their incomes. Most formal positions on the top-down sorter cooperatives in São Paulo paid about the minimum wage, while autonomous *catadores*, members of bottom-up cooperatives with no formal labour contracts (without a *carteira-assinada*), reported average earnings between 1.5 to 2 times the minimum wage monthly (Rosaldo 2022). Rosaldo explained that autonomous *catadores* have higher incomes than those in top-down cooperatives due to the access to better materials on the streets than those offered by the city to the cooperatives to sort and sell.

O'Hare (2020), in an ethnographic work in Montevideo, also found that waste-pickers at Cooperativa Felipe Cardoso (COFECA), a bottom-up cooperative, had higher incomes than the income offered to waste-pickers on formal positions at Planta Aires, the top-down cooperative created by the Montevideo municipal government (O'Hare 2020). Adding to the access to better materials, as shown by Rosaldo, O'Hare presents another important source of income through the recovery and sale of *requeche*. *Requeche* is related to valuable materials like watches, jewelry, and even money found in the waste that waste-pickers can sell, and the profits would be for them. As a formal employee from the Planta Aires, the top-down cooperative, waste-pickers were not permitted to take materials from the plant and sell them individually. So, selling the *requeche* was not an option anymore (O'Hare 2020).

Implementing measures by the state or para-state organizations, such as Comlurb, to restrict or impede waste-pickers access to waste by excluding nighttime shifts can be categorized as structural violence since it limits their working hours and, consequently, their income (Millar 2018). Another form of structural violence is the imposition of formalization on *catadores*, with a *carteira-assinada*, as happened in São Paulo, in order to be able to keep working, since the formalization process impacts waste-pickers livelihoods negatively and diminishes their income, as previously

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<sup>11</sup> The CLT is the Brazilian labour code, established by Getúlio Vargas in 1943 and still in effect, which includes the legal rights and protections for Brazilian workers (Mayer 2016). However, the CLT applies only for workers with a *carteira-assinada* (signed work ID), the official document in which employment contracts are registered. And, to be considered a formal worker in the Brazilian context, it is mandatory to have the work ID signed (Millar 2018).

mentioned (Coletto and Bisschop 2017, Rosaldo 2022). Although these policies aimed to improve working conditions by limiting working hours to more acceptable standards and providing social security benefits through formalization, they unintentionally restrict the waste-pickers full potential to generate income and sustain their livelihood. In this sense, those policies qualify as violent acts against waste-pickers. The fact that waste-pickers are still working informally, even after the implementation of those policies, can be considered an act of resistance.

An interesting example of resistance strategy presented by Millar related to the space dimension is related to a policy implemented by Comlurb. The company introduced a mandate for the use of vests to restrict the number of waste-pickers working simultaneously on the dump. The vests were distributed to intermediaries, who should then hand them to waste-pickers selected by the intermediaries. However, the number of vests was not enough to cover all the waste-pickers that used to work at the Jardim Gramacho dump. Thus, children and old waste-pickers should not receive a vest. To circumvent this policy, waste-pickers made copies, loaned or rented their vests to others when they were not working to allow more people to work (Millar 2018).

For instance, as indicated above, Comlurb tried to limit the access to the dump to certain hours only (effectively excluding nightshift), which affected the waste-pickers' working hours and, ultimately, the amount of material they would be able to collect and sell –and therefore negatively impacted their income. As a constriction of the repertoire of resistance strategies, because waste-picking depends on the amount of time collecting materials, resistance strategies that impact their available time to work directly affect their income.

### *iii. Catadores and the fight for their rights*

In 1999, Belo Horizonte hosted the “I Encontro Nacional de Catadores de Papel” (First National Assembly of Paper Pickers). The discussions on this assembly led to the creation of the Movimento Nacional dos Catadores de Materiais Recicláveis – MNCR (National Movement of Waste-Pickers). They also opened the conversations to organize a congress with waste-pickers of all types soon (Grimberg 2007, MNCR nd).

The MNCR then organized, in 2001, in Brasília, the “I Congresso Nacional de Materiais Recicláveis” (Recyclable Materials National Congress). 1,700 waste-pickers attended the event. The Congress resulted in the elaboration of the Carta de Brasília (Letter of Brasília). The letter covered a series of demands/proposals to improve the working conditions, recognition of waste-pickers as workers, their inclusion in the formal waste-management systems and a national policy for the selective collection that would include and prioritize bottom-up waste-pickers cooperatives (Grimberg 2007, MNCR nd). The event demonstrated waste-pickers strength and organization capacity. It led to the first major victory for the MNCR when, in 2002, the government changed the Cadastro Brasileiro de Ocupações – CBO (Brazilian Register of Occupations) to include the *catador* as a professional category, one of the demands present in the Letter of Brasília (Grimberg 2007, Pereira and Teixeira 2011, Cláudio, Zoom conversation on September 16, 2021). In Brazil, the concept of citizenship and work have been highly interconnected since the implementation of the welfare state and the CLT by Getúlio Vargas in the 1940s and are still culturally present today. Only workers had access to social security programs, and citizenship was directly connected to formal work (Millar 2018). In this sense, the recognition of waste-pickers as workers also entails their recognition as citizens by the population.

The event also incited the discussion of the national policy on solid waste by the Brazilian Congress in 2001, which culminated with the implementation of the law in 2010 covering other demands from the letter, such as the *Logística Reversa* policy (Reverse Logistics) (Ministério do Meio Ambiente nd). This policy aims to compel the biggest producers of recyclable materials to help finance the waste management systems and improve selective collection services. It is also a form of remuneration of waste-pickers cooperatives by their services (BRASIL 2010).

Besides the mobilization period from 1999 to 2001, Luís Inácio Lula da Silva, known as Lula, and the Partido dos Trabalhadores (PT, Workers' Party) had a critical role in the consolidation of bottom-up waste-pickers MBOs. The history of waste-pickers movements and the leftist PT crosses on several occasions, and some historic victories for the movement happened during PT administrations. As previously presented, COOPAMARE had successful negotiations with São Paulo's Municipal Government under Luiza Erundina's, from PT, mandate. Their success sparked the creation of other waste-pickers MBOs in São Paulo and nationally (Rosaldo 2022). ASMARE, in Belo Horizonte, was integrated into the formal waste-management system in 1993, during Patrus Ananias' mayor mandate, also from PT (Dias and Samson 2016, Pereira and Teixeira 2011). Waste-pickers organizations took advantage of the political opportunity window with the ascension of PT to the municipal administrations to advance their agenda.

Due to the party's foundations based on grassroots movements, PT administrations opened space to marginalized groups, such as the bottom-up waste-pickers organizations, to negotiate and advance their claims. Previously to become São Paulo's mayor, Luiza Erundina, one of the founding members of the PT, had worked with the Organização de Auxílio Fraternal – OAF (Organization of Fraternal Assistance), a group of nuns from the Brazilian Roman Catholic Church, advocating to expand public housing. The same group of nuns from the OAF helped eight waste-pickers to mobilize and form the Coopamare, São Paulo's first bottom-up cooperative of waste-pickers, in the late 1980s. Therefore, "Coopamare had an inside line with Erundina" (Rosaldo 2022, 76). Thus, OAF participated in the organization of the National Assembly of Paper Pickers in 1999, mentioned above, and in creating the MNCR (Grimberg 2007).

The process of organizing in a cooperative and creating the first connections between waste-pickers and the São Paulo's municipal government, with the assistance of the OAF, could be classified as brokerage, one of the mechanisms of contentious politics presented by Tilly and Tarrow (2015). As previously presented, the success case in São Paulo with COOPAMARE was then utilized in other cities, like Belo Horizonte, to organize waste-pickers and advance claims in a PT administration.

