



Rethinking Globalizations

PROCESSES OF ECONOMIC INFORMALIZATION

**RECONFIGURATIONS OF LAW,
LABOUR, AND THE STATE**

Ilona Steiler



Processes of Economic Informalization

Grounded on an analysis of informalized labour in the urban economy of Dar es Salaam, *Processes of Economic Informalization* explores the conceptual politics involved in the construction of the informal economy—diverse economic activities that are not regulated or protected by the state, now estimated to make up more than 60 per cent of all employment worldwide.

The author draws attention to the dynamic political, legal, and social processes shaping the formal-informal boundary. Fundamentally, the book argues that ‘informal economy’ presents a normative and essentially contested concept which is implicated into reconfigurations of legal institutions, labour organization and struggle, and practices of state governance. Based on interviews, ethnographic notes, and a review of policy documents and current academic literature, it illustrates how competing conceptions of the informal economy serve to normalize and justify but also contest specific forms of capitalist accumulation processes and social order. Highlighting the thorny role that conceptions of the informal economy play in its construction as well as in its governance, the book makes a timely intervention that challenges conventional positions in the debate on the appropriate regulation of informalized labour.

This book will be of interest to students and scholars of global political economy, international relations, labour studies, and development studies.

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Rethinking Globalizations

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Processes of Economic Informalization

Reconfigurations of Law, Labour, and
the State

Ilona Steiler



Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published 2025
by Routledge
4 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

and by Routledge
605 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10158

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

A catalog record has been requested for this book

ISBN: 978-1-032-27792-9 (hbk)

ISBN: 978-1-032-27797-4 (pbk)

ISBN: 978-1-003-29412-2 (ebk)

DOI: 10.4324/9781003294122

Typeset in Times New Roman
by Taylor & Francis Books

To Pekka and Tia Tua



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List of Acronyms

ATE	Association of Tanzanian Employers
BRELA	Business Registration and Licensing Agency
C189	Convention on Domestic Workers
CCM	Chama Cha Mapinduzi (Party of the Revolution)
CHODAWU	Conservation, Hotel, Domestic and Allied Workers Union
CLEP	Commission for Legal Empowerment of the Poor
CLS	Core Labour Standards
CPE	Cultural Political Economy
DART	Dar es Salaam Rapid Transit
DCC	Dar es Salaam City Council
DWA	Decent Work Agenda
DWCP	Decent Work Country Programme
FES	Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung
ID	Identification Card
IDWF	International Domestic Workers Federation
IFI	International Financial Institution
ILD	Institute for Liberty and Democracy
ILO	International Labour Organization
KAWASSO	Kariakoo Wamachinga Association
KIWOHEDE	Kiota Women Health and Development Organization
LEP	Legal Empowerment of the Poor
LGA	Local Government Authority
MFI	Microfinance Institution
MKUKUTA	Mkakati wa Kukuza Uchumi na Kupunguza Umaskini Tanzania (National Strategy for Growth and Reduction of Poverty Tanzania)
MKURABITA	Mpango wa Kurasimisha Rasilimali na Biashara za Wanyonge (Property and Business Formalization Programme)
NEEC	National Economic Empowerment Council
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
NORAD	Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation

NSSF	National Social Security Fund
OHS	Occupational Health and Safety
SACCO	Savings and Credit Cooperative Organization
SER	Standard Employment Relationship
SHIUMA	Shilika la umoja wa machinga Tanzania (Association of Hawkers of Tanzania)
TIENAI	Tanzania Informal Economy Networks on AIDS Initiative
TUCTA	Trade Union Congress of Tanzania
TUICO	Tanzania Union of Industrial and Commercial Workers
TRA	Tanzania Revenue Authority
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
URT	United Republic of Tanzania
UWAWADAR	Umoja wa Wajasiliamali Walemavu Mkoa wa Dar es Salaam (Association of Businesspeople with Disabilities of the Region of Dar es Salaam)
VIBINDO	Jumuia ya Vikundi vya Wenye Viwanda na Biashara Ndogondogo (Community of Groups of Small Producers and Small Business)
VICOBA	Village Community Bank
WIEGO	Women in the Informal Economy: Globalizing and Organizing

