

## 3. Methodological Reflections

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### 3.1 Introduction

Ethnography is a theory of description.

(Nader 2011, 212)

My involvement with the *çıkmacıs* in Istanbul started with my cross-disciplinary 2012 MA exhibition (see Ch.1.5), which had the goal of gaining new information through practice-based research. As I dwelled deeper into the subject, I became interested in the livelihood of demolition workers and scrap collectors. My further academic pursuit shifted from artistic research to a Ph.D. in urban studies because I also desired to discuss the subject using urban theory. Because urbanization is one of the key factors in how *çıkmacıs* emerged in the city as a profession associated with the development and maintenance of the city, I was interested in ethnography as a methodological tool to capture the social and urban aspects of them.

I consider ethnography an interdisciplinary research method that different disciplines can utilize in their field practices. Assemblage thinking emphasizes a thick description of informal trajectories and diverse worlds (McFarlane 2011a). Further, thick description itself entails a microfocus on the subject of the fieldwork while, at the same time, the researchers analyze and reflect on their own social, cultural, political point of view as well as their personal interpretation on specific context (Geertz 1973, 3).

For example, the research on ship-breaking (Gregson et al. 2010) uses ethnography to analyze the second-hand furniture market. Follow-the-thing methodology is utilized to describe the ways which end-of-life things are utilized to create secondary industry in subaltern places. Ships and furniture are nonhuman elements that validate the agency of things with multi-faceted analysis of ethnographic fieldwork. Simone's conceptualization of relational

infrastructures is also a result of micro focus on everyday tactics based on relations between people in the Global South. Additionally, the fieldwork on market spaces conceptualizes repair and maintenance practices constituted by everyday alliances and common aims (Simone 2015). Using concepts that identify "human and nonhuman relationships and affects, assemblage ethnographies uncover new subjectivities that blur 'the boundaries between researcher and researched' and enables both to become active participants in emerging assemblage agencies" (Ghoddousi and Page 2020, 3). During the research, it was necessary to identify the two important actants; humans (*çikmacıs*) and nonhumans (earthquakes, second-hand construction elements, second-hand markets, supply yards, and urban transformation policies). According to empirical analysis, the assemblage of *çikmacıs* brings together three different empirical themes:

- The role of informal labor in material reclamation
- Second-hand trade infrastructure: social networks (relational via migration) and supply yards (spatial)
- Materiality of second-hand construction elements in building construction and environment degradation.

Accomplishing the fieldwork requires long-term engagement; a concern for informal knowledge and everyday practices; and the discipline to listen to all aspects of the field (ibid). That being said, I should make it clear that my time in the area was not during an intense period or at a specific location, which is how most conventional ethnographic research is conducted. My fieldwork spanned 4 years between 2015 and 2019 and included several condensed research periods scattered between these years. Prior to that, the preliminary research for my master thesis took place between 2012 and 2014. As a result, I could see the changing second-hand market dynamics through Turkey's unsteady economy.

By following the *çikmacıs*' trajectory, I was exposed to demolitions and second-hand trade. The mobility of human and nonhuman actors suggested a multi-sited ethnography. In the summer of 2018, I took a month-long research trip to Ankara, Kayseri, Nevşehir, and Niğde, all of which are places where second-hand components are traded. Later I traveled to Tbilisi, Georgia, to find importers of second-hand parts. I transcribed 35 interviews and wrote field notes, including sketches, participant observations, and go-along interview notes each day during my time in the field. Before data analysis, I translated them from Turkish to English. I selected informants—presented

under pseudonyms—according to their active participation in the fieldwork, the size of their facilities, the type of activities and their development history.

In addition to profession-based ethnography at multiple sites, I employed the 'follow the thing' methodology (Marcus 1995) to trace the commodity chain of second-hand building components within a regional geography.

### 3.2 'Follow the Thing' Approach

In 1986, anthropologist Arjun Appadurai coined the phrase 'follow the thing', which was expanded upon in 1995 by another anthropologist, George Marcus. Both urged researchers to conduct multi-site studies based on following things, including their processes of production, trade, use, and disposal. Arjun Appadurai suggests that things should be analyzed by following their configurations, purposes, and movements because he believed that things have their own social lives (Appadurai 1986). Additionally, he claimed that the actual and historical circulation of things cannot be brought to light by an approach limited by the assumption that things have no significance other than through those qualities endowed to them by human transactions, attributions, and motives (ibid, 3). He suggested that "even though from a theoretical point of view human actors encode things with significance, from a methodological point of view it is the things-in-motion that illuminate their human and social context" (ibid, 5). Based on these ideas, I interpret this thing-oriented emphasis as a way to understand the dynamics in the second-hand commodity chain.

George Marcus' (1995) invites geographers to participate in multi-sited fieldwork because of globalization. His call is fundamentally oriented towards exploring the movement of culture, artifacts, and identities in dispersed time-space. Further, he makes clear that "although multi-sited ethnography is an exercise in mapping terrain; its goal is not holistic representation, an ethnographic portrayal of the world system as a totality" (ibid, 99). Marcus' ambitions instead lie in cross-cutting between the local and global to find parts that are both in and out of the system; these parts are represented as subaltern, a term which refers to colonized subjects that are socially, politically, and geographically excluded. For him, fieldwork strategies "following connections, associations, and putative relationships are thus at the very heart of designing multi-sited ethnographic research" (ibid, 97). Moreover, the approach aimed to de-fetishize commodities (Harvey 1990, 418) by linking

customers to previously unseen, unheard, unknown, and underappreciated producers from countries all over the world.