As a leftist party, PT has traditionally supported subordinate groups' demands and worked with social movements (Mayer 2021, Pereira and Teixeira 2011). President Lula, PT's main leader and founder won the national elections in 2002. In 2003, in his first year of presidency, Lula implemented the Comitê Interministerial de Inclusão Social de Catadores de Materiais Recicláveis (Waste-pickers Social Inclusion Interministerial Committee). The Committee was responsible for implementing actions in the National level to support waste-pickers. President Lula also created, in 2004, the Ministério do Desenvolvimento Social e Combate à Fome – MDS (Ministry of Social Development and Fight against Hunger) (Pereira e Teixeira 2011). The MDS was created to support cash transfer, food security and social protection policies (Silva 2014). Lula invited Patrus Ananias (PT), Belo Horizonte's former mayor, responsible for including waste-pickers in the

municipal waste-management system, for being the Social Development Minister (Pereira e Teixeira 2011).

Along with workers, segments of the Brazilian Roman Catholic Church also constituted one of the most influential groups in the PT's foundation (Secco 2011, Aarão Reis 2007). In some cities, the *Comunidade Eclesiástica de Base* – CEB (Ecclesiastic Community Base) led the creation of the PT local branch. In others, they support its creation by providing space for and participating in meetings (Secco 2011).

It is important to point out that members of the Brazilian Church have been influential actors in helping waste-pickers mobilize and create cooperatives since the 1980s. Members of the Church also had an essential role in creating two of the six bottom-up cooperatives studied, one founded in the late 1990s, *Cooperativa Vira-lata*, and another in 2007, *Recifavela* (Wanderley, Zoom conversation on September 28, 2021, Pedro, member of *Recifavela*, Zoom conversation on September 21, 2021). In both cases, a project from a sector of the Church incentivized church attendees to find groups of *catadores* on the streets and help them develop a cooperative.

The presence of members of the Church in the creation of PT, waste-pickers cooperatives and other civil society organizations happened due to a review from the Church on their practices. During the 1950s and 1960s, the Catholic Church began a process to reevaluate its position in the world, led by Pope John XXIII, to bring the church "into closer touch with the modern world." (Gleason 1972, 94). Departing from this revision and the necessity to regain the confidence of the poor that were moving from the Catholic Church to evangelical churches and Afro-Brazilian religions in 1968, from the assemblies of the Latin American Episcopal Council, emerges the Liberation Theology (Sader 1988, Martelli 2003, von Sinner 2007, Menezes Neto 2007). This critical transition changed the manner in which an important segment of the Catholic Church viewed the path to salvation, moving from an emphasis on individuals to a focus on collective action. Members of the Catholic clergy in Latin America who adhered to the Liberation Theology consequently abandoned the Church's generally passive social stance and adopted an active role towards social transformation. They did so through the implementation of community bases to assist marginalized groups by helping them to fight for their rights (Sader 1988). This new theology was based on the Marxist theory and entailed that the church should work with the poor to liberate them from the oppression of the capitalists and the State (von Sinner 2007).

In Brazil, as in other Latin American countries, members of the church aligned with the Liberation Theology implemented community bases called *Comunidades eclesiais comunitárias* - CEBs (ecclesiastic community bases). The CEBs helped indigenous and rural groups organize nationally and fight agrarian reform and had a critical role in the genesis of the *Movimento dos Trabalhadores sem Terra* - MST (Landless Rural Workers Movement) in 1979. During the military regime implemented in Brazil, from 1964 to 1985, the CEBs were safe spaces where militant groups could gather and discuss strategies to organize their demands. As a religious institution, the CEBs could escape the repressive regime and promote the mobilization of marginalized groups and new political leaderships (Aguiar and Sales Jr 2020, Baiocchi 2017, Martelli 2003). Besides their role in rural areas, CEBs were also implemented in peripheral urban areas of major cities. The CEBs had an active role in forming neighbourhood associations, communal kindergartens and other urban community organizations (Martelli 2003, Menezes Neto 2007). As presented above, the

CEBs were also important agents in the creation of bottom-up waste-pickers organizations, which allowed waste-pickers to develop collective strategies of resistance.

Due to a congruent agenda between the "new syndicalism" - new workers organizations that were fighting traditional syndicalists structures coopted by the military regime - and the Liberation Theology, members of the Church guided by the Liberation Theology and the CEBs had a critical role in the formation and consolidation of organizations such as the Partido dos Trabalhadores - PT (Workers Party), as previously mentioned (Chauí 1988, Martelli 2003, Menezes Neto 2007). I will not develop further on how these relations were constructed, as it is not part of the central discussion of this thesis<sup>12</sup>. However, it was important to contextualize the role of the CEBs in politicizing the urban and rural poor in the 1970s and 1980s, and their impact on waste-pickers mobilizing efforts.

## **B. Waste-pickers and civil society**

In recent years, the relationship between *catadores* that are members of bottom-up cooperatives and associations and civil society has been peaceful. None of the interviewees reported any recent situation of physical violence. Seven of the 9 participants stated that they never face any situation of verbal or psychological violence. But some did in the past.

The main source of chronic workplace violence perpetrated by the population used to be psychological violence through name-calling. Maura, a member of Cooper Glicério, stated that people on the streets used to call waste-pickers "cavalos" (horses) and "burros" (donkeys) because they were pulling carts (Maura, Zoom conversation on September 14, 2021). In the same lines, Cláudio, a member of the Associação de Catadores Nova Glicério, stated that waste-pickers used to be referred to as *maloqueiros*<sup>13</sup> (Cláudio, zoom conversation on September 16, 2021).

In order to mitigate these situations of psychological violence, I have identified two everyday resistance strategies: *organizing* and *reframing*. These two strategies and how and why they mitigated these situations of psychological violence will be discussed in detail below.

### *i. Organization*

As discussed in the "Waste-pickers and the fight for their rights" section, the mobilization efforts in the 1990s and early 2000s were crucial to reducing situations of violence perpetrated by civil society, at least for waste-pickers associated to bottom-up MBOs. Cláudio presented that situations of violence used to happen in the past. He pointed out the mobilization in the 90s as an essential strategy to reduce violence against waste-pickers. The mobilization process brought visibility to waste-pickers as workers and not as *maloqueiros* as it used to be. "This strategy of organizing the waste-pickers that were from the base 20 years ago, almost 30 years ago [...] brought this perspective that this would be the path. Waste-pickers mobilization brought visibility through recognition of their importance to the society, that saw the waste-pickers instead of the *ferros-*

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<sup>12</sup> For more information on the importance of the CEBs and the creation of PT see Sader (1988) and Aarão Reis (2007).

<sup>13</sup> *Maloqueiro* is a Brazilian slang used for petty thieves or to refer to residents of the favelas in a derogatory way.

*velhos*<sup>14</sup> (Zoom conversation on September 16th, 2021, my translation). Cláudio stated that *catadores* mobilization led to the inclusion of the *catador* as a professional category in the CBO (Brazilian Register of Occupations) in 2002. Grimberg (2007) corroborates Cláudio's statement, when she presents that one of the first main victories of the MNCR happened in 2002 with the inclusion of waste-pickers in the CBO, which was one of the demands on the Carta de Brasília. Grimberg (2007) also attributes this inclusion to the waste-pickers' mobilization in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Thus, he states that the population is more peaceful with them now and recognizes waste-picking is a profession (Cláudio, Zoom conversation on September 16, 2021). Rosaldo (2022) called this first phase of mobilization from the late 1980s to early 2000s, the "Waste Picker Recognition" or recognition approach.

However, although the interviewees expressed that situations of violence perpetrated by the civil society have ended, these episodes still happen with waste-pickers not associated with bottom-up MBOs. Paula, a member of the Armazém Fantasma, explained that she faced some episodes of psychological violence due to prejudice while collecting on the streets. The episodes of prejudice materialized through name-calling and discrimination. She stated that working on a bottom-up cooperative mitigates this type of violence since people do not recognize waste-pickers on the streets as workers but as drug users: "If you are on the streets, you are not worth it. If you are inside an [working] environment, it is a bit better." (Paula, WhatsApp conversation on November 17, 2021, my translation).

Paula also mentions the presence of barriers imposed by other waste-pickers in her neighborhood when she tried to collect materials on the street. Her strategy to circumvent those situations was to stop picking, mobilize and form a bottom-up cooperative.