Glossary

Bodaboda	Motorcycle taxi
Daladala	Dar es Salaam minibuses
Fundi	Technician, specialist, skilled worker
Fundi wa viatu	Cobbler, shoe repairman
Kahawa	Coffee, commonly sold by street vendors
Kahawa na kachata	Coffee and candy made from roast groundnut and sugar, commonly sold by street vendors
Katiba	Constitution, charter
Kazi	Work
Kijiweni	Street corner; public space for meeting and lingering, also an informal job fair for day labourers and unemployed
Machinga/wamachinga	'Marching guy', hawker; more recently used as synonym for all street traders (sing./pl.)
Mama/Baba Lishe	Street chef (lit. Mother/Father Nutrition)
Mfanyabiashara ndogo ndogo	Petty businessman or woman, entrepreneur (lit.: person doing small-small business)
Mfanyakazi/wafanyakazi	Worker, labourer (sing./pl.)
Mfanyakazi/wafanyakazi wa majumbani	Domestic worker (sing./pl.)
Mgambo wa manisipaa	Municipal law enforcement troops on short-term contracts; in common parlance used for the municipal auxiliary police in general
Mshahara	Salary, wage
Mzungu/wazungu	European, white person (sing./pl.)

Ndogo ndogo

Ofisi

Pesa

Polepole

Sekta isiyo rasmi

Shamba

Uchumi usio rasmi

Small-small

Office

Money

Slowly

Informal sector (lit. unofficial sector), often used to describe the informal economy

Farm, plot of farmland

Informal economy (lit. unofficial economy), less commonly used than informal sector

Acknowledgements

While I was doing research in Dar es Salaam, some local acquaintances would chuckle about my European hurriedness. ‘Ah, madam, in a rush again! Why don’t you relax a bit?’ ‘Where so fast, *mzungu*, no time for *chai*?’ Ironically, then, it took a long time to write this book, and I am immensely grateful for both the patience and the persistence of numerous people without whom it might never have gotten on its way. I wish to thank the editors, Barry Gills and Kevin Gray, for including the book in their series, and especially Barry for his advice and support. At Routledge, I would like to thank Hannah Rich, Lydia de Cruz, and Lauren Powell for professionally and patiently accompanying the lengthy process from book proposal to finalized manuscript. Like so many other academic endeavours, the book has thrived on a good deal of communal creative, intellectual, and emotional labour far exceeding any work contract, but it also could not have been written without funding: the doctoral research on which it is based was financed by the University of Helsinki Doctoral Programme on Political, Societal and Regional Change as well as by a travel grant and research fellowship from the Nordic Africa Institute; the work on the manuscript was at least partly sustained by employment in the Sustainable Transformation of Urban Environments profiling area as well as in the Research Council of Finland-funded project ‘EnVi(r)oCare’ at Tampere University, which also covered the Open Access fees.

The greatest source of inspiration throughout this journey, which began with several shorter and longer periods of fieldwork between 2014 and 2016, were the domestic workers, street vendors, experts, officials, academics, and other urban dwellers from all walks of life who I was privileged to meet in Dar. By sharing their views—and on many occasions challenging mine—they invited me to rethink some taken-for-granted conceptions of work, and, on a larger scale, of how the world works. Owing to a lack of space and skill (the latter a trait I admire greatly in colleagues from the field of anthropology), I am not able in this book to trace all its arguments to their origin in as much detail as might be desirable. Yet many and indeed the key ideas emerged from spontaneous reactions or seemingly mundane conversations. It was above all the working-class Tanzanians—to whom Issa Shivji gives the name *wavuja-jasho*, those who bleed sweat—and who, in describing their struggles to earn a living, drew my attention to the hardships and contradictions

involved in straddling the formal-informal delineations and hence to what would become the topic of the book. To each of them I am indebted for their warm welcome and for answering my questions, holding discussions with me, teaching me Swahili *polepole na kidogo kidogo*, and providing me with a view of the rich colours of life in the bustling city of Dar—in both its lighter and darker shades. While telling their names and stories would be deserving of another book, I wish to thank here those who left their imprint on this one: Colman Msoka from the Institute of Development Studies at the University of Dar es Salaam for all his support and guidance over the years; Chediell Nyirenda for introducing me to street breakfast and for the fruitful research collaboration; Ras Gumbo for frequently shaking up my Western, middle-class viewpoints; *mwalimu wangu* Chiza Mussa for dedicating his lunch breaks to Swahili lessons; Farajani Mwambasi for debating (Tanzanian and other) politics for hours while also taking me to the best *kiti moto* bars across town; and Pan-African poet Anna Mbise for contributing the opening song to the book. My experience of Dar would not have been the same without my dear friend, translator, and city guide Joseph Kainerugaba, whose observations and wisdom taught me much. *Asanteni sana*.

