

ROSALIND FREDERICKS



# GARBAGE CITIZENSHIP

*Vital Infrastructures of Labor in Dakar, Senegal*

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COVER ART: A trash worker in Niari Tali. 2007.

Photo courtesy of the author.

FOR MOM     *for your **grit** and **generosity***

## CONTENTS

Acknowledgments ix

INTRODUCTION. **Trash Matters** 1

ONE. **Governing Disposability** 27

TWO. **Vital Infrastructures of Labor** 60

THREE. **Technologies of Community** 97

FOUR. **The Piety of Refusal** 123

CONCLUSION. **Garbage Citizenship** 149

Notes 155    References 171    Index 193

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## INTRODUCTION. **Trash Matters**

Over the last twenty-five years, Senegal's capital city Dakar has been periodically submerged in garbage. In 2007, seven years after winning a landmark election hailed as a signal of deepening democracy in Senegal, President Abdoulaye Wade was reelected to little fanfare. Widespread dissatisfaction was brewing over elite politics and the uneven distribution of the fruits of the city's development. Two months after the elections, the city was plunged into one of its greatest garbage crises yet, as its municipal trash workers went on strike and ordinary Dakarais, in solidarity, staged dramatic neighborhood-wide trash "revolts" through dumping their household waste into the public space. Across the city, mountains of trash choked the capital's grand boulevards and paralyzed many of the city's functions. As the hours, sometimes days passed before the garbage was cleaned up, the quiet process of putrefaction slowly gripped the city in a noxious haze of filth and disgust.

The trash revolts in the working-class, central Dakar neighborhood of HLM Fass were particularly impassioned. Fed up with the state's inability to resolve the trash workers' labor dispute and with the burdens of managing their festering garbage, the neighborhood's youth and women were determined to publicly demand the resolution of the material inequalities of urban infrastructure. Under cover of darkness, they quietly evacuated their household trash into the Boulevard Dial Diop, blocking one of the main thoroughfares leading downtown. For weeks, garbage littered the streets alongside the remnant electoral-campaign messages (see figure 1.1), providing potent testimony to the messy state of urban development and the pow-



**FIGURE 1.1.** Remnants of the trash revolts spearheaded by Dakar residents in May 2007. Note the campaign message for Abdoulaye Wade, left over from the February 2007 presidential elections. Author's photo, 2007.

erful role played by the city's residents in the function—or *dysfunction*—of this key urban infrastructure.

Those events contrasted markedly with a different trash crisis that transpired in Dakar almost twenty years prior. In 1988–89, a now-famous social movement germinated in the streets of Dakar as youth ambushed the city's trash-clogged public spaces with brooms and buckets (see figure 1.2). Known as *Set/Setal* (“Be Clean/Make Clean” in Wolof), young men and women throughout the city set out to clean the city, buttress the failing urban waste infrastructure, and purify a polluted political sphere in a frenzied explosion of what came to be billed as *participatory citizenship* (ENDA 1991). The movement looms large in the popular imagination and has gone down in scholarly literature on Senegalese democratic politics as a pivotal juncture in germinating youth political consciousness (M. Diouf 1996). Its messages can still



**FIGURE 1.2.** Activists from the Set/Setal movement painting neighborhood murals in 1989. ENDA, *Set Setal, des murs qui parlent*. Reprinted with permission from ENDA Tiers Monde.

be glimpsed peeking out from faded murals in unexpected corners of the city and in periodic cleanup events bearing the movement's name.

Juxtaposed, these two tales of dirt and disorder in Dakar—the Set/Setal movement and the 2007 strike—are of enormous significance. Surprisingly, most of the striking workers were actually the same young people who had spearheaded the legendary social movement years before. In a culture where cleanliness of body and soul is of deep spiritual import, their acts of dirtying or ordering public space are profoundly meaningful.

This book examines contestation surrounding Dakar's household waste infrastructure as a lens into questions of urban citizenship. Dakar's city streets have oscillated between remarkably tidy and dangerously insalubrious as the city's garbage infrastructure has become the stage for struggles over government, the value of labor, and the dignity of the working poor in Senegal's neoliberal era. As a key feature of new urban development agendas unleashed in the wake of structural adjustment, a volatile series of institutional reorganizations have reconfigured the responsibilities and rewards for

doing the city's dirty work through various formulas of community participation. Differentially disciplining people through the burdens of waste disposal has become a primary mode of state power. Governing-through-disposability devolves infrastructure onto labor, reconfiguring the relations of social reproduction and mobilizing invisible burdens of stigma and disease onto specific geographies and laboring bodies. At the same time, these ordering projects have been intensely fraught. Through clogging streets with the city's rejectamenta, garbage activists have met attempts to govern through garbage with a visceral "refusal to be refuse."<sup>1</sup> Often framed through discourses of Islamic piety, their struggles have provided a potent language with which to critique Senegal's neoliberal trajectory and assert rights to fair labor.

This analysis bridges a cultural politics of labor with a materialist understanding of infrastructure, through an ethnography of everyday infrastructures of disposal. In doing so, it recalibrates how we understand urban infrastructure through emphasizing its material, social, and affective elements. A central contention is that infrastructure and materiality debates often miss the social and embodied parts of infrastructure, and thus fall short of fully grappling with the political implications of how lives and bodies get caught up in urban restructuring. Through focusing on labor, the analysis illuminates how urban infrastructures are composed of human as much as technical elements, and how these living elements can help make infrastructures into a vital means of political action and a tool for the formation of collective identities. On the other hand, materialist insights offer an important corrective to studies of labor and culture that elide the ways in which "things" are consequential and how bodies and things intersect. New labor arrangements for trash collection discipline specific bodies through the material power of waste. The material practice of cleaning, in turn, conditions the subjectivities and communities of affect that strive to realign the material and the moral. Waste makes clear how governing regimes and the messy possibilities for their disruption are constituted in the particularities of the matter at hand—here, discard and filth, and their obverse, cleanliness and purity.

Through fleshing out the material and social life of infrastructure in the era of austerity, the analysis bridges "old" and "new" materialist debates in order to grapple with infrastructure's political address. It brings Africanist, postcolonial, and feminist-materialist insights to bear on urban and infrastructure theory through an analysis that is at once grounded in situated knowledge and politics, and attuned to wider circuits of capital, ideas, and power. Ostensibly neutral everyday infrastructural systems are revealed

to contain complex socio-technical and spiritual worlds stitched together through expert labors of salvage bricolage. These material practices of negotiation become the stage for citizenship struggles. A focus on the labors constituting these bricolage infrastructures foregrounds the ways that “people as infrastructure” render the city their laboratory through tinkering and maintenance.<sup>2</sup> At the same time, it reveals the corporeal and spiritual burdens of fragmented infrastructures devolved onto laboring bodies. Garbage grounds the practice of politics in the pungent, gritty material of the city. The book challenges the notion that Southern cities, especially African cities, represent exceptions to urban theories, and draws insight from Dakar’s everyday urbanism toward recalibrating how we think of infrastructure, labor, and citizenship in cities anywhere.