David Harvey highlights the importance of revealing globalized commodity changes in order to investigate the exploitation of labor and resources in the Global South (ibid). Following Harvey, Ian Cook and others to conduct a series of follow the thing studies entitled 'Geographies of food: following' (Cook et al. 2006). Specifically, the study on the papaya supply chain "outlines the findings of multi-locale ethnographic research of food globalization, focusing on a supply chain stretching from UK supermarket shelves to a Jamaican farm, and concluding in a North London flat" (Cook 2004, 642). This study's unique multi-locale ethnography identifies all the human and nonhuman actors and portrays their invisible relationships. The research reveals how exploitation at the production sites provokes moral and ethical positions.

Initially, the 'follow the thing' approach was only used to study a restricted set of commodities in a supply chain, primarily within the food and fashion industries (Mintz 1986; Dwyer and Jackson 2003; Barnett et al. 2005). Beginning around 2015, the range of research subjects was expanded to include low-end items and waste; inexpensive China-produced commodities (Hulme 2015; 2017); ship breaking (Gregson et al. 2010); and toxic waste (Balayannis 2020). These approaches, which I will discuss in the following sections, are former studies that inspired my research methodology.

## Journeys of Low-End Commodities

In her book, *On the Commodity Trail: The Journey of a Bargain Store Product from East to West*, Alison Hulme traces the trajectory of low-end commodities (e.g., a plastic Buddha statue) from their manufacture origins as raw material in a Chinese landfill through regional factories, international trade centers, distribution networks, online marketplaces, western bargain stores, and finally, to the consumer's front door (Hulme 2015). In her ethnography that traces the back-end of the value chain, she identifies the key sites (landfill, factory, container ship, port, and bargain store) and its key players (waste peddler in Shanghai, wholesale buyer in Yiwu, container ship captain, dock worker, store owner, and customer). Her research attempts to encompass a global commodity chain. However, at the end of her study, she notes some untraceable elements of the equation:

[S]low parts of the chain, the older, clunkier mechanisms backing up the mouse-clicking efficiencies of speedy capitalism at the front of the house, the grinding rust of the container ports, with their spilled contents, break-ages, illicit cargos (sometimes of people), industrial accidents, and an incessant nature that still breaks workers despite things having changed from previous eras. (Hulme 2017, 159)

Within these ruptures, she refers to things and lives that are lost, altered, dropped, or evaluated as useless, their existence appearing and vanishing in the blink of an eye: "Rupture is so frequently now the norm, a 'flow' of micro-catastrophes at each part of the chain, that serves to make it stronger but polarize the lives of those along its trajectory" (ibid,159).

The most relevant part of Hulme's research for my fieldwork is the first part where she describes the 'dump towns' where the journey of plastic products generally begins and often ends in China. Much of this waste, which comes from both local and western countries, is recycled into tiny pellets, which are melted down and molded into new products in regional factories. She explores the livelihoods of waste peddlers and how they are exploited by various capitalist forces. According to her, following the object across multiple sites brings the researcher into gaps and ruptures in the slow parts of the chain, and a micro-focus on these instances can clearly reintroduce the role and condition of the subaltern within a globalized economic system (Hulme 2015).

### Dismantling practices

The second example is the investigation of the shipbreaking industry on Sitakunda beach near Chittagong (Discussed in Ch. 2.2.1) (Gregson, et al. 2010). The ships, which were built in the Global North, are sent to eastern locations like Turkey and the Global South. It is necessary for my 'follow the thing' research to take into account discarded commodities shipped to newly industrialized countries for disassembly or recycling.

This fieldwork focuses on end-of-life ships broken down for their scrap value in Bangladesh. It looks at how local furniture businesses known as 'chock-chocky' reclaim materials from these disassembled ships and rework them into new furniture to sell to middle-class Bangladeshi customers. Their study points out many fieldwork difficulties, such as the difficulty contacting customers who suspect that the study supports the efforts of NGOs to stop shipbreaking. In order to access the households that purchased chock-chocky

furniture, they mainly interviewed women. Their study is not entirely positive when it comes to shipbreaking resources. They worry that reuse, recycling, and remanufacturing could have negative effects on where end-of-life things are being discarded or put out of sight. Those effects, unfortunately, result in environmental degradation, climate change, neglect of labor health and safety, unequal distribution of income, and exploitation of migrant and refugee labor.

Gregson and others remark (*ibid*) that these locations where the process of dismantling and recycling are articulated are places where waste is weakly controlled or unregulated. These places host the movement of unwanted commodities near the end of their useful lives. On the verge of economic expansion and development, the presence of secondary markets like furniture production via shipbreaking is beneficial for establishing local livelihoods. However, it is essential to acknowledge that such integrated circular systems come with invisible costs. Because the release of materials like asbestos or toxic fumes can be hazardous for the dismantlers and the environment itself (Gregson, Watkins, and Calestani 2010).

### Toxic Waste Disposal

In an ethnographic study by Angeliki Balayannis a chemical stockpile in Tanzania was ‘followed’ throughout the process of its removal from its storage location in Tanzania (Balayannis 2020). The materialities of hazardous waste, in this case the pesticide DDT, are highlighted in her landmark research through her examination of common disposal methods and their infrastructure. Hazardous material movements are unjust but legal, and they have complex narratives in their Global North-to-South context. The Global South countries agree to receive industrial or solid waste from the Global North that will be stored or recycled there. For example, England and the European Union still sell separated plastic to Turkey but it is not sustainably recycled there (Greenpeace 2022). In short, in terms of waste disposal, Western capitalism exploits these underregulated countries.