I received much scholarly support over the years in turning early notes and initial ideas into structured arguments. At the University of Helsinki and the (proudly undisciplined) discipline of Global Development Studies (GDS), Juhani Koponen, whose profound knowledge of the history of development discourses in and beyond Tanzania pointed me towards seeing the bigger picture of what I had learnt in Dar, and Marjaana Jauhola, who encouraged me to explore the hidden, quiet, and apparently trivial matters of the everyday, provided excellent guidance. Valuable input also came from Anja Nygren, Barry Gills, Sakari Saaritsa, Franklin Obeng-Odoom, and Teivo Teivainen, as well as from many colleagues in GDS during shared writing and reading group sessions. I am thankful to numerous researchers from outside of Finland who have commented on earlier chapter versions. Among them are Silke Trommer, Jessica Schmidt, Christian Scheper, Florian Edelmann, David Chandler, Kai Koddenbrock, Christa Wichterich, Ulrik Jennische, Matteo Rizzo, Colman Msoka, David Bailey, and Ian Bruff.

Sections of some chapters have appeared in modified form in journal articles, and I wish to thank the journal editors and all the anonymous reviewers for their feedback which also helped to improve the clarity of the arguments presented in these pages. Elements of Chapters 2 and 3 were published as ‘The intersectionality of informal employment: Insights from street vending and domestic work in Tanzania’ (Special Issue, ‘Informal and Precarious Work: Insights from the Global South’ edited by Anita Hammer and Immanuel Ness, *Journal of Labor and Society* 24(1) 2021, 107–132); Chapter 4 takes up key arguments from a discussion published in ‘Labour institutions and the dynamic production of informality: collective organisation of hard-to-reach workers in Tanzania’ (Special Issue ‘Labour Conflict, Forms of Organisation and Class’ edited by Maurizio Atzeni, Jenny Chan, and Devi Sacchetto,

Global Labour Journal 14(3) 2023, 271–288); some of the thoughts presented in Chapter 6 appeared in an article co-authored with Chediel Nyirenda, ‘Towards Sustainable Livelihoods in the Tanzanian Informal Economy: Facilitating Inclusion, Organization and Rights for Street Vendors’ (UNU-WIDER Working Paper 2021/53) and in an article in the Special Issue ‘Street Vending Facing Urban Policies’ edited by Sylvain Racaud, Jackson Kago, and Samuel Owuor (*Articulo—Journal of Urban Research*, 2018).

Getting a book written while trying to stay afloat in the neoliberal university is one thing; not losing my hope, health and sanity over it has been another. Luckily, I had the best colleagues, friends, and family to help with that: the precarity of post-doc life was cushioned considerably by the encouragement and support I found at the Tampere Centre for Societal Sustainability and its wonderfully open-minded members, particularly Liisa Häikiö. For many years, starting at the University of Helsinki and continuing at Tampere, the collective (and productive) writing, ranting, and caring sessions with Marjaana Jauhola, Violeta Gutiérrez Zamora, and Satu Sundström have provided a much-needed refuge. I cannot express enough my gratitude to Marjaana, who has done everything to support me and to secure the space and time I needed to finalize the book, and who above all is an inspiring role model for being academically successful *and* ethically sincere. They all not only helped me to regain my voice and confidence as a researcher whenever I lost them, but also always brought my attention back to the important matters of food, drink, play, and joy! The same goes for my office mates at a shared working space in Kolmas Linja who are in so many ways remarkable and who have accompanied me through the many ups and downs of the writing process. Thank you especially to Mira Käkönen, Hinni Aarninsalo, Tuomas Tammisto, Henni Alava, and Heikki Wilenius for putting up with my frustrations and offering useful advice, encouragement, and good company. Tomáš Kohout’s virtual morale-boosting during late office hours in the final weeks of writing was much appreciated. A big thank you to Jessica Schmidt, Georg Gampe, Anna Salmivaara, Leena Enbom, and Thomas Slätis, to whom I could always turn with all work- and non-work- related concerns, and whenever I was in need of cheerful sarcasm and friendship.

Finally, I wish to thank my family: I owe much to my parents, and although it took me a long time to realize it, their struggles have been another deep source of inspiration for doing research that places at the centre those who have to beat the odds. From my heart, I thank my late mother, Edith, for her boundless love and support, and my siblings Elli, David, and Andreas, and my father Peter for all their care.