### **Neoliberalism, Labor, and African Cities**

Most broadly, a key contribution of the book involves reconfiguring understandings of neoliberalism. It is well recognized that urban public services have been crucibles of struggle surrounding structural adjustment and other neoliberal logics. And yet, much writing about neoliberal urban reform in the Global South privileges singular scripts of urban change viewed on a planetary scale (e.g., Davis 2004). Critiques of neoliberalism have become hegemonic in studies of African cities over the last decade, and many of these studies imagine a sort of teleological “impact model” of neoliberal globalization as a global bulldozer wreaking havoc on a passive local victim (G. Hart 2001; Parnell and Robinson 2012). Though neoliberal logics have recrafted postcolonial development trajectories in Africa in powerful ways, it is important not to portray those dynamics in reductive terms. A growing body of research emphasizes the different, often hybrid variants of processes of neoliberalization as well as “the *multiple and contradictory aspects* of neoliberal spaces, techniques, and subjects,” especially in their situated expression in Southern cities (Larner 2003, 5). Building on those insights, I provide a detailed examination of the ways that such reforms get hashed out in one of the last bastions of Senegal’s urban civil service. Through grappling with everyday negotiations in homes, streets, and municipal offices, my analysis rejects simplistic narratives of urban change to instead reveal the complex mix of politics unleashed by neoliberal reform, the often hybridized nature of institutional forms, and the way that people’s lives and political subjectivities are restructured with important consequences.

Senegal is a rich case through which to examine the processes and consequences of neoliberal reform, as one of the first African countries to undergo structural adjustment but also a key locus around which theories of structural adjustment and critiques of the African state were articulated (Berg 1981, 1990; Van de Walle 2001). This research examines the way that logics of urban reform have manifested in political struggles around garbage infrastructure—or, more broadly, through relations of disposability, over the last three decades. It responds to the gap between the abundant literature on “the state in Africa” and the dearth of ethnographic research into new governance agendas, the ways that state power is materialized in everyday infrastructures, and how life is experienced daily by civil servants and citizens alike.<sup>3</sup> Recognizing that the state is an important site of neoliberal reason and that many of the recent contestations around neoliberalism in Africa have been directed at state power, this study returns state bodies to the center of political ethnography. Overall, this is a decidedly Senegalese story that is particular to the play of neoliberal ideas in the context of Dakar’s urban politics. The story assembles a rich history of democratic politics, a specific political ecology of order, a fabric of religious identities and affiliations, and a complex field of globalizing relations.

In Senegal, we shall see that municipal and national state politics remain key arenas through which citizenship battles are fought. As the country’s capital and the engine of the country in demographic, economic, and administrative terms, Dakar has been the heartland of postcolonial electoral politics and contestations around the nation’s development. Much as the city was the seat of the French colonial administration in West Africa, today it operates as an influential center of development administration and as a key mover and shaker in regional and international politics.<sup>4</sup> Given that most visitors and tourists fly into Dakar, the garbage crises over the last decades have been a key challenge to aspirations of modernity. Garbage crises take on larger-than-life significance in this small country; the trashing of Dakar represents the trashing of the nation.

Examining urban labor as a grounding of citizenship is a powerful lens through which to make “theory from the South” about the neoliberal era (Comaroff and Comaroff 2012). Specifically, the book details the transformation of trash labor in contemporary Dakar. In doing so, it builds on a rich tradition of research in African studies that explores ethnographically the transformation of work and urban citizenship in the context of political economic change. Both the labor question and the city have loomed large



in Africanist scholarship. An important tradition of Africanist social history and ethnography has long grappled with the ways that work in diverse contexts across the continent has transformed with the tectonic changes unleashed in African societies, as they have been integrated into global circuits of trade, development agendas, and, more recently, neoliberal globalization.<sup>5</sup> Foundational Africanist research in political ecology has exposed the particular ways that new political economic agendas are rooted in socio-environmental power relations and the important connections between material-environmental knowledge, labor, and landscape transformation.<sup>6</sup> Building on this long tradition of inquiry into contestations surrounding people's socio-natural relationships, this study focuses on urban waste infrastructure as a distinctive ecology that incorporates human labor. In so doing, it opens up new frontiers for probing intersecting material precarities and politics in the urban sphere.<sup>7</sup>

Though there has been a strong agenda of Africanist urban studies over the last few decades,<sup>8</sup> little research has explored ethnographically the way that neoliberal reforms since the 1980s have transformed labor in specific African cities. An exception is research looking at work and labor mobilization in South Africa's postapartheid neoliberal era.<sup>9</sup> A small but highly relevant group of geographical studies specifically examine how trash work (municipal collection and informal trash picking) has been reconfigured in South Africa over the last two decades. Like this book, these studies show how cleaning work magnifies contestations surrounding austerity, and emphasize the important role of social difference in structuring degraded labor (Beall, Crankshaw, and Parnell 2000; Miraftab 2004a, 2004b; M. Samson 2007, 2009, 2015). Faranak Miraftab, for example, details how neoliberal governance agendas forwarded in the postapartheid era were consolidated in the casualization of urban waste labor in Cape Town (Miraftab 2004a, 2004b). Her analysis of the deployment of discourses of empowerment, participation, and social capital to justify the exploitation of, especially, poor black women's labor resonates deeply with what I've observed in Dakar. My research goes a step further, however, in examining the infrastructural implications of a mode of governing-through-disposability and its grounding in the corporeal and spiritual burdens of the materiality of waste.

Beyond specific studies of urban labor, this book is deeply informed by a broader recent literature on African cities examining practices of urban citizenship. Africanist literature has driven some of the most innovative and provocative recent scholarly debates considering the urban condition.<sup>10</sup>

This research captures the creative innovations deployed by urban Africans while also conjuring the artifice that may be entailed in innovative forms of governing and rebellion. It has been especially generative toward reconceptualizing the spaces of belonging through which urban residents grapple with custom, imagine new rules of association, and perform civility in the city. Gender, generation, and religious affiliation come to the fore as particularly consequential shapers of sociopolitical community and citizenship practices. In the Senegalese setting, urban scholars challenge the preoccupation within Senegalese religious studies on formal religious institutions, through revealing the role of quotidian modes of religiosity in forging urban publics (Babou 2007; Diouf and Leichtman 2009). New work on gender and generation, moreover, demonstrates the complex ways that young men and women negotiate daily life and politics in Dakar (M. Diouf 2003; Foley and Drame 2013; Fouquet 2013; Fredericks 2014; Honwana 2012; Nyamnjoh 2005; Rabine 2013; Ralph 2008; Scheld 2007).

Building on this foundational Africanist research exploring the cultural politics of labor and urban practice, this book examines the communities of affect that have been animated by new material relations of disposal, focusing specifically on gender, generation, and religion. The analysis brings attention to both labor and infrastructure in a novel interrogation of urban transformation in the neoliberal era. Its concern is to cross-fertilize the Africanist research on labor and the city with the materialist literature, through attending more deeply to the materiality of labor and the city's infrastructural realm while not losing sight of the cultural references and identities through which people's labor and struggles gain meaning. It builds on a small but pioneering literature on urban infrastructural politics that brings new materialist concepts to bear on studies of urban change in Africa's contemporary era.<sup>11</sup> However, discussions of labor have been conspicuously absent from most of this work on political infrastructures. Through thinking about vital labors of waste infrastructure, this analysis resists the unmooring of cultural politics from the substrate on which it operates, and emphasizes the full register of meaning and material practice surrounding garbage as waste. This will allow for a deeper understanding of the full gamut of political violences, struggles, and possibilities that shape the urban condition. Before delving more deeply into this theoretical framework, the next section will overview the specific history of trash politics in Dakar.

## Reforming Trash in Dakar

In 1988–89, groaning under the strains of harsh structural adjustment-induced austerity measures and disappointment in the nationalist development project, especially among the nation's youth, Dakar became the epicenter of the country's worst political crisis yet. The elections of 1988, won by the incumbent president amid widespread controversy, precipitated massive youth riots and the cancellation of a whole academic school year, including at the Cheikh Anta Diop University of Dakar. Forming the material expression of political disorder, garbage accumulated in the public space. As the municipal garbage system collapsed under the budgetary constraints of austerity, Set/Setal youth set out to clean the city on their own terms.