The stockpile of DDT waste was shipped from Greece to an enclosed site in Tanzania in 1987. Later, it was sent back to Poland to be incinerated. Across time and space, Balayannis (2020) broadens the spectrum of relevant parties in waste economies and pays attention to hidden discarding practices. She addresses the removal process by interacting with participants in the Africa Stockpiles Programme (ASP), including government agencies, universities, intergovernmental organizations, non-governmental organizations, chemical

producers, and disposal businesses (ibid, 773). What is more, she discusses participants' testimonials and bureaucratic documents on pesticides via interviews, participant observation, photography, and archive study (ibid, 774).

Her way of using assemblage thinking aims to achieve two methodological goals. First, she examines how waste material is transformed through its disposal process. For her, the effectiveness of the disposal activity is always dependent on material aspects, and she argues that maintaining coherence between remotely designated guidelines from the North and local operations is not as simple as it is recorded in the official documents (ibid). This occurs because the local officials in the hosting country do not have strict controls or the regulations are too loose to identify the level of hazard.

Secondly, using reports as evidence of removal, she focuses on bureaucratic representation and its relationship with the materiality of the waste management company (ibid). By doing this, she identifies removal reports as nonhuman actors representing corporate knowledge production and the lack of important contamination and safety details (ibid). Her conclusion puts the ethical superficiality of global institutions and their politics of toxic waste disposal in the Global South into question. The North knowingly sends their nonrecyclable waste to places where the regulations are lax. Plus, they never take any responsibility for the environmental degradation they cause in the South. As Balayannis so aptly observes: while it is physically impossible to dispose of the waste stockpile or eliminate its hazardous damage, it is *possible* to remove it from appearing on any official documents (ibid, 790).

The three examples discussed above focus on fractures, unattended materialities, and transformation of waste disposal practices that end up or start in newly industrialized subaltern geographies. Through their methods, they identify invisible actors; precarious labor; the agency of waste within a global commodity chain; and its negative degrading effects on the environment. I have found multiple commonalities between these precedents of these studies and my own follow the thing methodology.

### 3.3 Methods for Collecting Empirical Data

To gather empirical materials, I approached my field subject from a cross-disciplinary perspective. This systematic framework combines ethnographic, architectural, and artistic methods. In this subchapter, I describe how I com-

bined participant observation, architectural surveying, interviews and photography.

### 3.3.1 Participant Observation and Architectural Surveying

Participant observation is a practice in which the researcher immerses themselves in a specific social setting while, at the same time, learning how to occasionally distance themselves from that setting enough to be able to objectively observe, think critically, and write about what has been experienced (Bernard 2006). Throughout this process, my sketchbook became an apparatus for collecting spoken and visual fieldwork data found at the demolition site. Because of the mobility of the informants at their work sites, it was very challenging to take notes and follow them. I used an A6 size handbook, and my smartphone helped me deal with this challenge. Sometimes I had to take notes on my smartphone. It was a practical device for blending into everyday situations. I also used the device, with their permission, to take photographs and short videos documenting their activities.

The field notes and visual memos are the central and defining tools that I improved during my long-term fieldwork. At the end of each day, I had to transcribe the notes into clean copies while the visual documentation served as a guideline for remembering and translating the empirical material. The notes are accompanied by sketches of the apartment buildings, photographs of the environments, and videos of labor activity. The field notes and my sketchbook accompanied photographic and architectural surveys. Plus, I wrote category codes on the notes such as economy (value, second-hand trade), migration (rural, urban, refugee), waste management (reuse, recycle), urbanization (environment, urban transformation projects, demolition, *gecekondü*), politics and, labor (safety, livelihood).

My field notes and sketches were visual memorandums consisting of plan layouts of apartments in demolished blocks and supply yards. They documented some modern plan layouts from Turkey's apartmentalization period. If they weren't registered in archives, all the planning details were erased by demolitions. Based on those memos, I calculated an average number of building components that could be reclaimed, mainly interior and exterior façade openings. While visiting supply yards, I drew quick floor plan sketches to be used as visual memos. Later in the data analysis, utilizing satellite imagery by Google Earth, I created 3d diagrams of the scrap yards that showed the uses of

the spaces. These drawings enabled me to develop a better understanding of the yard's differences in terms of size and design.

In these early stages of the research, my participation in the reclamation process was limited to being a passive observer. I carried out my own practice as a researcher and architect. From morning till night, I was actively surveying spaces, making notes, and taking photos and videos. Participant observation "provides context for sampling, open-ended interviewing, construction of interview guides and questionnaires, and other more structured and more quantitative methods of data collection" (DeWalt and DeWalt 2011, 3).

During lunch, cigarette breaks, and other pauses, the workers and I shared food and were able to have deeper conversations revolving around labor migration, place of origin, kinship networks, *gecekondu*s, the recycling sector, and urban renewal projects. The day-to-day category codes enabled me to create a framework out of the field notes, participant observation, and casual conversations.