The book is dedicated to my companion Pekka Toivonen and our five-year-old daughter Tia Tua, who finds the outcome of my excessive working hours disappointing: so much work on a book that does not even contain colourful pictures! I thank them both for lighting up my days, and Pekka for listening, his critical thoughts, understanding everything, and (not) always taking me seriously.

Preface

The Song of Machinga

Hodi hodi, it's us, the Machinga,
From Mwenge, Kariakoo, to Ilala,
Machinga Complex, *hakuna kulala*.
We are the city's beating heart,
We work, never hurt.

Across Dar es Salaam's streets,
We rise with the sun and go past dawn.
We keep striving, thriving, always on the run.
With every sale, we build the nation,
Dreaming of dignity, a better station.
We do what we do best, working with zest.

Imagine the city without our trade,
Empty streets, livelihoods delayed.
As you buy from us, our families are fed,
You get the services you most want instead.
We pay our taxes with a willing heart,
The money we pay is legal, a true start.

Why are we labelled criminals, we ask with pride,
Is securing our future truly a crime in disguise?
Is this why our rights are ignored?
No sheds, no drains, no space secure,
Smelly, unsafe, how much more must we endure?

If we are criminals for making a living,
Then who truly bears the heaviest blame?
We seek not just a new and dignified name,
But laws that protect us, with fairness to claim,
At your service, Machinga.

Anna Meleiya Mbise (Chuganese)



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1 A Contested Concept at Work

On 14 April 2004, the Tanzanian National Assembly passed the Labour and Employment Relations Act. While it made few international headlines at the time, the Act would turn out to be a groundbreaking piece of legislation: it recognized domestic workers as workers with rights. Unlike most other countries, including most advanced economies, Tanzania now guaranteed fundamental principles and rights at work, among them a set minimum wage, eligibility for pension schemes, and the essential right to strike, to almost two million previously unprotected workers. The new law, which had resulted from a lengthy campaign effort by the International Labour Organization (ILO) and non-governmental organizations for better protection of Tanzanian child domestic workers, came to serve as a showcase for workers' rights in the years that followed. A global movement of workers' associations and unions, struggling for domestic workers' rights around the world, finally succeeded in bringing about the adoption of the ILO Convention on Domestic Workers (C189) at the 2011 International Labour Conference in Geneva, Switzerland.

In late November 2016, the municipal authorities demolished an unapproved street market in the city of Mwanza. Responding to the protests and unrest that followed, on 6 December, Tanzanian President John Magufuli fulfilled a promise he had given to hundreds of thousands of unlicensed street traders across the country during his election campaign one year earlier: he would allow them to make a living in the cities. Magufuli publicly reprimanded officials from the Ministry of Regional Administration and Local Government in a televised address, ordering them to halt all forcible relocations of the vendors and instead to ensure the availability of suitable trading spaces. The new policy heralded a sharp turn from the previous decade, during which national and municipal governments had repeatedly clamped down on unregistered and unlicensed street trade. The move was widely celebrated among Tanzanians, especially by the vendors themselves who, in their masses, streamed to the streets cheering for the president. Two years later, in another spectacular televised message, Magufuli rebuked the Tax and Revenue Authority for its sluggish implementation of his policies and personally handed over 670,000 freshly printed Business Identification

DOI: 10.4324/9781003294122-1

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Cards to regional commissioners which would grant small-scale traders a semi-formal status.

These occurrences mark cornerstones in the governance of domestic work and street trade, two archetypically ‘informal’ sectors, in Tanzania. They also set the legal and political backdrop for my research visits to Dar es Salaam, where I had ventured to learn about the role of labour rights within wider rights-based approaches to development, a topic which turned out to be more difficult to unpack than I had anticipated. During interviews with government officials, trade union representatives, and experts, I was frequently told that the protection of workers in Tanzania faced a major predicament: the pervasiveness of the informal economy, in which more than 70 per cent of the total workforce—90 per cent including agriculture—were earning a living.¹ This was creating all sorts of problems: little statistical data was available on the labour relations and conditions in which the vast majority of Tanzanians worked; experts in law were challenged with blurred lines around the legal frameworks at hand to regulate work; where labour standards and workers’ protections existed, they were all but impossible to enforce; work in the informal economy was characterized by widespread poverty, multiple insecurities, and low education and skill levels; and unionists faced immense difficulties in recruiting informal economy workers into their ranks. Meanwhile, for the government, the persistent and ever-growing informal share of the economy led to significant losses in revenue collection and displayed the puzzle of being either cause or effect, or perhaps both, of stalling economic and social development.