As I detail in chapter 1, Set/Setal was the founding moment in an era when cleanliness and the labor of urban garbage management would take center stage as a primary language of control and contestation surrounding urban citizenship. At the height of Set/Setal, Dakar's then mayor made a shrewd political calculus to mastermind the recruitment of youth activists into a citywide participatory trash-collection system. A feature of the country's new neoliberal course, the participatory trash sector brought in these young men and women as new political clients, thereby co-opting their threat to state authority through the symbolic position they were to take on as the new face of the nation and its orderly development. Their incorporation into the trash sector was facilitated by a discourse of responsibility through active participation in the cleanliness of the city and thus "a moral urban politics based on the enrolment of subjects into 'civilized' behavior" (McFarlane and Rutherford 2008, 367). They became the backbone of the municipal waste management system and remain the sector's labor force today.

Since Set/Setal, Dakar's garbagescape has become a central terrain over which the cultural and moral legitimacy of the Senegalese state has been fought. A saga of institutional reorganizations in the trash sector over the last twenty-five years manifests tumultuous struggles for power between the national and municipal state over ordering Dakar. Far from a linear trajectory of neoliberal reform, unexpected hybrid institutions were forged out of this power struggle against the backdrop of an impetus to privatize, decentralize, and shrink the public sector. Even under the banner of expressly neoliberal politics, implemented by socialists and liberals alike, formulas for managing the city have emerged that seek to centralize and nationalize control. This

sheds light on the real political stakes of implementing reform in practice given the important patronage functions and performative dimensions of urban public services in Dakar. During the liberal party president Abdoulaye Wade's twelve years in office (2000–2012), the garbage sector epitomized the national government's often schizophrenic approach to managing public services and assembling urban infrastructure. Radically uneven, sporadic, and performative investments in urban infrastructure left parts of the city to rot, rust, and slowly crumble with the passage of time while others were spiffed up with elite, world-class urban aesthetics.

Spatially limited in its expansion due to its location on the Cape Verde Peninsula, and facing rapid growth rates, Dakar has sprawled out from its original colonial confines (today's downtown or Plateau *commune d'arrondissement* [district]) into its rapidly expanding *banlieue* (outskirts) (see map 1.1). Plateau is the most formally planned and serviced district, while the sprawling *banlieue* of Pikine and Guédiawaye represent the least formally planned and often most disfavored areas for infrastructure investments. This periphery now houses much of Dakar's population (Collignon 1984). Flooding in these neighborhoods is a perennial problem and urban public services are increasingly stretched thin as the city's population continues to climb. Though the Plateau district still hosts most of the federal government agencies as well as banking, international development, and corporate offices, much of the city's economic activity is decentralizing into more localized markets and economic hubs dispersed throughout the city. With the pull of the new industrial park and urban "pole" of Diamniadio just east of Dakar, moreover, the city's *banlieue* is becoming increasingly important compared with the central districts (Cohen 2007, 148). Despite this fact, these areas are still deeply disadvantaged for government services and planned infrastructure.

Though real estate values generally fall the farther one travels from downtown, historical factors and patronage politics mean that certain neighborhoods that are still quite central (for example, HLM Fass) remain disadvantaged for receiving the fruits of urban public services. Garbage regularly collects in these neighborhoods and the city's poor outskirts, and during trash strikes and collection crises they are inundated with their own waste. Elite enclaves scattered throughout the peninsula (e.g., Les Almadies), on the other hand, may take garbage management into their own hands or negotiate special privileges with the state. Shrinking funding for urban public services over the last decades has unleashed intense volatility as different



**MAP I.I.** Contemporary map of Dakar, 2017. The population of Dakar was estimated at 3.5 million of Senegal's 14 million inhabitants in 2015. CIA, "The World Factbook: Senegal."

governing bodies and politicians have clashed over diminishing budgets. In Dakar's garbage sector, this profoundly contested agenda evolved in fits and starts through an often confusing medley of hybridized institutional forms. Over the course of Wade's tenure in office, the garbage sector was reorganized at least ten separate times, ranging from full privatization, to nationalization, to various power-sharing arrangements between government, private, and other institutions. This instability defies quick characterization within simplistic neoliberal paradigms but has had far-reaching implications for how the burdens of waste and its disposal are shouldered in Dakar.

Chapter 2 details how these reconfigurations turned on manipulating trash labor and its remuneration through various formulas of participation. Community participation and associated empowerment discourses are a key tenet of "soft neoliberalism" (Peck 2010, xvi)—new "kinder, gentler" modes of governing austerity in the face of widespread critique and social dislocation (Mohan and Stokke 2000). In Dakar, this involved more than just participation being imposed from on high into the lexicon of Senegalese development. Originally a radical approach by Set/Setal youth to assert rights to a healthy city, the discourse of participation was transformed by key political actors into a very different set of projects concerned with disciplining certain elements of the social body through material means. Participation served as a mode of governing through reconfiguring relations of social reproduction. The greatest burdens of the municipal trash system were devolved onto labor: workers were furnished with little equipment for collection, if any at all, and existing materials were allowed to degrade. The onus of disposal work shifted onto laboring bodies as the city expanded and consumption levels rose.

Meanwhile, the periphery of the city witnessed another development that further displaced waste infrastructure onto labor, as explored in chapter 3. Linking up with participation in the "formal" municipal sector, in hard-to-access parts of the city's periphery, "informal" community-based nongovernmental organization (NGO) projects were spearheaded in the early 2000s to bring unpaid women in as "municipal housekeepers" to collect their neighborhood trash. Consistent with the wider discourse on participation and associated notions of appropriate technology and empowerment, these projects involved door-to-door horse-drawn-cart collection projects centered on the voluntary labor of neighborhood women. Across these transformations in the city and its periphery, it is possible to identify a number of different infrastructural formulas for managing the city's garbage collection that turn

on flexibilizing the formal labor force and mobilizing community-based labors of collection.

In a keen demonstration of the “unruliness of infrastructure” (Larkin 2008), workers and residents in Dakar have exerted their rights to urban citizenship through tactics aimed at unsettling the “proper” function and significance of trash infrastructures. In chapter 4, I show how from 2000 to 2009, the municipal trash workers went from being disorganized, invisible, and stigmatized to being one of the most mobilized and respected labor unions in contemporary Senegal. Since the mid-2000s, the trash workers have periodically disturbed the ordering processes of governing-through-garbage by staging a series of multiday, havoc-wreaking, general trash strikes. During this time, ordinary Dakarois in neighborhoods like HLM Fass have joined in the chorus of rebellion through disorder by the concerted dumping of household garbage into public streets, squares, even in front of government buildings. Strikes by workers and public dumping by residents deploy the power of dirt to creatively subvert ordering paradigms and contest the stigma and abjection implied by living and working in filth.

The trash workers personally and publicly frame their labor as an act of Muslim piety rooted in the spiritual value of cleanliness. This refusal of disposability turns the stigma of trash work on its head. Through accompanying their strikes with a savvy public relations campaign, the trash workers have redefined their profession, earned widespread public support, and played a key role in critiquing the country’s neoliberal development trajectory. With the signing of the trash union’s collective bargaining agreement in 2014—which conferred formal contracts, higher salaries, and health care benefits—the garbage sector pioneered the reversal of neoliberal trends flexibilizing urban labor and signaled the possibility of a new era of urban governance in Dakar.

As can be seen from this brief history, trash in the public space in Dakar signals more than just technical failure or inadequate funding. Wrapped up with the question of trash is the negotiation of citizenship in the space of urban infrastructure. Violent neoliberal political economies congeal in the city’s wastescape and are made manifest in crisis moments. I take the major trash crises of Senegal’s neoliberal moment—especially 1988–89 and 2007—as key points of rupture, when political economic turmoil became materially visceral in the public space and different actors negotiated a new configuration of socio-material relations. The trash crises are thus the manifestation of the disorder of development (see Beall 2006). They are produc-

tive moments of revelation and reflection on larger political questions, when citizens renegotiate their roles in the urban labor force and, more broadly, in the orderly processes of city making. The next sections will detail the book's theoretical orientation toward a materialist ethnography of waste infrastructure.