I had already been out on the street to collect material. It is very advantageous. But, here in my neighbourhood, there is already someone designated to collect materials in each place.[...] If someone else tries to collect materials here in my neighbourhood, there is a conflict with the already existing autonomous waste-pickers. I have been out in other areas to collect materials, but I had to stop. I had to stop not because of shame or because it was not worth it. I stopped because I could not do the transportation of the material collected. [...] (Paula, Zoom conversation on September 27, 2021, my translation)

In order to resist psychological violence, Paula organized a group of peripheral black women that did not have previously worked with waste-picking. Then, she started convincing the existing autonomous waste-pickers in her neighbourhood to sell their materials to Armazém Fantasma, instead of selling the materials to *ferros-velhos*. With that, Paula avoids confrontation with those existing autonomous waste-pickers. Paula stated that she decided to open the bottom-up cooperative due to her previous experience working on Recifavela (Paula, Zoom conversation on September 27, 2021).

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<sup>14</sup> *Ferros-velhos* are small commerce that buys almost any sort of used item at a low price to resell it and is common in poor neighbourhoods in Brazil.

This process of resource mobilization is not new in the social movement literature. The novelty here is how Paula uses resource mobilization process tactics on everyday resistance. Her main objective was not to bring supporters to the waste-pickers movement in order to achieve waste-pickers movements goals. Paula was able to attract waste-pickers and the unemployed women that work with her by providing facilities, labour, and access to the pre-existing network she built with Recifavela. She used her resources to bring supporters to her organization to resist workplace chronic violence.

Paula's *organizing* was a successful collective, open and non-confrontational resistance strategy. It allowed her to keep working as a waste-picker by circumventing the hidden fees imposed by existing waste-pickers and improved all participants' incomes. In the following section, I will explain how she improved her income and the income of waste-pickers that sell materials to her. Although this strategy does not mitigate situations of psychological violence for waste-pickers not associated with MBOs, it can be considered successful as it was not intended to impact all waste-pickers situations but her own.

Paula acknowledges that this is a specific situation in her peripheral neighbourhood and that these hidden fees are not in place for waste-pickers who work downtown. Indeed, none of the other interviewees mention any restrictions to collect waste, as their cooperatives are all located near the downtown area. Paula explained that the volume of waste in the downtown area is far bigger than in her neighbourhood. In this sense, a new waste-picker will not negatively impact the volume of materials collected by waste-pickers already working in the region. She also stated that waste-pickers in the downtown area see waste-picking as a business and an economic opportunity. In her neighbourhood, the materials to be collected are scarcer, and introducing a new waste-picker will negatively impact the volume of materials they collect and, consequently, their income. Besides, she stated that waste-picking in her neighbourhood is a last resort strategy. (Paula, Zoom conversation on September 27, 2021)

## ii. *Reframing*

Organizing into bottom-up cooperatives and associations also enabled waste-pickers to develop their second collective, open and non-confrontational resistance strategy to further their recognition from the civil society, which I identified as *reframing*. In the case of waste-pickers, the *reframing* strategy aims to present themselves as workers and environmental agents.

Maura stated that she used to suffer verbal violence in the past.

When I used to pull my cart in the Moema region, people called us horses or donkeys because we were pulling carts. [...] Sometimes we were collecting recyclable material on the dumpsters, and they crossed the streets fearing that we would rob them. It used to be common because people feared us. (Maura, Zoom conversation on September 14, 2021, my translation)

However, Maura said that the situation changed after joining Cooper Glicério. A successful strategy of resistance to tackling physical and psychological violence presented by her is the reframing from waste-pickers to workers and environmental agents. Maura stated that the reframing happens through lectures in schools and companies. The importance of the cooperative

on the reframing process, as presented by her, is that she was able to start giving those lectures “through the cooperative.” Thus, she explained that, due to the lectures, “[...] today, we [waste-pickers] are now known and respected” (Maura, WhatsApp conversation on November 17th, 2021, my translation). Through *reframing*, *catadores* were able to move their collective action frame from a rigid and exclusive frame of waste-picking to a flexible and inclusive master frame of environmental justice. The broader master frame of environmental justice has the potential to resonate more with other movements and mobilize other groups (Benford and Snow 2000). The strategic processes deliberately and goal-oriented used by waste-pickers are frame extension, connecting waste-picking with environmental justice, and frame transformation, transforming old understandings of waste-pickers as *maloqueiros* to new ones as workers and environmental agents (Benford and Snow 2000).

Gutberlet et al. (2021), in participatory research made with other authors and waste-pickers, present the case study on how the reframing process occurred in São Paulo through the lectures mentioned by Maria. The lectures started on Fundação Santo André, through a project called *Participatory Sustainable Waste Management – PSWM* between the University of Victoria (Canada), the Faculty of Education at the University of São Paulo – FEUSP and the FEUSP Foundation – FAFE, with financial support from the Canadian International Development Agency – CIDA. However, as the *mobilization* strategy, *reframing* is only partially successful as it does not mitigate situations of psychological violence to waste-pickers not associated with MBOs.

PSWM proposed in 2006 the first Environmental Week, which later became an annual event. During this event, waste-pickers were invited to talk on recycling, social-environmental issues, and waste management challenges in São Paulo (Gutberlet et al. 2021). The lectures included “insights into technical aspects of the collection and separation of recyclable materials and their transportation, the organization and governance of work in cooperatives, the socio-environmental impacts caused by waste, as well as the necessity to prioritize waste avoidance and reduction” (Gutberlet et al. 2021, 381). These lectures in the universities “had stimulated reflections over waste and resource recovery and how to create a more just society, valuing the work of waste pickers” (Gutberlet et al. 2021, 387).

Due to the project, waste-pickers also started to give lectures in elementary schools (Gutberlet et al. 2021). The lectures allowed waste-pickers to enter previously inaccessible spaces (e.g., universities) and de-stigmatize their work by increasing awareness on selective waste issues and sensitizing participants about waste-pickers work and struggles (Gutberlet et al. 2021). The reframing strategy successfully reduced chronic psychological workplace violence by diminishing harassment from the population due to the population's increased perception of the waste-pickers importance. It is important to point out that the reframing strategy began with a project run by Canadian academics, but it was incorporated by waste-pickers to their set of resistance strategies, which then expanded this strategy. Initially, the project involved giving lectures in the FEUSP only, but *catadores* also started giving lectures in schools and companies, as Maura stated.

*Reframing* can also be considered as a partly successful resistance strategy. According to Maura, the *reframing* strategy caused a positive transformation in the community's awareness of waste-pickers struggles and brought recognition for them as workers. Gutberlet et al. (2021) corroborates Maura statements. However, it is important to note that Maura joined Cooper Glicério in 2009, during Lula's second turn and right before the implementation of the Lei Nacional dos Resíduos



Sólidos in 2010. In this sense, the period she joined the bottom-up cooperative coincides with advancements on waste-picker's movement claims and recognition by PT's federal government of their importance on the waste management system. Therefore, it is possible that the changes in how *catadores* are framed by the civil society could have been affected by the political environment. Nonetheless, waste-pickers recognition in spaces not previously accessible for them, is an important step towards broader recognition.

### ***C. Waste-pickers and buyers of recyclable materials***

As presented by some interviewees, waste-pickers associated with bottom-up cooperatives and associations have been able to use long-lasting resistance strategies to diminish physical and psychological violence. However, financial violence is still a reality, and it has been the primary source of chronic workplace violence waste-pickers still face. Buyers of recyclable materials, especially *ferros-velhos*, are the perpetrators of this type of chronic violence by not paying a fair price for the collected materials. The state is also a perpetrator of financial violence, but the analysis of the relationship between waste-pickers and the state will be addressed separately in the following section.

Millar (2018) presented that waste-pickers face daily struggles that limit their capacity to save money and plan their finances. Thus, their income and net revenues from selling their collected materials are low. According to the IBGE<sup>15</sup>, in 2019, the average income per worker in São Paulo was 4.1 times the minimum wage, while according to Rosaldo (2022), waste-pickers receive 1.5 to 2 times the minimum wage. In this sense, the rate paid by buyers for waste-pickers materials can significantly impact *catadores* income and improve or aggravate their financial situation. As presented by Mayer (2021), unfair compensation constitutes a form of financial violence. Therefore, paying a lower fare than the average market price for the collected materials represents a financial violence against waste-pickers.