Reflecting many concerns about the informal economy which have become firmly established over the course of the past 50 years (see e.g. Guha-Khasnobis et al. 2006a; Chen and Carré 2020), these explanations were common knowledge. However, they sat somewhat uneasily with the twists and turns described above. The ‘problem’ of economic informality appeared to come in many shapes, changing with legislation, effective regulation, and public policies which varied not only between sectors but also shifted over time—in the case of street trade as swiftly as in one day.

Furthermore, the importance given to the problem of informality in official accounts collided with the viewpoints of domestic workers, street vendors, and other working Tanzanians, who rarely preoccupied themselves with whether their ways of earning a living qualified as informal work or not. Indeed, informality seemed the least of their troubles. The notions of ‘informal sector’ or ‘informal work’ never surfaced in their own accounts of their working lives. If they arose—on those occasions when I explicitly mentioned them—I had to carefully explain what I meant by them, and workers always immediately connected them to concrete issues. For street vendors, informality related to access to and visibility in public space, harassment by the authorities, bribes and fees, the provision and upkeep of market facilities, or the sufficiency of their income to make a living. Domestic workers linked the notion to working hours, working conditions, remuneration, their relations

with employers, and importantly, working life opportunities and the respectability of their work. Discussions about informality also often raised the issue of corruption among government officials. In short, for the workers with whom I conversed, informality was not a problem in and by itself but had many facets.

Gradually, in a thought process which began during my stays in Dar es Salaam and matured in the course of writing, economic informality emerged as more than a term describing an empirical phenomenon. Beyond being a conceptually problematic category, it turned out to be intrinsically paradoxical: on the one hand, it was commonly characterized as being outside the law and hidden from the outreach of state institutions; on the other, it was far from invisible, and instead was an ubiquitous part of everyday life, appearing everywhere in Dar es Salaam. This initially confusing observation would later prompt me to reflect critically on the visibility and invisibility of work to the public eye, as well as on the thorniness of the opacity of the concept which, given its integral role in the governance of the economy, rendered it complicit in the construction of social hierarchies. Moreover, doing research in and on the urban informal economy became entangled in an intriguing methodological conundrum: which research and writing methods would prove sound from a social scientific perspective while also being suitable for a phenomenon which by its very definition existed *off the books*? Conversely, if informal work could be researched, conceptually grasped, and written about, what did this say about the demarcation between the ‘formal’ and ‘informal’ worlds of work as a sign of the limits of official data and knowledge, legal protection, law enforcement, and the possibilities for the political and social inclusion of specific groups of workers?

Following up on these reflections, this book aims to unpack the informal economy as a concept and imaginary, investigating what economic informality *means*—in the double sense of what it *connotes* and *implies*, that is, both with regard to the conditions and practices it represents, and the concrete effects of such categorizations. This is a timely and relevant undertaking, as the informal economy has been reported to exist everywhere. Half a century after the term was coined in an ILO report (ILO 1972; Hart 1973), more than two billion of the world’s employed population are estimated to work informally, representing more than 60 per cent of all employment worldwide. The trend towards unregulated and non-standard employment has proved resilient and is indeed increasing in many countries, particularly in low- and middle-income countries in the Global South; however, it is also spreading into formal enterprises in the high-income countries in the Global North (ILO 2018, 2023). In light of its stunning persistence, Keith Hart, the economic anthropologist credited with giving the informal economy its name, has commented: ‘When so much of the economy is “informal”, we are entitled to ask whether the term has outgrown its usefulness’ (2001, n.p.). Nonetheless, paralleling its growing proportion in the global economy over the past decades, the term ‘informal economy’ has continuously gained

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prominence in academic scholarship as well as policymaking. Despite or perhaps precisely because of their much-debated opacity, the binary terms ‘formal’ and ‘informal economy’ have prevailed in academic and policy discourse (Guha-Khasnobis et al. 2006b). Scholars working on the informal economy emphasize its usefulness for statistical and analytical purposes notwithstanding the shortcomings of the formal-informal dualism (e.g. Harriss-White 2020). As Ilda Lindell (2010, 5) puts it, the term ‘informal economy’ continues to serve as a ‘commonsense notion’ to portray activities beyond state regulation.