### **Vital Infrastructures**

In contrast to technocratic representations of solid-waste management (swm), this book treats trash infrastructures as political matter (Braun and Whatmore 2010). It builds on a long tradition of geographical research examining the production of urban space in processes of uneven development.<sup>12</sup> New political economic agendas are crystallized in the space of urban infrastructure. But urban infrastructures, including housing, water, waste, and transport, are not stable edifices of power or technologies of rule. They are key sites of performative government practice as well as claim making by elite and disenfranchised citizens alike. This study is part of a growing body of ethnographic research examining urban infrastructures as key forums for negotiated processes of political contestation.<sup>13</sup> It builds on a recent emphasis on the urban scale as the key locus of citizenship and on everyday negotiations around access to public space and goods in the city as central to claiming citizenship.<sup>14</sup> It advances these discussions through emphasizing the material basis of contestations around citizenship, especially focusing on the materiality of labor.

As part of a broader field of ethnographic research on infrastructure politics, Africanist research has been particularly innovative in showing how material infrastructures such as roads, sewers, and electricity grids serve as a “political terrain for the negotiation of central ethical and political questions concerning civic virtue and the shape of citizenship.”<sup>15</sup> Antina von Schnitzler's (2013, 2016) research on prepaid water-meter technologies in South Africa, for instance, shows how in bypassing, destroying, and tinkering with this neoliberal layer of infrastructure, township residents wage a micro-politics of innovation and subversion which contests ethical regimes of individuation and incentivization. Of particular relevance to this research, Brenda Chalfin (2014, 2016) examines citizenship practices rooted in daily engagements with sewer infrastructures in the context of modernist failure in urban Ghana. She pays special attention to how the embodied material practices through which urban residents adapt, maintain, and forge waste



infrastructures renegotiate the urban social contract. Similarly, this study focuses on the embodied practices of trash collection in Senegal's neoliberal era but also on the cultural modes through which that infrastructure is organized and valued.

Waste in Dakar urges an understanding of infrastructure not as a simple, inert, technical supporting structure, but as a relational articulation of material, social, and affective elements. Infrastructures are ecologies that assemble a range of spatialized relationships between political economic imperatives, technologies, natural processes, forms of sociality, social meanings, and modes of ritual action (see Murphy 2013; Star 1999). This allows for a much broader understanding of infrastructures that can include biophysical processes, technologies of government, experiences of abjection, embodied precarities, the force of matter and machines, and aesthetic or spiritual systems of order. These relationships get articulated in and through the material form of the city, and negotiated in everyday politics specific to different urban arrangements and their attendant sociohistorical complexes. Infrastructures are not static; they are composed of fluid relations between technologies and forms of sociality. Their development, operation, maintenance, and breakdown, moreover, are imbricated with other discursive, symbolic, and religious realms. Considering these socio-technical ecologies relationally allows us to probe the intersections between human and nonhuman agencies, the concrete burdens placed on laboring bodies and communities, and the everyday meanings and practices through which infrastructures become political.

The matter at stake in infrastructures—or the materiality of relationships among people and the urban ecologies they manage—is an active agent in the political negotiations they engender. This research is informed by new materialist debates, especially the recent resurgence of materialist thinking in geography.<sup>16</sup> It is concerned with the force of things or, drawing on Bruce Braun and Sarah J. Whatmore's (2010, ix) important intervention, "the way that things of every imaginable kind—material objects, informed materials, bodies, machines, even media ecologies—help constitute the common worlds we share and the dense fabric of relations with others in and through which we live." This vitalist perspective emphasizes the relational nature of material and social worlds. Like other managed objects and commodities—for instance, oil, water, sewage, carbon, electricity, lead, and asbestos (Anand 2011; Fennell 2016; Gregson, Watkins, and Calestani 2010; McFarlane 2008; von Schnitzler 2016; Watts 2009; Whittington 2016)—household trash has

its own unique, context-specific materiality and spatiality that conditions the social and political life of waste infrastructure. A key element of this analysis is disentangling the way that “different matters matter differently” (Gregson and Crang 2010, 1027)—or the special force of household waste in this story. We shall see how the specific materiality of Dakar’s garbage, waste’s connection to impurity in Islam, and the power of cleaning as a process of purification are key features of the political valence of trash in Dakar.

Extending geographical insights on materiality, this research departs from some of the new materialist thinking in how it defines and locates the political. Although the conception of vital infrastructures here shares an interest with Jane Bennett (2010, 6) in “thing-power” as “the curious ability of inanimate things to animate, to act, to produce effects dramatic and subtle,” it diverges from Bennett’s approach to evaluating the agency of things. Bennett’s conception of politics floats in an abstract, philosophical mode that does not recognize the asymmetries of power represented by the assemblages she considers, and offers limited insight into the actual political work that nonhuman actants do in specific settings (see Braun et al. 2011). Through ethnography, this analysis goes beyond the philosophical to show how waste exerts very different power within divergent contexts, with far-reaching implications for different people in Dakar. By centering the analysis on the materiality of labor, it unpacks “the complexities, frictions, intractabilities, and conundrums of ‘matter in relation’” (Abrahamsson, Bertoni, and Mol 2015, 13) to interrogate what *kinds* of politics matter has and the strategic alliances people forge with things. Reconsidering labor and infrastructure is, thus, a way to recuperate a vital politics of material infrastructures. Through drawing attention to people as infrastructure, bricolage as material work, and the material moralities of value and meaning making, I show how material geographies of trash matter to how government and citizenship are practiced.

Attention to waste in Dakar foregrounds that urban infrastructures are composed of social as much as technical elements and that waste matters in its encounter with and animation by/of human bodies. In contrast to definitions of infrastructure in much of the recent critical literature that elide the social life of infrastructure, this analysis is centered on the way that new infrastructural assemblages are situated in human labor and the crucial intersections of human and nonhuman agencies. It thus urges for a “fleshing out” of infrastructures’ literal vitality (living parts) through advancing an understanding of the key role of labor and community in infrastructural

systems. In this way, it builds on and extends AbdouMaliq Simone's (2004b) notion of *people as infrastructure* to examine how "infrastructure exerts a force—not simply in the materials and energies it avails, but also the way it attracts people, draws them in, coalesces and expends their capacities" (Simone 2012). Vital infrastructures are alive in all sorts of ways with the materials that compose them—including the trash and its active biological processes but also, crucially, the human labor through which they take form. This liveliness illuminates the relational precarities of infrastructure and labor—or how they are precarious in different ways that intersect in key moments.

Although there is growing attention within urban studies to how networked infrastructures are fragmenting in ways that exacerbate urban inequality all over the world, attention to human labor is especially relevant in the nonnetworked, often informal, fragmented infrastructural systems that dominate in Dakar and across the Global South.<sup>17</sup> Austerity and economic stagnation in recent decades have magnified the historical fragmentation of African urban infrastructures, dashing the aspirations of the nationalist era and amplifying uneven development. As we'll see in Dakar, this has bred infrastructures of salvage bricolage, even within the core of urban public services. These systems underscore that infrastructures are processual—they are constantly undergoing innovative processes of care and (re)fabrication by the bodies and systems of sociality they are built upon. On the other hand, an emphasis on labor highlights how devolved, participatory waste infrastructures have come to be a central pillar of governing practices in Senegal and of the material processes of abjection through which certain bodies become constituted as waste. Infrastructures can be seen to expend human capacities in two senses—both through disbursing them, and also through using them up. This allows for a more robust conception of the ways that people are infrastructure, which is attentive to the violences that may consolidate in the silences of infrastructure's concrete and the daily material negotiations through which those violences may be fractured.<sup>18</sup> Dakar's bricolage infrastructures highlight both how infrastructures may predate their human elements and the important ways that infrastructures' people may upend these systems.