### 3.3.2 Interviews

The semi-structured interviews took place in the *çikmacis'* depots and supply yards in the Altınşehir area located on the Asian side of Istanbul. The guidelines for interview questions were formed by literature on waste collectors and trending academic debates around neoliberal urbanization. I chose my informants based on their background in scrap collection, demolition and second-hand trade activities. I could walk right in and ask about prices of components like a customer, then introduce myself as an academic researcher. In the beginning, it was hard to reach people because they suspected that I was some sort of government official inspecting their businesses. I had to explain my purpose in asking questions. Being an architect and a Ph.D. student softened my presence for them. I talked with most of the owners in Altınşehir. Some of them were more interested and attentive than others. As I was driving through a peripheral neighborhood on the European side, I came across the same type of depot and supply yard agglomerations. Here too, I went into the depots and met people managing their businesses.

In a later phase, I started to visit demolition sites. Most of the time, though, I ran up against a barrier there because the sites are dangerous and entrance to them was frequently forbidden. Besides that, they did not want to waste their time on me. It took me a while to find people who could trust me enough to have casual conversations. After occasional visits, they got used to my presence.

During the demolition of a building behind where I lived, I met a scrap collector named Engin. I regularly visited the site to make observations and have conversations with him while he was working. Then, he introduced me to his labor team, which consisted of his family members or people from his same village. Through Engin's contacts, I met several other scrap collectors. Since I was interested in where the second-hand components were used, I also interviewed some customers of theirs. After a certain number of interviews, the information I gathered was getting fairly uniform so I decided to stop the interviews.

[E]ven if a researcher does not take a grounded theory approach, qualitative research in general, and participant observation in particular, encourages the continual reassessment of initial research questions and hypotheses, and facilitates the development of new hypotheses and questions as new insights occur as a result of increasing familiarity with the context. (Ibid, 15)

In the beginning, I used my first stage questions for sit-down interviews in Altınşehir. These questions focused on how they obtain second-hand materials and who they sell them to; what the dynamics in the second-hand market are; and what the legal status of their business is. Nevertheless, I realized these questions, based on preliminary observations, were insufficient for guiding the research. The important empirical data remained out of reach because my inquiries were basically constructed from my preliminary observations. For instance, migration, seasonal labor, refugee workers, and the link between informal housing were substantially missing from my collected data. After a few interviews, I realized that the structured ones did not capture the informants' perspectives. Furthermore, the questions were based on the political economy of urban renewal projects that overshadow the alternative potential of small entrepreneurs. They were also based on dichotomies between formal and informal thresholds within the construction market.

This approach did not reveal the informants' actual views. The conversations were stunted because of the leading questions that resulted in too many similar answers. For example, they said they were doing an unimportant job in the construction market, and their participation in the construction sector was often invisible. Throughout the research, I had to often revise my framework as I followed the changing fieldwork. Instead of structured interviews, I gave more attention to participant observation, casual conversations, and go-along interviews. Such exchanges had an open-ended quality that allowed the in-

interviewees time and space to reflect on, and more easily voice, their ideas and opinions.

Most of the sit-down interviews and everyday conversations were unrecorded because my informants were not comfortable with the presence of a recording machine. This was because they wanted to remain anonymous; they worried that their recorded testimonies might be used against them in the future. However, they did give consent to my taking video and photographs.

Every day, I took a detailed record of everyday conversations and interviews, adding them to my daily jottings. After a day at the demolition site, I wrote up the notes in a research diary. Since the conversations were not recorded, the transcription started at an early phase. During this phase, I took general notes while, at the same time, doing category coding. After improvements in my interview experience in the field, I was proficient in guiding the conversations toward research questions (see Ch. 1.3).

These casual conversations at their work sites were crucial for accessing the testimonies of my informants. These conversations not only revealed their political views, which were nationalist and conservative, but also exposed their livelihood, which was sometimes in the form of seasonal work. Also, in some cases, I got to learn how they constructed their houses with second-hand materials when they first arrived. Such natural-occurring oral narratives offered me immediate information about their context, viewpoints, concerns, and discursive practices (Hammersley and Atkinson 2019). In addition to context-setting casual conversations, I conducted semi-structured interviews with every participant focusing on specific themes such as migration, labor, recycling, second-hand, trade, and urbanization.

The semi-structured interview questions helped me triangulate the empirical data and this, in turn, provided a space for me to expand on some important topics unfolding in the most recent daily discussions. According to Galleta (2013, 45), semi-structured interviews include open-ended questions and other inquiries oriented toward collecting data that is embedded in the informants' experience. Although the informants were not aware of such a framework, it is vital to point out that their testimonies are the empirical knowledge that this study is grounded on.

The tacit knowledge and experience of the informants were further collected by go-along interviews when sit-down interviews and participant observation were not available. Sit-down interviews often remove informants from their usual context and prevent them from taking part in 'natural activities' (Kusenbach 2003, 445). As a countermeasure, go-along interviews allowed

me "to observe their informants' spatial practices in-situ while accessing their experiences and interpretations at the same time" (ibid, 46). Since I was with *çıkmacıs* working in the demolitions or their depots, the go-along method helped me access unrevealed experiences and perspectives. Such go-alongs took place while they were dismantling stuff, transporting reclaimed materials, or cutting out some part of a building. The materiality of their environment was more graspable for me when they were directly engaging with it physically.