Regarding buyers of recyclable materials, we have three main types - *ferros-velhos* (small size buyers), *aparistas* - or intermediates - (medium size buyers), and the industry (companies that process the recyclable materials and are at the top of the recycling chain). *Ferros-velhos* are the less demanding buyers (they buy all types of materials, mixed or not) and pay the least for the material. *Aparistas* buy recyclable materials from *catadores* and cooperatives to sell to the industry. They are more restrictive with the types of materials they purchase and will pay more than *ferros-velhos*, but less than the industry. They also pay a variable rate depending on how well the materials are separated (plastic by colour, cardboard from Tetra Pak, etc.). The industry is the buyer that pays the most for recyclable materials. However, they demand a minimum amount of material and high stands for the separated material. They need to be perfectly sorted and compacted in blocks of the same size. This description of the value chain of the collected materials permeated all conversations.

Waste-pickers main strategies when negotiating with buyers of recyclable materials are *organizing* and *mobilizing*. The *organizing* strategy refers to organizing into bottom-up cooperatives to sell materials collectively, negotiate better prices for the collected material, and avoid the *ferros-*

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<sup>15</sup> Pesquisa Nacional por Amostra de Domicílios Contínua Trimestral. Access on February 9, 2022: <https://sidra.ibge.gov.br/tabela/5439>

*velhos*. The *mobilizing* strategy entails mobilizing bottom-up cooperatives in networks to gather more materials and avoid intermediaries selling the collected materials directly to the industry at even better prices. Here again, differently from Tilly and Tarrow (2015) perspective of coordinated action towards unified goals to advance claims for the waste-pickers movement, my analysis focus on organizing and mobilizing on a daily basis when dealing with buyers of recyclable materials to get better prices and improve their livelihood.

The primary strategy to resist financial violence presented by 8 of 9 interviewees has been the organizing in bottom-up cooperatives of all sizes and the mobilization of those bottom-up cooperatives and *catadores avulsos*<sup>16</sup>. Bottom-up cooperatives are organizing to sell materials only to the *aparistas* and to the industry. They are also buying materials from *catadores avulsos*, paying more than the *ferros-velhos* so that they can sell it to the *aparistas* or the industry.

My role is going on the streets, attracting *catadores*, and I pay the price paid by the industry. I have contacts with the cooperative. I can sell directly to the industry, while the *ferro-velho* cannot. So, the *ferros-velhos* are indeed freeloaders. They buy at a price way lower than the price on the market. (Paula, Zoom conversation on September 27, 2021, my translation)

Besides paying a fairer price, Paula explained that, during her interactions with *catadores avulsos* they exchange information on the prices paid by the *ferros-velhos* and the prices paid by the industry. In this sense, she can buy the collected materials at higher prices to help *catadores avulsos* and avoid that they sell their materials at lower prices to *ferros-velhos*. Paula adds that she can still have revenues selling the materials to the industry. Paula also stated that she only buys plastic and Tetra Pak packages and cannot buy all the materials collected by *catadores avulsos*, due to lack of space. So, she teaches *catadores avulsos* how to separate better the materials that she does not buy. With that, *catadores avulsos* can sell their materials at better prices to other buyers (Paula, Zoom conversation on October 20, 2021).

Sabrina, a member of Cooperpac, stated that working in cooperatives networks can increase the price received for the collected materials due to higher volumes.

Without a doubt, if we work in networks, cooperatives networks, [...] it is much better since we can have a greater volume [of material]. And, with this, with a greater volume, we can sell the collected materials at a better price. (Sabrina, Zoom conversation on September 23, 2021, my translation)

In the cooperatives networks, the *mobilizing* resistance strategy, bigger bottom-up cooperatives, with more resources, buy materials from smaller bottom-up cooperatives to gather enough materials to negotiate with *aparistas* for better prices or to be able to sell the materials directly to the industry. One of the main networks of bottom-up cooperatives to gather materials is the *Rede Paulista de Comercialização Solidária de Materiais Recicláveis* (São Paulo's Solidary

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<sup>16</sup> *Catadores avulsos* are autonomous waste-pickers, not associated with any cooperative or association.

Commercialization Network of Recyclable Materials). This network is composed by 7 bottom-up cooperatives – Cooper Glicério, Recifavela, Cooperativa Vira-lata, Vitória do Belém, Caminho Certo, Recicla Butantan and Cooperativa Gaia –, comprising 271 waste-pickers (Rede Paulista de Comercialização Solidária de Materiais Recicláveis nd).

The importance of these networks to share information, resources and gather more materials is presented by Paula:

In fact, it is a partnership. As we don't have a vehicle, they [Recifavela] do the transportation. So, they [Recifavela] lend us the truck, and we do two loads per month, which are our sales. Then, they [Recifavela] transport my material. (Paula, Zoom conversation on September 27, 2021, my translation)

These networks enable bottom-up cooperatives of all sizes to sell their materials at better, and fairer, prices, positively impacting waste-pickers income.

Bigger bottom-up cooperatives can wait until they gather enough materials to sell it to intermediaries or the industry. As an organization that develops economic activities, bigger bottom-up cooperatives usually have working capital to pay expenses while gathering enough recyclable materials to sell at a better price. However, smaller bottom-up cooperatives, such as Armazém Fantasma, do not always have enough working capital to buy collected materials from *catadores avulsos*. When the smaller bottom-up cooperative does not have enough working capital, they need to convince *catadores avulsos* to sell their materials to them and wait until the buyer pays the bottom-up cooperative, which then pays *catadores avulsos* for the collected material. Due to *catadores avulsos* precarious financial situation, they end up trapped in a dilemma between a fair price for their materials through smaller cooperatives and immediate money to cover their urgent needs, but at unfair prices paid by the *ferros-velhos*.

Another challenging point is working with cash. In some cases, we, the [bottom-up] cooperative, receive payments by transfer. But, some companies pay us through cheques. The cheque takes three days to clear. And, the *catador avulso* wants the money right away. So, although I can pay more for their materials, they (*catadores avulsos*) will sell the collected materials to the *ferro-velho*, because the *ferro-velho* will give them the money right away. (Paula, Zoom conversation on October 20, 2021, my translation)

*Ferros-velhos* exploit waste-pickers precarious financial situation and disadvantageous position to pay lower prices for their collected materials. Mobilizing in bottom-up cooperatives and networks of bottom-up cooperatives allows waste-pickers to successfully circumvent and mitigate these acts of financial violence and avoid exploitation from *ferros-velhos*. However, *catadores avulsos* cannot always benefit from this strategy as smaller bottom-up cooperatives may not have enough working capital to buy their materials and pay immediately. And, sometimes *catadores avulsos* cannot wait to receive the money for their materials.

Recircular, a project created by Recifavela, which is a bigger bottom-up cooperative, also aims to address the exploitation of *catadores avulsos* by *ferros-velhos* by paying in cash right away for the collected materials at fairer prices.

We buy the collected material from *catadores avulsos* and cooperatives. *Catadores avulsos* are exploited by *ferros-velhos* because *ferros-velhos* buy their collected materials at low prices and sell them for the market with a way better aggregate value. We glimpsed the possibility of buying the material from the *catador avulso*, at a fairer price. It is a win-win situation. That is the proposal of the Recifavela Project. We are already selling around 35 tons of pressed material through this project. [...] When the material arrives, it is weighted right away. We can pay *catadores avulsos* for the collected materials right away. (Janira, Zoom conversation on October 29, 2021, my translation)

Janira, a member of the Recifavela, explains that as they are a bigger cooperative, they can always pay in cash for the collected materials. In this sense, they can be more attractive to *catadores avulsos*, as they pay for the collected materials right away, as *ferros-velhos*, but they also pay higher and fairer prices than *ferros-velhos*. Furthermore, another issue that the Recircular project aims to tackle is to enable *catadores avulsos* and smaller cooperatives to access a public policy called *logística reversa* (Janira, Zoom conversation on October 29).