Finally, infrastructures are affective worlds that give rise to a range of structures of feeling. This story draws attention to the intersections of materiality and social systems of meaning—or the generative capacity of non-human actants "to move us and shape our collective attachments" (Braun

and Whatmore 2010, xxiv; drawing on Connolly 2010). Dakar's trash infrastructures reveal not just the social labor processes through which people stitch together livelihoods out of the fragments of stagnant economies, but also the bricolage modes of meaning making they inspire. The piety of refusal can be seen as a sort of bricolage of the self in a landscape of disrepair and pollution that serves as both a mode of piety and a collective resource. Infrastructures require belonging; they are embedded in social relations and are erected upon moral architectures. "'Modes of religiosity' forge new spaces of affiliation, movements, civic culture, and communities" (Diouf and Leichtman 2009, 3–4), but also alternative infrastructures through which new moral geographies are crafted. The focus on salvage here grounds bricolage in the material practice of dealing with ruins and waste. The qualities of waste are central not just to how these infrastructures operate, but to how they are understood and felt. As we shall see in the next section, waste's powers to disrupt and the salience of cleaning as a practice of order and piety are key features of the political valence of trash as vital matter in Dakar.

### **Waste Matters**

Waste has special salience as vital matter on multiple registers owing to the particularities of its material properties and its role as an index of value.<sup>19</sup> Waste has a "gritty," coarse materiality that helps to "ground" understandings of materialism (Kirsch 2013). The high organic content, stench, and propensity for quick putrefaction in the Senegalese heat makes household trash in Dakar visceral, lively matter. Far from inert, it is a material in transition. The internal processes of decomposition endow Dakar's trash with a "toxic vitality" (P. Harvey 2016) that is a central feature of trash politics. These properties and the socio-spatial geographies of its management have important implications for a consideration of the role of discard infrastructures in formulas of governing and claims to urban citizenship.

Waste plays a key role in the cultural work of coding value. In her seminal work on pollution and taboo, Mary Douglas (1966) illustrates how symbolic associations around impurity maintain social structures. Dirt should be seen, she argues, as simply "matter out of place" or "disorder"; there is a social function behind rites and rituals defining what—and who, for that matter—is considered pure versus what is labeled a contagion. In her words, "As we know it, dirt is essentially disorder. There is no such thing as absolute dirt: it exists in the eye of the beholder. If we shun dirt, it is not because

of craven fear, still less dread of holy terror. Nor do our ideas about disease account for the range of our behaviour in cleaning or avoiding dirt. Dirt offends against order. Eliminating it is not a negative moment, but a positive effort to organise the environment” (Douglas 1966, 2). Douglas exposes the powerful ways that discourses around the dangers of dirt and pollution produce social boundaries and thereby structure and spatialize social relations. However, it is important to emphasize that the meaning and thus political import of waste is not a transhistorical, -cultural, or -geographical given. Waste should be understood as a “mobile description of that which has been cast out or judged superfluous in a particular space–time. *It is a technical and political artifact* that gathers force in its performativity” within certain contexts (Gidwani and Reddy 2011, 1649; italics in original). Douglas’s focus on semiotics and denial of the material force of matter beyond the cultural realm, moreover, is insufficient.<sup>20</sup> The power that trash comes to perform in certain contexts is constituted through its material-semiotic properties as they intersect with particular bodies. Trash matters, in other words, because its dirty associations and messy properties govern the practice of managing it and its sociopolitical power. Through pushing beyond the symbolic to grapple with the full force of waste in its material and performative dimensions, this research traces the powerful ways that government officials, municipal workers, and ordinary Dakarois harness the power of waste to different ends in specific conjunctures.

Attention to the full discursive and material import of waste draws into relief the way that “purification impulses” (Sennett 1970) have long governed modernizing missions through rigorous urban boundary making.<sup>21</sup> Urban space in the colonies was produced and regulated along racial lines through ideas of dirt and disease, crystallized through pivotal moments of socio-spatial reorganization like disease outbreaks. Just as urban space and its infrastructures were produced unevenly along segregationist logics in the colonial period, so do infrastructures in postcolonial cities codify government prerogatives and unequal citizenship across the urban landscape. As in the colony, the uneven provision of infrastructure for urban public services like water, sanitation, and waste management is a mechanism of abjection through which access to the rewards of the city may be extended or denied. Drawing on Julia Kristeva’s formulation of how processes of abjection repel/expel the other who is deemed polluting, Nikhil Anand shows how governmental practices render abject certain residents of Mumbai through the active denial of water infrastructures.<sup>22</sup> Exerting control over urban de-

velopment and governing urban subjects depends upon the maintenance of an aesthetic order in the city that keeps people in their proper place. Governmental techniques, which render unruly slum space unlawful, define and enforce aesthetic norms to produce specific images of modernity and legitimize the displacement of those deemed “polluting,” or lacking a proper “citizen-culture,” as unfit to belong in the city.<sup>23</sup> In this light, Vinay Gidwani (2013, 176) describes India’s exclusionary urbanisms as a “century-long class war against waste.”

At the base of state legitimacy, therefore, is the government’s performative role in cleaning the city through managing urban waste. Waste management—or the process by which waste is rendered a “public secret” (Hawkins 2003)—is a primary vehicle of modernizing missions through ordering spaces and disciplining bodies (see Doherty, 2018; McFarlane 2008; Moore 2009; Gidwani 2013; Brownell 2014). Yet urban waste and its management is a contradictory indicator of progress and modernity. As the outcome of consumption and production, waste represents the excess of modernity (Moore 2009). Thus the challenge of managing it escalates with the pursuit of development. Because the movement of waste—its effective, proper disposal, out of sight—allows development to continue and urban order to be maintained, the blockage of that disposal process is the ultimate symbol of nonprogress and indicator of state delinquency. Without ritual practices of expulsion and elimination, the city risks being consumed by the very effluvium of its own advancement. The accumulation of urban waste in the public space exteriorizes that which is private, exposing the public secret of waste.

This book argues that practices of governing in Senegal have deployed the power of waste as impurity and disposability. This is not by any means the first consideration of the role of discourses of waste, excess, and excrement in relation to African political discourse and governing logics. An influential body of francophone political theory places excremental politics at the center of postcolonial political discourse on the continent (Bayart 1989; Mbembe 2001). Drawing on often grotesque and scatological political discourse, Achille Mbembe argues that an “aesthetics of vulgarity” is central to the exertion and derision of authority.<sup>24</sup> Though this analysis shares an interest in excremental languages involved in political displays of authority, it resists a tendency to characterize “the African state” in a way that ends up pathologizing African politics in blanket terms and sidestepping “the insistent materiality” of waste (Chalfin 2014, 93). I am concerned here with examining how the material power of literal waste infrastructures serves the

consolidation of hegemony or its fracture in specific historical conjunctures in Senegal.

I show that governing-through-garbage is a material practice of power that works through two modes of precarity. The first involves the dirtying of specific places. The problem of trash management is a question of boundaries. Trash marks the boundary between inside and outside: the inside is constructed as protected and safe whereas the outside—which can be “rubbished”—is figured as potentially malevolent, disorderly, and dangerous.<sup>25</sup> Uneven trash collection in Dakar differentiates urban space—rendering abject those spaces and people not deemed a priority for urban public services through processes of neglect and its consequence, rubbishing. Waste and dirt collect in those zones, inevitably the poorer and less well connected city neighborhoods, thereby disproportionately saddling residents with filth and its associated stigmas and dangers. Processes of urban neoliberal reform are premised upon allocating precarity through assigning disposability.