This engagement allowed me to speak about the economic and supply changes in the second-hand market and the frequency of demolitions during the four years of fieldwork. According to Hammersley and Atkinson, repeat interviews are significantly beneficial for tracking transformations over time (Hammersley and Atkinson 2019, 97). Such repeat interviews allowed me to connect the adaptive tactics and experiences of the *çıkmacıs* to the changing economic conditions of Turkey.

In sum, I used different types of interviews: semi-structured, go-alongs, and casual conversations. Among them all, go-alongs, which I actually saw as 'work-alongs', were the most useful for gaining practice-based insights. My camera was also there capturing those significant moments.

### 3.3.3 Photography

Producing still images (photography) is one of the primary tools that I employed to construct an interdisciplinary approach that combined art and ethnographic writing practices. The use of photographs by ethnographers and urban researchers is employed for documentation and survey purposes. It can show how the informants and their environments relate to each other better than written text can. Photographs reflect the perspective of the researcher. They reveal equivocal details and fragments. Besides that, they are evidence that proves the researcher's presence in the field. Pink (2013, 49) defines this function of photography as a visual study diary and note-taking, which reveals how one can respond to the field during the research process; additionally, it hones our vision by framing the specific situation in the viewfinder. For her, the camera may unexpectedly take ethnographers into a deeper relationship with informants and can help one's fieldwork techniques evolve. On any given occasion, these processes are intertwined with the connections formed with the informants as the study unfolds. One of the method questions is how to utilize the images and text together. To achieve this, I will refer to the Marcus'

montage concept (1990) and Pink's (2013) 'image captions' in ethnographic writings.

Montage is a film editing technique that combines different film clips together. It is not only limited to filmmaking but also used to make photomontages (composite photographic images). It is basically an editing process that generates new forms of narration in cinema, photography, and literature. When a writer introduces flashbacks, they use a montage effect that sets up an interplay between past and present. George Marcus (1990, 2) proposed that an ethnographic text should be produced using a montage principle in order to better reflect the non-linear narration of ethnographic research and daily life. He means by this that ethnographic texts should contain the views of individuals and academic discourses non-hierarchically. Acknowledging that, I would like to suggest that the photographs represent a simultaneous reality along with the descriptive text, like captions, as if they are being used in a montage of descriptive text, photos, and their captions.

Generally, photographs or images are accompanied by text describing what the image contains, that is, describing *what has been photographed*. Sarah Pink (2013) uses them as binding and capturing elements for extracting meanings and nurturing arguments. She regards the photographs of her participants as realistic depictions. At the same time, their lengthy captions reflect details of the environment that cannot be seen and sometimes they also contain the informant's opinions (ibid, 71). For her, the caption's goal is to get readers to think about their perceptions of the image and recognize how the snapshot and cultural symbols it contains might be understood. In the example below (Figure 3.1), I used an image to introduce a caption text that creates a description and analysis of the environments and people who inhabit them. This caption acts as a vignette linking the scenes and the background story.

In the beginning, it was unclear to my informants what the intention of my work was. My role as a researcher was also uncertain until I published the field photographs in an online magazine. This photo essay was titled 'Kapı yok pencere çok' (Not enough doors but windows) and it depicted several sites and actors in the field (Ceritoglu 2018). Instantly, I shared the essay with my informants, and they read it. The means of photojournalism and visual storytelling helped me make a statement of my critical perspective and my visualization of reality. Fortunately, it helped me to get closer to my respondents. Such usage of photography is discussed by Pink, who extensively used photography in her studies;

Showing photographs to their subjects can provide feedback on the images and their content while also forging connections with members of the 'community'. This can provide excuses or reasons for further meetings, which might include visiting people in their homes and building up connections with them. In this way, ethnographers may also use such photographic practices as ways of communicating about themselves and what they are interested in. (Pink 2013, 78)

The previous distance between my informants and myself turned into a trustful relationship when they saw something concrete in the photo essay and it became clearer what I was pursuing. This online publication highlighted the limited visibility of my informants in the construction sector. It was a helpful tool for meeting new actors in the second-hand market because I could show them this essay beforehand.

The production and usage of images were also executed by *çikmacıs*. They were posting photos and videos of the components in online marketplaces where they exhibited their supplies. Some were advertising their demolition work with videos on online image-sharing platforms. These images possessing archival and documentary value helped to identify the variety of components, the places of accumulation, the logistics, the means of transportation, and the involvement of the workers.

As a visual art practitioner, photography is one of the more powerful mediums that I employ. From the earlier stages of my encounter with *çikmacıs*, I used the camera to capture labor activities and places where second-hand components were accumulated. During breaks, I showed my informants those photographs. I also surveyed and archived their 'advertisement' photos and videos of salvaged items. These mediums enabled a relational exchange and produced a visual archive of reclaimed materials and the precarious work environment.

Participant observation, field notes and jottings, survey drawings, different types of interviews, and visual documentation are architectural and ethnographic methods that I employ throughout the fieldwork. Such a multi-disciplinary perspective creates distinctive monitoring of demolition and building reclamation in an unregulated context.

Figure 3.1: Jabir, a refugee worker from Afghanistan<sup>1</sup>



Source: Author's own

- 1 He is wearing a hat that he found in an emptied apartment. His jacket is worn out on the shoulders. The work shoes and hand gloves are the only appropriate safety clothes he wears on the demolition site. He is standing in front of the security barrier made of galvanized metal sheets. They reused an elevator door of a salvaged apartment block as their main entrance.