The *logística reversa* system, or reverse logistics, was introduced in 2010 during the Lula government through the Lei Nacional dos Resíduos Sólidos, federal law nº 12,305/2010. This system establishes that companies that produce recyclable materials, such as plastic, tires, electronics and others, must recover them after use. They can implement these systems by themselves or hire waste-pickers cooperatives to do so (BRASIL 2010). The main goal of this policy is to compel the biggest producers of recyclable materials to help finance the waste management systems and improve selective collection services. As previously mentioned, this *logística reversa* policy was one of the demands of the MNCR presented through the Carta de Brasília during the negotiations to implement the national policy on selective collection (Grimberg 2007). In São Paulo, besides the money collected by bottom-up cooperatives when hired by the industry to collect their waste, the municipal government also receives an amount through sorter cooperatives and deposits these funds on the Fundo Paulistano de Coleta Seletiva, Logística Reversa e Inclusão de Catadores (Maura, Zoom conversation on June 2nd, 2021).

Due to the waste-pickers precarious financial situation, as presented above, bottom-up cooperatives usually set their activities in public or inadequate spaces to avoid paying or to pay low rent. However, in order to be eligible for the *logística reversa* policy, the cooperative needs to be fully formalized. Smaller bottom-up cooperatives, based on precarious locations, under a viaduct as Cooper Glicério or on a rented garage as Armazém Fantasma, are not able to access the money provided by the *logística reversa* policy, since they cannot obtain all the documents necessary to the process of formalization. In the specific case of the Cooper Glicério, they cannot get the certificate from the Fire Department, as they are located under a viaduct (Maura, Zoom conversation on June 2, 2021). And, Armazém Fantasma's rented garage is not designed to function as a warehouse. In this sense, the garage does not meet the requirements established by the Fire Department to function as a deposit of recyclable material.

Through the Recircular, Recifavela buys materials from non-fully formalized bottom-up cooperatives, including Cooper Glicério, and *catadores avulsos* and share with them the amount received from the *logística reversa* policy. In this sense, they are able to get more money both by accessing this public resource and by having more negotiation power with *aparistas* and the industry, as they have more materials to sell. Through this project, they also share, at no cost, resources (machinery and vehicles) with smaller bottom-up cooperatives, as Paula mentioned (Janira, Zoom conversation on October 29, 2021, Paula, Zoom conversation on September 27, 2021).

Due to the unfair prices and lack of governmental support, waste-pickers must resort to other forms of revenue to complement cooperatives' revenues and, consequently, their incomes. Bigger bottom-up cooperatives provide collecting services (Lídia, member of the Recifavela, Zoom conversation on November 1, 2021). Participants from bigger bottom-up cooperatives explained that they charge for collecting material from condominiums and companies. Since 2009, São Paulo Municipal government implemented the Law 14.973, which establishes that companies that produce more than 200 cubic litres or 50 kilograms of trash per day and commercial condominiums that produce more than 1000 cubic litres per day are responsible for the proper discharge of their recyclable materials. The law defines *proper discharge* as sending the material to recyclable plants (SÃO PAULO 2009). Some companies and condominiums hire waste-pickers bottom-up cooperatives to collect their separated materials.

Smaller bottom-up cooperatives resort to other sources of income, such as selling craftsmanship made with recyclable materials, as it is the case of Cooperpac, that used PET to produce bags and baskets, or selling books produced by them, as it is the case of the *Coletivo Dulcinéia Catadora*, a group of waste-pickers from Cooper Glicério. Authors donate the stories in the books, and *Coletivo* produces the cover with recyclable paper and sells them at book fairs (Sabrina, Zoom conversation on September 23, 2021, Maura, Zoom conversation on June 2, 2021).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, waste-pickers and bottom-up cooperatives financial insecurities became more salient. All the cooperatives were forced to cease their operations and remain closed for more than five months. Waste-pickers associated with cooperatives and *catadores avulsos* were able to access the money from the Fundo Paulistano de Coleta Seletiva, Logística Reversa e Inclusão de Catadores<sup>17</sup>. They received R\$ 1,200 per month, equivalent to the minimum wage, for three months to stay home without working. However, the participants explained that bottom-up cooperatives did not receive any public assistance to help with their organizations' expenses during this period. The cooperatives had to resort on donations, live events to collect funds and funding campaigns on the internet to be able to survive. They also negotiated, with the assistance of lawyers, with credit institutions to delay the payment of instalments on credit used to acquire machinery and trucks. Those strategies were used by all bottom-up cooperatives studied in my

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<sup>17</sup> The Fundo Paulistano de Coleta Seletiva, Logística Reversa e Inclusão de Catadores is a private fund established by the Plano de Gestão Integrada de Resíduos Sólidos – PGIRS – from São Paulo's Municipal government implemented in 2014. The fund is managed by the *catadores* and its board members are cooperatives associated or not with the municipal government, non-governmental organizations, representatives of public authorities and higher education institutions. (SÃO PAULO 2014)

research. The bottom-up cooperatives also shared *cestas básicas*<sup>18</sup>, which were received through donations.

[...] the expenses were coming in every month. So we decided to do a *vaquinha*<sup>19</sup>. We made a lot of *vaquinhas* to support the cooperative's expenses. We received many donations from our partners. (Lídia, Zoom conversation on November 1, 2021, my translation)

[...] we financed a three hundred and fifty thousand reais truck in December [2019] from Volkswagen. And, in March [2020], we had to close. We had an installment of six thousand reais a month, which we couldn't pay. We had a hard time and asked our lawyer for help. They [Volkswagen] didn't want to negotiate. But, we succeeded in the negotiations [...]. Some other bills we did not pay. We did a *vaquinha*, and we also shared it with our partners. That is how we were able to remain open, paying some bills and not paying others. (Janira, Zoom conversation on October 29, 2021, my translation).

[...] many cooperatives closed, so we tried to help in some way. We received plenty of help through *cestas básicas*. So, [we] did campaigns within companies to ask for help. [...] If my cooperative had a lot of *cestas básicas* and another cooperative did not, we would send them some. We are still sending it today. And, if we do not have enough *cestas básicas*, they send us some too. So, we help each other a lot. (Maura, Zoom conversation on September 14, 2021, my translation)

Organizing into bottom-up cooperatives and mobilizing into networks of cooperatives has been a successful collective, open and non-confrontational resistance strategy. Unlike the partial success of organizing regarding relations with civil society, mobilization when dealing with buyers has included *catadores avulsos*, not associated with MBOs, and improved their incomes and livelihood. Through bottom-up cooperatives and networks, waste-pickers have been able to gather their collected materials and sell them at higher and fairer prices, access public policies not available for all, improve their livelihood, and avoid exploitation from *ferros-velhos*.

#### **D. Waste-pickers and the State**

On the relationship with the State, *catadores* reported four forms of violence; eviction and repossession of property – mentioned by four interviewees -, implementation of incineration plants,<sup>20</sup> police violence – presented by two interviewees each, – and exploitation – cited by one *catador*. In order to resist state violence, waste-pickers have, mainly, resorted to formal channels

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<sup>18</sup> *Cestas básicas* are food packages composed of non-perishable items such as rice, beans, pasta, biscuits, sugar, canola oil, salt etc.

<sup>19</sup> *Vaquinha* is a popular Brazilian term used for campaigns to collect money.

<sup>20</sup> Incineration plants burn the waste collected in the municipality before it could be sorted out and recyclable materials collected.

of negotiation through the Ministério Público<sup>21</sup> and Defensoria Pública<sup>22</sup>. Both Ministério Público and Defensoria Pública are State institutions responsible for defending individual and collective rights. Among other duties, these two institutions act as intermediaries on negotiations between marginalized groups and the State. And, when the negotiations are not fruitful, they can represent a case to the courts and provide legal assistance to those groups against the State and state agents (BRASIL 1988).

Regarding policies that affect waste-pickers, the Brazilian constitution defines that the responsibility for labour-related laws and major environmental policies relies on the Federal government. Moreover, the municipal government is responsible for implementing and executing waste-management systems. In contrast, the state-level government does not have any significant role in policies that would affect waste-pickers. The only state responsibility that affects waste-pickers daily lives is policing. In this sense, everyday resistance strategies are more related to municipal government, and traditional collective action strategies, as Tilly and Tarrow (2015) explored, are mainly adopted when negotiating with the federal government. This does not mean that waste-pickers do not use everyday resistance strategies to circumvent barriers implemented by policies from the Federal government. However, this distinction helps us differentiate their strategies when dealing with each level of government.