Compounding the wasting of specific spaces, the second mode of precarity is rooted in the way that particular bodies are actively enlisted into labors of disposal which render them abject through the corporeal and spiritual burdens of pollution. This second mode is especially relevant here because labor has been at the center of governing-through-garbage in Dakar. Precarious labor demands attention to the materiality of bodies—their sensuous capacities, differentiated burdens, and embodied engagements with nature (Bakker and Bridge 2006; Jackson 2000). The labor of discard, as a process of positively organizing the environment, is central to the reproduction of the social order. Garbage disposal requires not just places that are discardable, but also disposable people to accomplish the task. The work entailed in trash management repels, yet the risk and danger inscribed in the process render it a vital labor at the base of urban development. Though it is by definition dirty, polluted labor, trash work can be seen simultaneously as a process of cleaning and purification. In Senegal, cleaning takes on added meaning owing to the particular importance ascribed to purity and cleanliness as an indispensable element of Islamic faith.

Labor-intensive, “participatory” waste infrastructures have come to be a central pillar of governing practices in Senegal. By respatializing the relations of social reproduction, these new infrastructural formulas devolve the burdens of garbage infrastructure onto bodies and social systems with profoundly uneven effects.<sup>26</sup> Feminist insights on the gendered nature of material life bring into view questions of embodiment, corporeality, and per-

formativity which help to explain how certain bodies become constituted as waste through the full force of the burdens they bear. As Katie Meehan and Kendra Strauss (2015) point out in their reformulation of social reproduction drawing on a tradition of feminist posthumanism, attention to embodiment illuminates the material body as a “force that shapes knowledge, but also as the material *site* in which value, politics, and meaning is produced.” This underscores the importance of the “fleshy, messy” aspects of the crisis of social reproduction or the way it operates through labor’s materiality (Katz 2001; Meehan and Strauss 2015). The force of waste is animated through its intersection with human labor—as it literally emplaces burdens of dirt and disease onto specific bodies through differentiated experiences of precarity and discipline.<sup>27</sup>

By focusing on the material precarities of trash work and the infrastructure it builds, I show that the power of trash has conditioned specific knowledges, subjectivities, and practices that threaten the hegemonic power of governing-through-disposability. The matter at stake in infrastructure—here, the flows of waste and filth—shapes political possibilities, because the meanings associated with such matter (and not just the technical vulnerabilities) can be the source of its usefulness for political mobilization. Trash strikes are effective because they demonstrate the value of workers’ labor as it is withdrawn, but also because the material-semiotic resonance of trash as waste makes it a particularly powerful matter of rebellion. The public secret of waste and its associated risks rely on a multitude of everyday intersecting forms of vigilance to keep it in its proper place. Years of tinkering have evolved the collection process toward a system premised upon intimate, daily intersections between women household garbage managers and municipal garbage collectors who share a commitment to ridding the city of its collective effluvium.<sup>28</sup> Once those labors have been withdrawn and garbage has been discharged into the public space, the natural forces of decomposition take hold and the richly organic material begins to putrefy. With time, the resolution of the crisis becomes even more pressing as the residents’ message takes on a life of its own in the waste’s increasingly hazardous stench and rot.

The counterhegemonic force of trash rebellion in Dakar was thus forged out of the specific subjectivities conditioned by the material practice of discard and cleaning, and manifested in the creative deployment of the material itself in rebellion. Precarious bodies, abject and empowered by waste, are always there to trouble delicate political orders. As in other settings,



waste workers in Dakar harness the power of discourses of cleaning and purity as a primary weapon in the fight for better wages and respect (see Millar 2012; Moore 2009). They unsettle the ordering paradigms implied by participatory labor arrangements to argue for a sort of “garbage citizenship” premised upon fair remuneration and benefits for garbage labor, and affordable, accessible garbage services. Their appeals to Islamic morality deploy an ethical and spiritual critique of the state’s erosion of labor and establish a new language through which to value a vital infrastructure. Dakar trash workers’ battle to make their labor manifest and to sculpt a vernacular understanding of its worth is thus a claim for a more ethical infrastructure. In this way, an examination of the human life of Dakar’s infrastructure can lend new insight into processes of urban citizenship and related questions of justice in cities anywhere.

### **Making “Theory from the South”**

Cities in the Global South are more often than not characterized in pathological terms, through a lexicon charged with descriptions of what they lack and how their histories diverge from that of the rest of the world. Representations of African cities are often particularly gloomy and reductionist. Essentialist understandings of the continent as rural by nature and of African urbanism as necessarily dysfunctional were foundational to the constructions of difference that have historically haunted ideas of Africa. Despite the fact that a near majority of Africans now forge their lives in cities, racialized narratives of African alterity stubbornly persist. These join with theories of “proper” urban development patterned after Western urbanism to render African cities perverted, incomplete, and dysfunctional. Now yoked to a developmentalist ethos, framings of African urbanism are all too often limited to invectives of perverse growth, crumbling infrastructure, and flagging economies that demand a series of international interventions.

Garbage often stands in as the quintessential symbol of what’s wrong in African cities: the material expression of the failures of development and the chaos taking over the African continent. The challenge of managing trash, in other words, acts as a potent metaphor for the African “crisis” writ large. Indeed, Dakar’s trash “crisis” is almost always rendered either a technical-financial problem or a product of corruption, plain and simple. As such, it becomes part of the depressingly familiar narrative of the “failed” African metropolis, a symbol of “the coming anarchy” that influential journalist

Robert D. Kaplan predicted would soon envelop a continent ruled by chaos and decay, sliding farther and farther off the map of global connection.<sup>29</sup>

Narratives of African exception that paint a picture of African cities as degrading, unfinished, or unworkable are not new or imaginative. They are consistent with a long legacy of discourse, deeply tied up with other rounds of globalization, which places Africa as the primordial other, a perverted and incomplete version of the Western whole (Mudimbe 1994). But, if waste is an index of difference—of that which should be cast out—then blanket discourses of “trashing” should be roundly suspect. Describing African cities through discourses of waste and disorder profoundly ignores the “gutted infrastructures of segregated cityscapes” inherited through sedimented layers of imperial debris (Stoler 2008, 194). In the dilapidated, salvaged garbage trucks that arrive into Dakar from distant European shores we can trace ruins of empire and their role in producing and upholding violent environments. Dakar’s trash collectors, like e-waste workers, pickers, recyclers, ship dismantlers, and so forth all over the world, signify geographies of dispossession, past and present. They are potent symbols of “the colonial logic of (neo)liberal modernity” (Roy, Larner, and Peck 2012). Essentializing narratives of urbanism and waste are just some of the obstinate ruins of empire that dog Africa’s present.

Characterizations that pathologize African cities are surprisingly resilient, even within some current urban scholarship and policy writing on the continent. They are a central feature of what Jennifer Robinson importantly delineated as a stark geographical division in urban theory: cities in the Global North (especially “global cities”) are designated as sources of theory, and Global South cities as repositories of poor people and problems that “do not contribute to expanding the definition of city-ness” but are, rather, “drawn on to signify its obverse, what cities are not” (2002, 540). In drawing attention to this uneven geography of urban theory, Robinson forces us to consider how theories of “global cities” reify their own categories and hierarchies and are, in fact, part of the production and regulation of those cities’ power through an othering of “ordinary cities” (Robinson 2006). She urges a recentering of new urban scholarship on those ordinary cities normally located “off the map.”