### 3.3.4 The Research Process

According to ethnographer Giampietro Gobo (2008), the ethnographer's presence is initially intrusive because it can cause shame, discomfort, tension, and anxiety among the community of participants. Reflexivity is a self-controlling mechanism that entails a critical self-interrogation of the researcher's position informed by their background subjectivity, identity, and social background (Stuart 2018, 211). It is a kind of critical awareness of how the researcher's presence transforms the order of things in a typical fieldwork environment. To attain this goal, I asked myself questions such as: What is my role in the demolition sites? How am I perceived by the *çikmacıs*? Who does and doesn't give support to my presence? Why and why not? What might be the specific things limiting my access? Who or what is setting my rules of engagement?

My first goal was to build and establish trusting relationships with my informants. To accomplish this, I showed up every day at the dangerous and partly knocked-down demolition site where I took the same risks as my informants, that is, I also did not wear the proper work safety clothes. Even with the class difference, I was able to establish a non-hierarchical relationship with them because I was interested in what they were doing. Such a relationship was unusual for them in the construction sector because architects generally represent higher positions in the labor order. In general, the empathetic and ethical concern about the informants' precarious life conditions enables the researcher to establish trust, which leads to open access and more refined empirical findings.

My profession as an architect sometimes became useful when they asked me about building technology. Such exchanges improved my status as a participant. Nevertheless, social distinctions (status, education, etc.) hampered communication with reluctant informants in several instances. For many years, I have lived in Istanbul, a city that is changing rapidly from the influence of neoliberal dynamics. As an informed neighbor, I was observing the developments on my street. The neighborhood where I lived was a middle-class part of the Kadıköy district that was rapidly being gentrified. When urban transformation intensified after 2012, I witnessed the way buildings were demolished one after the other.

When I focused on a specific family, the youngest member, Engin, became my contact person. He was open-minded and supported me in conducting my architectural surveys and interviews. I assume this was because we were about the same age. He was aware of the lack of research and state support in his

field. In terms of visibility, he wanted to reveal the economic difficulties and labor conditions. I share his viewpoint. As an artist, architect and academic, I am very critical of the demolition projects of the AK Party. Further, I became more politically engaged after taking part in the Gezi Park civil occupation and demonstrations<sup>2</sup> in 2013. This movement was against the top-down privatization and neoliberal urbanization. These processes were happening literally right at my doorstep.

When the building behind our shared apartment was announced to be 'under urban transformation', I could observe and document all the stages<sup>3</sup> of demolition and construction of the "Uzay Apartmanı"<sup>4</sup> from my bedroom window. Every day I took pictures and made videos of its disappearance. One day, during the dismantling and reclamation of the building, I went there to ask if I could salvage an IKEA bed frame that I could see from my bedroom window. That was where I met Engin, who was working alone in the building. I could see how he was discarding window frames. After explaining that I was a neighbor, he got friendlier and showed me around the abandoned building. Engin became my main informant and invited me to other sites where he was working with family members.

For the first Tbilisi Architecture Biennial, I was invited to make a pre-event presentation in May 2018. During my visit, by coincidence, I saw a local second-hand supply yard advertised on Facebook. Then, I managed to contact a wholesaler who exported second-hand components from Turkey. Then, I did my first semi-structured interview with a local trader. Subsequent to the interview, I documented several old Soviet apartments in the micro-district of Gldani, whose façades were upgraded by components from the depot. On my second

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2 On 28 May 2013, a surge of civil disobedience and organized demonstrations erupted in Turkey, firstly in response to the urban development project for Taksim Gezi Park in Istanbul. The park, which is the only green space in the city center, was slated to be turned into a shopping mall and city museum by reviving an old Ottoman military barracks. Thereafter, supportive demonstrations and strikes occurred around Turkey, opposing a broad range of issues, notably among them: urban inequality, freedom of speech, human rights and islamist conservative politics that were causing secularism to deteriorate.

3 The four stages are: the vacating of the premises, putting up barriers with glazing corrugated plate, the dismantling and reclamation of the reusable and recyclable building components, the demolition, the excavation for foundations, and the construction of the new building.

4 All the apartment building names are in Turkish. In this case, Uzay means 'Space'.

visit to Georgia for the main event of the Biennial in October 2018, I recontacted the seller and received free PVC frames for an art installation. In the course of the production, I went to several second-hand supply yards and held detailed semi-structured and go-along interviews with several workers from the yard. In the following year, I revisited them to have an update on how their business was progressing. My occasional visits created a mutual understanding and feeling of trust with the owners. Furthermore, I could observe the changes in the material flow from Turkey to Georgia based on the fluctuations in the sector.

In the second stage of the fieldwork, my aim was to follow the trade and re-use activities of second-hand components (PVC frames, doors, etc.). Based on the empirical data in Istanbul, I visited demolition yards and *çıkmacı* supply yards in the Anatolian cities of Ankara, Kayseri, Nevşehir, Aksaray in Turkey, and Tbilisi in Georgia. During my visit to the Anatolian cities in May and June of 2018, I conducted semi-structured interviews and held participant observations while I was visiting depots several times during my stay. Further, I documented vineyard sheds, country cottages, apartment buildings, and village houses. Each town I visited was undergoing a nationwide urban renewal projects. I investigated the associations between second-hand retailers and customers in order to figure out material configurations. These clues help me to interconnect demolition practices, self-help construction methods, and the trade of affordable materials. I also discovered that the journey of second-hand components did not end in Anatolia but continued on to neighboring Georgia.