Before diving into the analysis of *catadores* resistance strategies when dealing with the State identified throughout the interviews, I will discuss how organizing into bottom-up cooperatives and associations is also a successful resistance strategy against structural violence.

#### i. *Cooperatives and associations as a resistance strategy*

Cooperatives and associations are formal membership-based non-profit organizations according to the Brazilian Constitution and Civil Code. As formalized organizations, these types of MBOs can benefit from public policies and be hired by the government to provide services. Both the cooperative and association models also allow their members to be formally registered, which gives them access to social protection policies (BRASIL 2015).

As waste-pickers' primary objective to mobilize into bottom-up cooperatives and associations is to increase their negotiation power when dealing with buyers of recyclable materials through gathering more materials, they could also register as enterprises. Janira stated that if they register as an enterprise instead of a cooperative, they could pay a lower social security tax (a decrease from 20% to 7.5% of the salary). However, if they register their bottom-up organization as an enterprise to access lower social security taxes, their members would have to be registered with a *carteira assinada*, rather than cooperative members. As discussed in the formalization section, workers who are formally registered with a *carteira assinada* are subject to the CLT and its

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<sup>21</sup> Ministério Público is a permanent and independent institution, created in 1951 and established by the Federal Law 1,341/51 (Ministério Público da União nd). The Ministério Público main attributions are defending the legal order, the democratic regime and inalienable social and individual rights (BRASIL 1988).

<sup>22</sup> Defensoria Pública is a permanent and independent institution responsible for providing legal guidance, promoting human rights and defence, in all degrees, judicial and extrajudicial, of individual and collective rights, in an integral and free way, to the needy (BRASIL 1988).

restrictions: fixed working hours, limited to 44 hours at maximum and 40 hours at minimum per week, and monthly payments. These restrictions imposed by the CLT negatively affect waste-pickers' income and livelihood (Millar 2018). Instead of registering as an enterprise and imposing those restrictions on its associates, Recifavela prefers to remain as a bottom-up cooperative and preserve the organization's history based on cooperativism and the concept of mutual help (Janira, WhatsApp audio on November 17th, 2021). Recifavela is also opened 24 hours a day, seven days a week, to allow their associates to work flexible hours (Recicla Sampa nd). This flexibility enables waste-pickers to adapt their working hours to their needs, both when and how many hours a day they work. As presented by Millar (2018), flexible working hours and the possibility of adapting the amount of work to their financial needs is crucial to maintain waste-pickers' livelihood.

All five bottom-up cooperatives in this study and the association are formalized at some level. Three of the five bottom-up cooperatives are fully formalized. The other two bottom-up cooperatives are registered with authorities, but they do not have all the certificates yet (sanitary, fire department and environmental authorities). Moreover, none of the bottom-up cooperatives or associations have their associates registered with a *carteira assinada*.

Formalizing as bottom-up cooperatives and associations instead of companies is a collective, open, and non-confrontational resistance strategy. It successfully allows waste-pickers to access public policies and social security policies and, at the same time, resist the structural violence imposed by CLT restrictions that would negatively impact their income and livelihoods.

## ii. *Organizing, negotiation, and evictions*

Regarding eviction and repossession of public space mandates, the most cited form of direct physical violence perpetrated by the State, São Paulo's Municipal government more specifically, bottom-up cooperatives, both bigger and smaller, used negotiation strategies. These bottom-up organizations asked the support of the Ministério Público and the Defensoria Pública to intervene on the negotiation process, and remain in their location or, at least, to be reallocated somewhere else, instead of just being evicted with nowhere to go. In three of the four cases presented, this strategy was used, and it was successful – Cooper Glicério was able to remain in their current location, and Recifavela and Cooperpac were reallocated to a new space. Maura added that, during a meeting with the Deputy Mayor from the Sé region, in which the Baixado do Glicério is located, to negotiate and avoid eviction, the deputy mayor verbally abused her by falsely accusing them of polluting the neighbourhood. She appealed to the legal system to deal with the situation. She stated that the case was still open, and that the deputy mayor was replaced (this change is not related to the appeal) and the new one was open to negotiations to allow the Cooper Glicério to continue working where they are (Maura, Zoom conversation on September 14, 2021).

Associação dos Catadores Nova Glicério was also able to resist the repossession mandate through negotiations, but they did not appeal to the Ministério Público or Defensoria Pública to intervene. Cláudio stated that in the case of the Associação, he was able to negotiate with the police and avoid the eviction mandate. He explained that when the police forces were preparing to raid the warehouse, he asked to talk to the police officer in charge of the operation and check the document in possession of the municipal government agent supporting the mandate. He noticed that the legal authority did not sign the document presented by the agent. According to the Brazilian Civil Code, Law 13,105/2015, every eviction process needs a court decision in order to be legitimate. In this



sense, all eviction mandates need to be signed by a designated judge (BRASIL 2015). Since the mandate was not allowed by the Judiciary and did not have the signature of a designated judge, Cláudio convinced the police officer in charge of the operation that the eviction mandate was not legitimate. The police officer agreed and retreated, and the agent from the municipal government was not able to fulfill his purpose and regain possession of the warehouse (Cláudio, Zoom conversation on September 16th, 2021).

In the case of Cooperpac, in 2019, they were notified by the municipal government to leave the warehouse they use. The cooperative asked the support of the Ministério Público, Defensoria Pública, MNCR and Municipal Chamber to help them negotiate with the municipal government to remain in their warehouse or be reallocated, instead of being left without anywhere to go. They also created a petition that got more than four thousand signatures. Although they could not remain in the same warehouse, they successfully negotiated their reallocation with the municipal government. They only left when they were provided with a new place (Sabrina, Zoom conversation on September 23rd, 2021).

The organization into bottom-up cooperatives have allowed waste-pickers to learn about their rights and access political and institutional agents, more specifically the Ministério Público and Defensoria Pública, that would be hard to reach individually. Pedro stated that, through the Recifavela, they frequently invite Humans Rights specialists from different institutions to give lectures to their associates on this theme. These specialists are mainly from the Municipal Chamber and the Ordem dos Advogados do Brasil – OAB (Brazilian Bar Association) (Pedro, WhatsApp phone call on September 21st, 2021). With that, waste-pickers are more aware of formal forms of resistance against violence perpetrated by the State. The increased negotiation power, allied with their increased knowledge about their rights, allowed waste-pickers to successfully resist arbitrary decisions, as the case of the Associação Nova Glicério, and eviction mandates, as the cases of Cooper Glicério and Cooperpac, through negotiations.

### *iii. Mobilization, confrontation, and incineration policies*

Policies to implement incineration plants have been discussed in some cities throughout the State of São Paulo and are a form of structural violence. Incineration consists of dealing with waste disposal by burning the waste collected and generating energy through this burning process (Crespo et al. 2019, Boonpa and Sharp 2017). Advocates on incineration have tried to reframe this technology as a waste-to-energy technology and a source of “renewable” energy, based on the fact that domestic waste would be a renewable source (Gemar et al. 2021). Authors that defend the waste-to-energy technology argue that waste incineration produces fewer emissions than burning fossil fuels, such as coal and oil (Crespo et al. 2019, Boonpa and Sharp 2017). However, these studies on incineration disregard a myriad of other social and environmental impacts of this technology, such as the disposal of hazardous residues resulting from burning waste and the need for more virgin raw materials to produce new products. Thus, instead of a circular model based on recycling, waste management and production are framed as linear models with an infinite source of virgin raw materials (Crespo et al. 2019).

Although incineration indeed produces fewer carbon emissions than burning fossil fuels, recycling is still more efficient and environmentally friendly waste-management technology. Furthermore, one key aspect of implementing incineration policies, especially for the topic of waste-picking, is

its impact on recycling, as implementing incineration plants negatively affects recycling (Yamamoto and Kinnaman 2022). Burning waste eliminates waste-pickers access to waste and impedes them from collecting and selling recyclable materials. The implementation of incineration policies would negatively impact the recycling industry and tremendously affect waste-pickers work and livelihood.