Precisely because of its presumed otherness, the African continent is essential as a source of theory. Following Jean and John Comaroff (2012), this book uses ethnographic theorizing from Dakar as a way of making “theory from the South.” In addition to lending insight into the specifics of Senegal’s neoliberal present, its broader intention is to incorporate African political systems into more cosmopolitan urban and political theories. I take cities to be

sites of experimentation, and privilege the daily micropolitics through which new expressions of citizenship are negotiated, without neglecting the imposition of global forces of neoliberal capitalism and development discourses or “the difficulties of putting new citizenships into practice” (Holston 2010, 9). Through a perspective ethnographically attentive to place and the sociohistorical contingency of power relations, this theorization resists one-size-fits-all models of political economy or colonial legacies and rejects essentialist framings that simplistically pathologize or celebrate African cities.<sup>30</sup>

By considering the continent’s connection to the rest of the world, my analysis works against the naturalizing and disabling effect of depictions of Africa that simply recite a series of failures, lacks, and absences (Ferguson 2006). Relational understandings of global connection elucidate the “embeddedness in multiple elsewheres of which the continent actually speaks,” and, crucially, African cities’ key strategic role in empire, past and present (Mbembe and Nuttall 2004a, 348). Recognizing that “Africa” is in many ways a mythical entity—fabricated as a coherent geographic object despite great internal diversity—and considering the many ways in which the continent has been injected into the neoliberal world order, I seek to ask some questions about the material and symbolic “trashing” of the continent. Digging beneath Dakar’s detritus denaturalizes representations of decay, and, in doing so, refashions the very basis of how we understand cities and urban citizenship.

### **Outline of the Book**

Chapter 1, “Governing Disposability,” intervenes in debates on infrastructure politics, Senegalese democracy, and neoliberal development through the lens of Dakar’s garbage politics over the last twenty-five years. Institutional volatility in the garbage sector is the outcome of intensified competition between the national and municipal state over controlling Dakar’s infrastructural order in the wake of economic and political liberalization. These forces accelerated a mode of governing-through-disposability premised upon performative, fragmented infrastructure investments and strategies to flexibilize the urban workforce.

Chapter 2, “Vital Infrastructures of Labor,” takes a closer look at what the institutional transformations in the garbage sector have meant for the workers caught in their sway, through a materialist reading of the cultural politics of trash infrastructure. Tracing the sector’s history from the Set/Setal youth movement, it illuminates how new formulas for garbage man-

agement reconfigured everyday lives and embodied materialities of labor and, along the way, communities, political subjectivities, and relationships to the city. The turn to participatory infrastructural formulas for garbage collection devolved technology onto labor, binding people to each other through their refuse and to machines through relations of salvage bricolage.

Chapter 3, “Technologies of Community,” links the highly contested battle to flexibilize the sphere of (“formal”) municipal trash labor and the turn to (“informal”) participatory garbage collection, through examining a community-based trash project in a peripheral neighborhood centered on voluntary women’s labor and horse-drawn carts. The chapter further examines the social and material components of fragmented infrastructure devolved onto labor, while contributing to critiques in development studies unpacking notions of community, participation, and empowerment in community-based development. The continued devolution of infrastructure onto labor extends the relations of social reproduction into the neighborhood space, rendering neighborhood women municipal housekeepers and reinforcing customary authority over local development.

Chapter 4, “The Piety of Refusal,” examines the values and vernacular moralities through which these infrastructures are felt and understood by the people who make up the social systems they are built upon. It details the trash workers union movement and the waves of public dumping through which workers and ordinary Dakarois have refused conditions of precarity since the mid-2000s. Through examining workers’ identities and strategies as a union, the chapter shows how the particular resonance of their labor as cleaning and their refusal to clean through striking have validated garbage work, earned them widespread public support, and, in turn, allowed them to stem the tide of labor flexibilization. The chapter engages with debates considering the relationship between citizenship and spiritual identity and highlights the intimate communities of affect that forge infrastructures, through examining the architectures of faith undergirding the workers’ movement.

The conclusion, “Garbage Citizenship,” brings together the key arguments of the book and draws insight for understanding urban infrastructural citizenship in the wake of neoliberal development. Drawing on Dakar’s trash politics, it argues for bridging new and old materialist debates through considering the material labors of infrastructure. Values are coded in urban infrastructures but especially in the vital, living parts of the urban landscape. The provocations of Dakar’s garbage citizens are used to reflect on the possibilities for building more just urban infrastructures.

INTRODUCTION. **Trash Matters**

1. See Sharad Chari's (2013, 133) similar notion of "refusal to be detritus."
2. I'm drawing on and reconfiguring AbdouMaliq Simone's (2004b) notion of *people as infrastructure*.
3. For some notable exceptions, see Blundo and Meur (2009) and Chalfin (2010) as well as the political infrastructures literatures discussed later in the chapter.
4. The city is a major financial center, home to a dozen national and regional banks (including la Banque Centrale des états de l'Afrique de l'ouest [Central Bank of the West African States] which manages the unified West African franc [CFA] currency) and numerous international organizations, NGOs, and international research centers, and it is the center of the country's tourist economy.
5. Among other interventions, these literatures have contributed pathbreaking insight toward understanding gendered and generational access to resources, migration and rural-urban connection, and the persistence of "custom" (e.g., Berry 1993; Carney and Watts 1990; Ferguson 1994; Isaacman 1996).
6. Africanist research has been foundational in political ecology (e.g., Bassett and Crummey 1993; Fairhead and Leach 1996; Ribot 1998; Schroeder 1999; Tiffen, Mortimore, and Gichuki 1994; Watts 1983). Though most of the early political ecology scholarship was focused on the rural sphere, there is a growing literature refracting urban political-ecological questions through the lens of African cities (e.g., Lawhon, Ernstson, and Silver 2014; Loftus 2012; McFarlane and Silver 2017; Myers 2005; Njeru 2006).
7. See footnote 12 for a brief discussion of Africanist urban political ecology (UPE).
8. There is a long, important tradition of Africanist urban historiography and ethnography that shifted the rural focus of labor studies to grapple with the transformation of work and labor organizing in the city. For instance, Luise White's ground-

breaking *Comforts of Home* explored the role of prostitution as a means of capital accumulation in colonial Nairobi (1990). Research on urbanism in the Copperbelt, a copper-mining region in Central Africa mostly centered in Zambia's Copperbelt Province, moreover, was central to a new paradigm in urban studies emerging in the middle of the century (see early research coming out of the Rhodes-Livingston Institute [e.g., Gluckman 1961; J. C. Mitchell 1961] and the discussion by J. Robinson [2006]). More recent scholarship on the urban labor question has recalibrated understandings of urban informality (K. Hart 1973), the challenges of economic decline (Ferguson 1999), new patterns of migration (Buggenhagen 2001; Cooper 1983; M. Diouf 2000), the gendered politics of work (Clark 1994; G. Hart 2002), and questions of labor mobilization and unionization (Cooper 1996; Lubeck 1986; Parpart 1983)—to name a few central contributions.

9. For instance, Gillian Hart's (2002) important monograph examines the cultural politics of labor fomented by industrial globalization in black townships in KwaZulu-Natal faced with ongoing legacies of racial dispossession.

10. For instance, my edited volumes with Mamadou Diouf (2013, 2014) brought together a range of established and emerging scholars wrestling ethnographically with the forms of experimentation, adaptation, and negotiation through which African urban dwellers stake claims to the rights and rewards of the city. Other relevant overview pieces include: De Boeck and Plissart (2005), Mbembe and Nuttall (2004b), Murray (2011), Murray and Myers (2011), Myers (2005, 2011), E. Pieterse (2008), J. Robinson (2006), Simone (2004a, 2010), and the debate between Watts (2005a) and Nuttall and Mbembe (2005).