### 3.4 Analyzing Empirical Data

In the analysis phase of ethnographic research, the researchers collaboratively gather codes, analyze data, and choose what data to collect next in order to create a theory as it arises. This process is known as theoretical sampling. The analytical process of acquiring observations and looking for the best assumption (hypothesis) to explain those findings is known as the abductive reasoning approach.

The analysis of empirical data can be described as the process through which data is transcribed, organized, and interpreted to develop theories. Brewer sees it as a process in which one first aggregates what is found into patterns, categories, and descriptive units; then, one can conduct a search for any relationships between them (Brewer 2000). He continues by defining 'in-

terpretation' as the craft of giving meaning and importance to the analysis; he then defines 'presentation' as 'writing up' the gathered information (ibid, 104). During the process of gathering data and analyzing, I employed theoretical sampling and coding throughout.

### Abductive reasoning

Rather than following a predetermined set of research questions in the data collection process, abductive ethnography embraces serendipity and allows intuition to guide the fieldwork. Data analysis begins neither with inductive nor deductive reasoning. By temporarily disassociating the data from their context, specific theoretical debates, and the experience of data collection in the field, the ethnographer is able to play with the data freely and lead this process to a surprising discovery and insight. This discovery is then conceptually articulated through the dialog among the insight, contextualized empirical evidence, and theoretical knowledge. (Bajc 2012, 72)

Using abductive reasoning, I highlighted the emergence of a generated theory from the ethnographic findings. First, I gathered the empirical data and built preliminary insights and hypotheses about it; then, I assessed these theories as I continued doing the fieldwork, and finally, I further developed or abandoned these theories. Based on abductive logic, theoretical sampling is a critical method that entails a back-and-forth strategy between data collection and data analysis (Charmaz 2014; Stuart 2018). Abductive logic fundamentally begins with observation, examines all potential explanations to form theoretical arguments (or hypothesis) about that observation, and then tests those arguments with further observation. This kind of reasoning uses both inductive and deductive models at the same time:

It is sufficient to understand abduction in relationship to induction and deduction. Induction refers to the process of collecting new data and using it to strengthen or problematize well-established theories. The deduction, on the other hand, suggests a hypothesis about specific observations that are already based on existing theory. From a pragmatist perspective neither induction nor deduction is particularly creative, because neither leads to new theories. Theory generation requires us to move away from our pre-conceived notions and to create new narratives about the phenomenon we are trying to explain. (Tavory and Timmermans 2014, 2014)

To put it another way, the research is data and theory-driven at the same time. It is a circular logic to explain an observation as research evidence that does not correspond to existing theories. The researcher speculates how this evidence could be explained by forming new hypotheses or theories deductively. But while developing a new hypothesis, the researcher inductively makes new observations based on the same phenomenon. Induction verifies explanations via empirical testing, while abduction proposes explanations that are subsequently codified into deductions.

For example, one of the original research questions was: *Are ıkmacıs* a new phenomenon coming out of the current neoliberal urbanization. After several weeks of gathering field notes, I found out that they used to supply materials for *gecekondı* dwellers in the 1970s. On the basis of that finding, and after going through the theories and studies of *gecekondı* urbanization, I came up with the argument that they must have adapted to several different urbanization periods in Istanbul. When I reviewed the fieldwork, I looked for more empirical evidence of their past and present experiences in second-hand trade: I was curious how they interpreted their role now. As a result, I came up with the more robust hypothesis that their entrepreneurial model seemed to exist in the zone of a self-regulated trade and labor system. Then the research question changed: What is the role of demolitions in the history of Istanbul's urbanization in regard to the emergence of the *ıkmacıs* and material reclamation processes? During this back-and-forth process, coding becomes important to classify empirical data during this interplay between data and theory. Codifying and recording the empirical data (memoing) at an earlier phase enabled me to mature my reflective and interpretive attitude toward fieldwork.

## Coding and Analysis

Coding sorts the empirical data into categories to offer evidence for analysis and interpretation (LeCompte and Schensul 2013, 59). Categories are informed by the conceptual framework and research objectives. To achieve the coding process, day-to-day field notes, memos, and transcribed conversations are assembled in a MS Word document. Then, I review them thoroughly and add any missing information with the help of the video and photographic documentation. For example, I write a description of how they dismantle a window frame and then translate all the notes to English.

To illustrate, during a casual conversation with Rıfat, he stated that: "We used to sell second-hand components that we reclaimed from inner-city

demolitions to *gecekondu* dwellers in the 1970s". This segment describes the former relationship between self-help housing and the building reclamation activity of *çikmacıs* in the past. Therefore, it was categorized under "gecekondu, trade, and urbanization". After applying this procedure to all the data, reappearing codes started to appear: economy, migration, waste management, urbanization, politics, labor, and infrastructure. The general coding was carried out during the fieldwork. Later, I added more specific coding throughout the analysis process. From the same example, I labeled Rıfat's statement into sub-codes: "urban transformation, migration, unrecognized labor, *gecekondu* urbanization, urban demolitions, second-hand trade, dual lives, incremental construction, formalization, repair".