Maura and Cláudio stated that the mobilization of bottom-up cooperatives and associations from all over the state through their networks had been their primary resistance strategy. As Bayat (1997) presented, marginalized groups tend to transition from more individualistic resistance strategies (even considering the organization level) and use collective resistance strategies when the State tries to implement policies that would jeopardize their rights. The leading case cited by both Maria and Cláudio is the implementation of these plants in Santos, a mid-size city 70km east of São Paulo. Before the pandemic, the bottom-up cooperatives and associations mobilized to organize demonstrations in front of Santos' Municipal Chamber. However, the pandemic forced them to meet online (Maura, Zoom conversation on September 14th, 2021). Demonstrations, an open, collective confrontational resistance strategy, have not been successful. These demonstrations are the first confrontational strategy identified in my research. Cláudio admitted that this strategy was ineffective, and some municipalities had already implemented incineration plants. He stated they are changing their strategy and had initiated efforts to mobilize the civil society to fight against these policies (Zoom conversation on October 4th, 2021).

On mobilizations to implement or resist policies that affect waste-pickers, the MNCR is the leading actor in mobilizing waste-pickers and negotiating public policies with government actors (Pedro, WhatsApp phone call on September 21st, 2021, Gutberlet et al. 2021). The MNCR can lead mobilizations of local and regional networks of bottom-up waste-pickers cooperatives and NGOs towards specific agendas (Gutberlet et al. 2021). Due to its national and international reach, through international alliances of grassroots groups, such as Gaia<sup>23</sup>, the MNCR has more negotiating power when dealing with political actors and policymakers than regional and local networks of waste-pickers bottom-up cooperatives (Gutberlet et al. 2021, Pedro WhatsApp phone call on September 21st, 2021). In this sense, mobilization into bottom-up cooperatives allow waste-pickers to successfully resist violence against their organizations. However, when dealing with the implementation of new policies that affects all waste-pickers, negotiations through the MNCR have been more effective.

#### *iv. Negotiation and police violence*

The presence of police violence is not a consensus between waste-pickers. Most interviewees stated that they never faced police violence, but others did. On one testimonial during a lecture presented in 2015, a waste-pickers told that many carts were in possession of the city hall, apprehended by the police. They resorted to the Pimp my Carroça NGO to help them negotiate with the municipal government and retake these carts. By the time of the video, the carts were still in possession of the municipal government (dos Santos 2015). However, Maura mentioned an agreement with the municipal government during Doria's mayoral mandate – from January 2017

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<sup>23</sup> Gaia is a global non-profit organization that aims to build networks of grassroots social movements and organizations on environmental justice and strengthen them locally and regionally (Gaia 2022).

to April 2018 – to avoid the apprehension of carts, unless in exceptional cases in which the cart is used for illegal purposes such as transporting stolen public wires (Maura, WhatsApp conversation on November 17th, 2021).

Pimp my Carroça is an NGO founded in 2007 by the street artist and activist Mundano to “create and develop creative and collaborative actions in order to positively impact the recognition and fair remuneration of collectors of recyclable materials; towards civil society, public and private authorities, in Brazil and worldwide” (Pimpmycarroça nd). Mundano started the initiative by updating the carts through new painting and needed adjustments. The updating aimed to improve waste-pickers working conditions through better working tools – their carts – and bring visibility to the waste-pickers cause. Mundano paints statements on the carts to highlight the importance of waste-picking for the environment and to confront policies to restrict waste-pickers to work. In one cart, Mundano painted the phrase “Não apreendam nossas carroças, aprendam a reciclar,” which in free translation means “Do not take our carts, learn how to recycle” (my translation) (dos Santos, 2015). Pimp my Carroça has done interventions in Colombian, Ecuador, Argentina, Hawaii and ten different cities in Brazil (Manaus-AM, Brasília-DF, São Paulo-SP, Bragança Paulista-SP, Jacareí-SP, Rio de Janeiro-RJ, Curitiba-PR, Recife-PE, Cuiabá-MT and Salvador-BA).

In 2015, Pimp my Carroça started a project called Pimp my Cooperativa, to paint and create artistic interventions in bottom-up cooperatives. Cooper Glicério was the first cooperative benefiting from this project. They have created interventions in 22 bottom-up cooperatives and one bottom-up association so far, including 3 (Cooperpac, Recifavela and Cooper Glicério) out of the five bottom-up cooperatives that participated in my research and one association (Associação Nova Glicério). The NGO is funded by donations, sales of merchandising and other products on their virtual store<sup>24</sup> and grants from numerous partners, such as Coca-Cola Foundation, OAK Foundation, Iniciativa Regional para el Reciclaje Inclusivo, Nestlé and others. They also rely on volunteers to organize and participate on their events (Pimpmycarroça nd).

Pedro also mentioned persistent cases of police violence, usually psychological violence, through unlawful requests, such as moving waste-pickers carts or trucks so they can park their police vehicles. Pedro stated that, in those cases, he contacts his lawyer to deal with the situation, as he avoids confrontation due to fear of violent repression. Also, he adds that to learn how to identify if a police request is lawful or not, Recifavela provides lectures to their associates on their rights, as previously mentioned (Pedro, WhatsApp phone call on September 21st, 2021). Here, once again, negotiating is presented as a successful resistance strategy against arbitrary demands from police officers. However, due to the lack of negotiation power when individually dealing with State agents, Pedro uses the service of a lawyer to intermedate the negotiation. Pedro stated that this strategy has been successful so far, enabling him to resist these arbitrary requests without confrontation and reducing the risk of escalating the situation to direct physical violence (Pedro, WhatsApp phone call on September 21st, 2021).

#### *v. Negotiation and exploitation by the State*

On exploitation as a form of structural and financial violence perpetrated by São Paulo’s municipal government, Wanderley stated that waste-pickers and bottom-up cooperatives provide services on

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<sup>24</sup> <http://www.lojapimpmycarroca.com.br>

waste management without getting compensated for their work. Waste management and selective collection are municipal responsibilities. Wanderley noted that the municipal government should pay waste-pickers and bottom-up cooperatives for the services provided in waste management and selective collection. São Paulo's Municipal government has a partnership with 25 out of the estimated 70 to 96 waste-pickers organizations (Wanderley, Zoom conversation on September 28th, 2021; SÃO PAULO 2021; Grimberg 2007). Therefore, 65-75% of the waste-pickers organizations work in the city's waste management system without any support from the government, such as providing space, equipment and technical support.

There are two types of partnerships between bottom-up cooperatives and the municipal government. In one type, the municipal trucks, part of the formal selective collection routes, destine part of the collected material to affiliated bottom-up cooperatives. In the other type, besides providing the collected material, such as the first one, the municipal government also pays the utilities and rent of the cooperative warehouse (Wanderley, Zoom conversation on September 28<sup>th</sup>). Three out of six organizations in this study have a partnership with the municipal government. These partnerships are established through agreements signed between the municipal government and bottom-up cooperatives and associations that are fully formalized. These bottom-up organizations need to apply for the agreement, and if all documentation is presented, the agreement is signed. Cooperpac has utility expenses and rent paid by the municipal government, and Recifavela and Vira-lata receive collected materials. The other three organizations do not get any support from the municipal government. However, these partnerships are precarious and are subject to change at any time (Rosaldo 2022).

In 2019, during the eviction mandate cited above, Cooperpac was also notified that their agreement with the municipal government would be terminated. During the negotiations to avoid eviction, the cooperative also negotiated with the municipal government to sustain their partnership as it used to be. Although they were relocated, they successfully maintained their expenses paid by the government (Sabrina, zoom conversation on September 23rd, 2021).