11. For instance, Brenda Chalfin, Daniel Mains, and Antina von Schnitzler have been at the forefront of ethnographic discussions of infrastructural change in the neoliberal era for their work in Ghana, Ethiopia, and South Africa, respectively (Chalfin 2016; Mains 2012; von Schnitzler 2016).

12. These concerns have animated broad swathes of urban geographical debate for some time. Some key foundational texts include Castells (1979), D. Harvey (1996), and Smith (1984). Urban political ecology (UPE) research has made especially important contributions toward emphasizing the socio-power geometries surrounding human-environment relations, the materiality of urban nature, and the key role of urban infrastructures in uneven environment-development relations (e.g., the collection by Heynen et al. [2007]). However, I join with Lawhon, Ernstson, and Silver (2014) in arguing for a provincialization of UPE. African urbanisms offer new insights for UPE, which, to date, has been narrow in theoretical scope and dominated by Global North perspectives. This book shares in Lawhon et al.'s call for a more situated UPE that draws on more heterogeneous theoretical influences (especially feminist and postcolonial), particularly through exploring how notions of people as infrastructure, embodied experiences, and situated knowledges are central to urban political ecologies. For some examples of urban political-ecological scholarship that may fall outside the purview of conventional UPE, see Loftus (2012), Myers (2011, 2014), Rademacher and Sivaramakrishnan (2013), and Truelove (2011).

13. The research on political infrastructures has exploded over the last few years. For

some key overview pieces and special issues, see Appel, Anand, and Gupta (2015), Calhoun, Sennett, and Shapira (2013), Collier, Mizes, and von Schnitzler (2016), S. Graham and C. McFarlane (2015), Jensen and Morita (2016), Larkin (2013), Lugo and Lockrem (2012), McFarlane and Rutherford (2008), T. Mitchell (2014), O'Neill and Rodgers (2012), and Star (1999). Water infrastructure has been an especially fertile area of research. See Anand (2017), Björkman (2014), Gandy (2014), Kooy and Bakker (2008), Ranganathan (2014, 2015), and Truelove (2011).

14. There is a wide and established body of urban scholarship, much of which is focused on Global South cities, that emphasizes the rising importance of the city as the key locus of citizenship accompanying the decline of nation-state-based citizenship. The shift to the urban scale is associated with the fading relevance of classic notions of citizenship focused on formal membership and participation in the national polity, and the rising importance of rights-based approaches which focus on access to substantive urban public goods like housing, sanitation, and employment. See the concise summary by Mirafat and Kudva (2015) as well as foundational texts including Holston and Appadurai (1999), J. Robinson (2006), and Roy (2009).

15. Von Schnitzler (2013, 689). See also Appel (2014), Brownell (2014), Chalfin (2014, 2016), Chari (2013), De Boeck (2014), De Boeck and Plissart (2005), De Boeck and Balaji (2016), Doherty (2018), Gandy (2006), Larkin (2008), Loftus and Lumsden (2008), Mains (2012), Masquelier (2002), Mavhunga (2013a), McFarlane and Silver (2017), Mizes (2017), Omezi (2014), Simone (2004b, 2012), and von Schnitzler (2016).

16. Geography has long made its mark on the academy through grappling with the relationship between human activity and material environments (Braun 2007). There has been a resurgence of interest in the last few years, influenced by wider new materialist debates and the rising influence of science studies and the “ontological turn” in anthropology, to bring materiality more fully back into the fold of cultural and political geographical inquiry.

17. See Stephen Graham and Simon Marvin's influential *Splintering Urbanism* (2001). The implied progression in Graham and Marvin's book from networked to individualized and privatized systems is less relevant in African cities. As Matthew Gandy (2006, 389) points out about Lagos, episodic aspirations by colonial and then postcolonial governments to modernize urban space have in reality been “little more than a chimera that characterized sketches, plans and isolated developments, but never constituted the majority experience.”

18. See Michael Watts's (2005a) critique of Simone's notion of *people as infrastructure* in the special issue of *Public Culture* on Johannesburg.

19. For some key texts in discard studies examining the culture and materiality of waste, see Alexander and Reno (2012), Gregson and Crang (2010), Hawkins and Muecke (2003), Moore (2012), O'Brien (1999), Reno (2015), and Scanlan (2005).

20. This study joins with a wider body of work in discard studies that pushes beyond Douglas's structural-symbolic approach to foreground waste's materiality (see Reno 2015).

21. Though the examples elaborated here are mostly in the postcolonial world, waste management has also been deeply implicated in city-planning policy and practice in

the West. For example, discourses of cleanliness and indiscipline resonate with a number of other long-running debates including the historic question of pollution and class that can be seen in the progressive era in the United States (Riis 1890).

22. Anand (2012), drawing on Kristeva (1982). Similarly, Michelle Kooy and Karen Bakker (2008) explore how the constitution of modern citizenship is entangled with the provision of water infrastructure in Jakarta through its role in disciplining corporeal subjects.

23. Chakrabarty (1991, 18). D. Asher Ghertner (2010a) argues that such techniques undergird the function of what he terms *aesthetic governmentality* in the service of elite “world-city” aspirations in Delhi. As Ghertner and other scholars of India have observed, bourgeois environmental discourses are frequently invoked in elite projects for urban development, often through mobilizing discourses of order, nuisance, or contamination (Doshi 2013; Ghertner 2010b; McFarlane 2008). It is in this sense that Vinay Gidwani and Rajyashree N. Reddy (2011, 1425) describe contemporary metropolitan governance in India through zones of exclusion, enclosure, and neglect as an “eviscerating urbanism” which operates as a regime of disengagement “for managing bodies and spaces designated as ‘wasteful.’”

24. Mbembe (2001). For his part, Esty (1999) argues that the excremental is a governing trope in African and other postcolonial literature, but draws on African satires to emphasize the way that satirists’ scatological language fosters an incisive critique of the failures of colonial development and the corruptions of neocolonial politics. See also Lincoln (2008) on excremental allegory in postcolonial African literature.

25. I’m drawing here on Chakrabarty (1991, 19–20).

26. This builds on a focus within critical development studies and urban geography as to how “life’s work” is restructured through the instrumentalization of participation in the interest of cheaper urban-development strategies, which roll back the provision of public goods (e.g., Katz 2001; Roberts 2008).

27. For other research looking at the particular burdens of waste work, see Crang (2010), Gidwani (2013), Gidwani and Reddy (2011), Gregson and Crang (2010), Miraftab (2004b), Parizeau (2015), M. Samson (2007, 2009, 2015), Nagle (2013), Reno (2016), and Whitson (2011). For broader explorations of disposability and labor, see Bauman (2003), Butler and Athanasiou (2013), Gilmore (2007), Hecht (2012), Meehan and Strauss (2015), Voyles (2015), Wright (2006), and M. Yates (2011).

28. The discard process is only the beginning of the second life of garbage. A village of people lives at the city’s dump, Mbeubeuss, carving lives and value out of the remains left by their better-off neighbors. Although this research did not consider the politics of picking, my new research examines the social life of the dump.

29. Kaplan’s article, “The Coming Anarchy,” became one of the best-selling issues in *The Atlantic Monthly*’s history, was cited far and wide, and is considered an influential intervention on the current state of world affairs. In his dramatic account of his ride to the airport in Conakry, he described the city as “a nightmarish Dickensian spectacle . . . The streets were one long puddle of floating garbage” (1994, 54).

30. See also Diouf and Fredericks (2013, 2014), Myers (2011), and Roy and Ong (2011) for extended discussion and ethnographic research that resist these two tendencies.