After completion, all data was transcribed and categorized thematically to illustrate common themes and contrasts in the empirical findings. These codes were based on the *çikmacıs*' views of their role in the construction sector and the categories that structured the thesis with assemblage analysis: materiality (recycle, reuse, environmental impacts); labor (migration, seasonal work); trade (networks), and urban renewal projects in general. The value and significance of the codes lie in their demonstration of the commonalities and differences of the *çikmacıs*. For instance, they all participate in cooperatives or informal labor organizations. Also, differences show how entrepreneurial approaches differ based on specific cases. The market dynamics are not fair to all. For example, Anatolian *çikmacıs* formed an association with each other as a whole, but the ones in Istanbul compete with each other for territory. In the end, the themes in the codes identified during my first analysis served as a foundation for the presentation in the empirical chapters.

During the fieldwork, I transcribed 35 interviews with *çikmacıs*, tenants, demolishers, scrap collectors, scrap dealers, and their customers. However, I chose 12 of them in the second round of analysis according to their location, experience, labor organization, professional, and immigration background in the second-hand market. Further, I made this reduction because they are the ones with whom I managed to go into depth with and each of them represent different types, especially in terms of having long-term experience or entrepreneurial success. These subjects were primarily connected to the perspectives of *çikmacıs* on reuse and recycling, environmental concerns, and labor precarity in the context of urban development in their localities, and more particularly on their influence on seasonal labor structure and second-hand trade. To emphasize the primary results of my study and the study's core argument, I concentrated on testimonies that reflected the many dimensions of urban re-

newal and their legal grounds for producing demolition waste, material reclamation, and second-hand trade in extensive qualitative detail.

They were more involved in scrap dealing from the street than building reclamation from demolitions. They could switch in-between due to second-hand supply shortage when the number of demolitions was decreasing. In this way, they engaged in various processes of valuing second-hand material, from trading with recycling factories to selling in the flea market. I could observe how they were flexible in adjusting to different markets and dynamics. Plus, they still had strong ties with their home village, where they were farming half of the year. I believe that evaluating such rural connections sheds light on the seasonal labor theme.

During my analysis, I categorized five different types of *çıkmacıs*: old-school and experienced, new and entrepreneurial, new and unsuccessful, resilient, and fading. For instance, the Rifat and Tezel brothers represent figures who have experienced demolitions since the earlier *gecekondu* period; Serhat and Ulaş are entrepreneurs who are new to the demolition and second-hand trade; Muslim's story illustrates an unsuccessful business; Demir comes from scrap dealing and becomes a promoter of second-hand trade; Engin and his brother are a prominent precedent for family business structure and rural-urban work; and Halis' and his supply yard depicts a continuation of work as an inherited asset. In Istanbul, four case studies (out of 8)—Rifat, Demir, Halis, and Tezels' supply yards—were chosen for spatial diagram representation based on their size and complexity. The remaining is portrayed using satellite images since spatial orientation is not as varied as in the previous four cases.

The overall data analysis process was an interplay between data collection and theory. From the beginning of the research, category-coding became an essential tool for mapping patterns and theoretical themes. Theoretical sampling helped me streamline the data collection process while making hypotheses and tracing existing theories. As I continued collecting the empirical data, I tested these hypotheses in terms of their viability in relation to the everyday experiences of the *çıkmacıs*.

### 3.5 Conclusion

The studies discussed in the first section of this chapter have proved useful for envisioning the flow of low-value commodities and waste in the Global South. They focus on production cycles and the materiality of these objects in

north-to-south exploitative circular economies. I highlight how such 'multi-sited' ethnography could be done with a 'follow the thing' method. Within the environment of an unevenly developed world, these concepts are able to focus on different localities within a networked trade system.

This study employs an investigation of livelihood practices related to waste reclamation in the secondary commodity chain existing beyond Istanbul's borders. By employing such methodology, I aim to investigate the importance of unregulated labor and nonhuman actors in the reclamation sector. The ethnography of the fieldwork derives from my conversations and observations of scrap collectors. It focuses on their double lives. The multi-sited approach is oriented around seasonal labor and the trade of second-hand components from Istanbul to Anatolia.

Unstructured discussions and spontaneous conversations were also part of the data collection process. The field notes, and day-to-day mnemonics, were accompanied by architectural survey drawings of supply yards and dwellings. I used them to create diagrams to orient the reader to the spatial organization of spaces.

To theorize my empirical findings, I pursued a path grounded in abductive reasoning. First, I started with research questions from the existing literature. After my first analysis of the field work, I realized that my questions were influencing my informant's answers, questions such as "Do you think that your activities are good for the environment?". Then, I shifted my approach. I reconfigured theoretical arguments and research questions in the light of the empirical findings. The reconfiguration process led me to generate new hypotheses about reclamation processes. Based on data triangulation (coding and theoretical sampling), I categorized the actors according to their experience in the sector, entrepreneurial approaches, and management models to be used for structuring Chapter 6. The study reveals a cross-section of these actors from different backgrounds and positions within the market. Throughout this process, I was guided by reflexive questions that problematized my subjectivity as a researcher.

As a support layer, photography became the primary visual tool to document sites and people. In the analysis phase, I combined ethnographic writing and analysis of photography with a montage logic and captions. To achieve this visual narrative in the book's linear structure, I used descriptive captions as a vignette to accompany the photographs.

Besides, it contributes to the unattended field of building reclamation and the flow and utilization of second-hand materials in rural dwellings. While

conceptualizing socio-materiality and nonhuman agency, it maps the distribution of materials from second-hand supply yards. Lastly, it describes the resilient character of unrecognized migrant labor bypassing neoliberal configurations by introducing forms of value production different from those of hegemonic capitalism.