Sabrina stated that, in 2016, the municipal government tried to change all the partnerships to a unified model in which they would stop paying for cooperatives expenses and would only deliver the recyclable materials. She added that every new incumbent mayor tries to change the partnership model and, with that insecurity, waste-pickers suffer a lot (Sabrina, Zoom conversation on September 23, 2021). Since the late 1980s, waste-management policies have swung between more inclusive-oriented policies during PT's administrations, and more private-sector-oriented policies, during centrist and right-wing administrations (Rosaldo 2022). As these partnerships between bottom-up cooperatives and the municipal government can be terminated at any time, these policies and administration changes always bring uncertainties (Sabrina, Zoom conversation on September 23, 2021). Political discontinuities are "one of the reasons why progress [in waste-pickers movements' agenda] is being slow and development seems to sometimes go backwards" (Gutberlet et al. 2021, 375).

In order to resist exploitation from the State, traditional forms of mobilization were utilized when dealing with the federal government to further the agenda of being compensated by the State for work. Policies such as the *Logística Reversa*, although not a direct form of compensation by the State, introduce a form of compensation through the private sector by compelling firms to pay for recycling services provided by waste-pickers. Mobilization efforts also allowed waste-pickers to

access the municipal government through opportunity windows during PT administrations and negotiate partnerships to partially compensate bottom-up cooperatives for their work by paying of utility bills, rent, and providing tools, as described above. In that sense, the main everyday resistance strategy utilized is negotiation when the municipal government tries to terminate those partnerships, deepening the exploitation perpetrated by the State. Here again, as previously mentioned, Sabrina emphasized the help of the Ministério Público, Defensoria Pública, MNCR and Municipal Chamber to intermediate the negotiations.

## **Conclusion**

Despite some improvements since the recognition of waste-pickers as workers in 2002 and the implementation of the Política Nacional de Resíduos Sólidos in 2010, *catadores* still face many challenges and remain in a precarious situation. A review of the existing literature showed that cooperatives are used as tools of resistance since their conceptualization in the XIX century. However, significant gaps in publications on waste-pickers and on informal workers' resistance strategies still exists. This thesis sought to examine waste-pickers resistance strategies to fill, in part, those gaps and build a solid ground to enable further studies on the subject.

The primary purpose of my research was to give voice to waste-pickers and collect data on how their organization into bottom-up cooperatives and associations contributes to their resistance strategies when facing situations of financial, psychological and structural violence. I first introduced my research question and argument. Furthermore, I made a review of the literature on waste-pickers, and their situation across the Global South, Latin America, Brazil and, more specifically, São Paulo. I presented the theoretical underpinnings relevant to my study and the methodology utilized in my research. As it has been put forth, collective resistance strategies utilized by waste-pickers are highly relevant. These strategies have proven to be their only path to improve their livelihoods since the recycling industry and the State still marginalize them.

My findings indicate that the primary source of chronic workplace violence happens through financial violence perpetrated by buyers of recyclable materials and that organizing into bottom-up cooperatives and mobilization of bottom-up cooperatives and associations in networks has been two critical strategies to mitigate its effects. Through bottom-up cooperatives and associations, and networks of bottom-up cooperatives and associations, they have been able to sell their materials at higher prices, avoiding *ferros-velhos*, and, consequently, improving their income. With that, waste-pickers resist exploitation and financial violence perpetrated by those buyers. The first organization efforts led to an initial inclusion of waste-pickers to the formal waste management system in some cities and provided them access to waste collected by the municipal government. Bottom-up cooperatives and associations have also allowed waste-pickers to successfully reframe themselves as workers and environmental agents to resist psychological violence perpetrated by the population. Furthermore, these bottom-up organizations permitted waste-pickers to resist structural violence imposed by the restrictions on the CLT and access social security and public policies. These strategies have consistently mitigated situations of financial, psychological and structural violence. Thus, the reframing, organizing and mobilizing strategies were influenced by external actors initially but, due to their success, were incorporated on the *catadores'* toolbox of resistance strategies.

Mayer's (2021) framework of resistance and categorization of sources of chronic workplace violence allowed a systematic analysis of the resistance strategies utilized by waste-pickers to mitigate each type of violence they are exposed to. These findings represent a significant theoretical contribution by identifying waste-pickers everyday resistance strategies not present in the literature. I also offer a detailed description of the relation between waste-pickers and the different buyers of recyclable materials, which had not been developed and discussed before.

Schenck et al. (2019), using a multiple case study design and cross-case analysis with data from 10 landfills in South Africa, analyze how waste management practices can affect waste-pickers livelihood. Schenck et al. (2019) concluded that it is not possible to build a single solution that would fit all situations. In that sense, policymakers should integrate waste-pickers since the designing of the policies through an inclusive, participatory process, in which those policymakers would engage with waste-pickers when discussing policies that affect their work (Schenck et al. 2019).

Although my findings in this research are relevant, most waste-pickers are not associated with bottom-up MBOs. Due to infrastructure and reach limitations, bottom-up and top-down cooperatives cannot absorb the significant part of the informal waste-pickers (Rosaldo 2022, Grimberg 2007). Moving forward, I suggest that future research thoroughly investigates resistance strategies from *catadores avulsos* to further the field and shed light on the differences in strategy between bottom-up cooperatives and non-associated waste-pickers to resist violence.

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## Appendix

### Pesquisa “Cooperatives as tools of resistance of *catadores*: A case study of Cooper Glicério (São Paulo, Brazil)” Perguntas para entrevistas

Data:

Horário:

Nome da pessoa entrevistada:

Idade da pessoa entrevistada:

Cor ou Raça da pessoa entrevistada:

Estado de saúde da pessoa:

Estado civil: casada / solteira / divorciada / outro

Possui filho(s):

Nível de educação cumprido da pessoa entrevistada:

Zona/Local de trabalho (como é o deslocamento, quem paga o transporte):

#### Questionário:

- 1) Há quanto tempo você trabalha como catador?
- 2) De onde você é, originalmente?
  - a. (Se relevante:) Como você chegou nesta cidade e como você veio morar aqui?
- 3) Você teve a chance de ir para a escola quando criança? Como foi a sua história com a escola?
  - a. (Se relevante:) Por que não?
- 4) Como você se tornou um catador?
- 5) Em geral, como você se sente em relação ao seu trabalho como catador? Por quê? (explorar coisas boas, ruins, caso elas não discorram).
- 6) Qual a sua relação com compradores de material reciclável? Eles sempre pagam um valor justo pelo material? Eles pagam em dia?
- 7) Como são as negociações com os compradores de material reciclável?
  - a. O que você faz/diz para convencê-los de algo que você considera justo?
  - b. Quando compradores de materiais fazem algo que não considera justo o que você faz?
  - c. (explorar vingança, fofoca, sabotagens caso nada apareça).
- 8) Você já foi abusado verbalmente em seu local de trabalho, tanto na cooperativa quanto na rua?
  - a. (Se assim for:) O que aconteceu? Quem perpetrou o abuso?
  - b. Como aquilo fez você se sentir?
  - c. Como você reagiu? O que você fez para se proteger?
- 9) Você já foi abusado fisicamente em seu local de trabalho, tanto na cooperativa quanto na rua?
  - a. (Se assim for:) O que aconteceu? Quem perpetrou o abuso?
  - b. Como aquilo fez você se sentir?
  - c. Como você reagiu? O que você fez para se proteger?
- 10) No dia-a-dia, existem coisas que você faz para evitar abusos verbais ou físicos de agentes do Estado ou outras pessoas da região em que trabalha?
  - a. (Se relevante:) O que são essas coisas que você faz?



- 11) Você já procurou informações sobre como se proteger de abusos?
  - a. (Se assim for:) Com quem? Esta informação foi útil?
- 12) Quando acontecem situações de desrespeito, quem você procura para conversar, te ajudar, etc?
- 13) Como você se tornou um membro da cooperativa? A cooperativa já lhe deu informações sobre como se defender de abusos verbais ou físicos? Essas estratégias foram úteis? Como e por quê?
- 14) A pandemia do COVID-19 afetou seu trabalho como catador? Se sim, como e por quê?
  - a. (Em particular a respeito dos abusos sofridos.)
- 15) Você tem contato com outros catadores, de outras cooperativas? Como é a relação entre vocês?
- 16) Você poderia recomendar outra catadora ou catador que você conheça, que é sindicalizada ou não, com quem eu poderia falar sobre essas questões?