Commonsensical concepts, however, are problematic and deserve critical scrutiny. Antonio Gramsci reminds us that ‘even in the brain of one individual, [common sense] is fragmentary, incoherent and inconsequential’ (1971, 419); yet it is central to our making sense of the world and, as a collective belief shared by groups and masses, to transforming the world as well. Since ‘scientific’ and popular common sense are inseparably intertwined, critical awareness is needed in the dissemination of commonsensical, apparently self-explanatory concepts in order to bring about positive change (1971, 325–327). Given the prevalence of informalized labour in the global economy, as well as the ambiguity and contradictions embedded in what counts as informal, as described earlier, the widespread use of the concept calls for deeper inquiry. On the presumption that neither unregulated and irregular labour in the life-world nor its capture under an ambiguous term will diminish in the near future, critical engagement with the concept, irrespective of its suitability, is key for better understanding the interrelations of economic informality with the institutional shapes of law, labour, and the state, in their manifestations at the local level as well as on a global scale.

With this aim in mind, the book probes into the contexts, contents, and consequences of conceptions of informality. In the chapters that follow, I put forward four interrelated core arguments. First, I propose shifting the focus from the informal economy and from informal labour towards the *processes of informalization*, that is, the intertwined historical, political, legal, and social dynamics through which labour becomes informalized. This is not the same as studying causes or conditions of informality within a static conception of the informal economy. Rather, it shifts attention to and problematizes the malleable boundary between what can be considered formal or informal.

Second, these processes involve not only economic, statistically measurable, or other material factors, although these undeniably do matter, but also, and of equal importance, political contestation around conceptions of informality. Affecting the legal, institutional, and social demarcations of formal and informal, these conceptual politics have real effects. The essentially contested concept and imaginary of the informal economy thus has a performative, constitutive function.

Third, informality of labour, both as a political and legal category and as a set of practices, is intersectionally constituted. This adds to, but also goes beyond, the by now widely accepted observation that formal and informal

work are not opposites but are located along a continuum of labour and social relations. An intersectional understanding of informality helps to illuminate how some informal economy workers are more ‘informal’—in the sense of invisible, precarious, and vulnerable—than others.

Fourth, while the formal-informal dualism inevitably confirms and perpetuates hierarchies and forms of exclusion in the capitalist economy, some conceptions of economic informality and prescriptions for formalization serve the working poor better than others. This depends largely on their ability to recognize and address structural conditions of informality.

Taken together, these arguments contribute to an understanding of the informal economy and of informalized labour as social and political constructs, rather than an *a priori* existing sphere of unregulated economic activities. The emergence and contours of the informal economy are in this reading seen as directly interlinked with those of formal institutions. Conceptions, imaginaries, and policy interventions which are designed to reconfigure the informal economy serve as a site to reconceptualize, reimagine, and contest the institutions of law, labour, and the state.

The greatest trick the devil ever pulled?

Before outlining the theoretical-conceptual and empirical groundwork for these arguments, a more general explanation of the rationale of this book is in order, pre-empting a valid objection: given the already burgeoning literature on the informal economy, why expend more time and resources on its analysis? Has the formal-informal dualism not yet received its fair share of criticism? Reiterating Deborah Potts’ (2008) earlier views on the matter, I contend that while substantiated critiques of constructions of informality are as old as the concept itself, these messages appear not to have reached the relevant audiences. On the contrary, notwithstanding all debate, the concept of the informal economy has proved remarkably resilient, and scholarship as well as policy proposals on what is perceived as one of the central woes for economic and social development abound.

As a consequence of its inherent dualism, most of these engagements with the informal economy persistently cast it as beyond the grasp of well-known and time-honoured tools of analysis and governance. The eclipse is reminiscent of Charles Baudelaire’s quip, ‘[t]he greatest trick the devil ever pulled was convincing the world he didn’t exist’.² In the same way, under the pretext of difference and exclusion from the formal economy, the majority of the world’s labouring population has become strangely hidden from the conceptual radar of mainstream theorizing on labour and economic development. Those working in the informal economy, however, are usually neither devious nor trying to conceal themselves; their relegation to the back is, rather, the outcome of conceptual, analytical, and, above all, political choices. I will elucidate this claim in the course of the following chapters, in which I discuss conceptions and practices in the governance of informalized

labour as they come to bear in legal frameworks, workers' organizations and representation, as well as state and urban policies—all of which are designed with specific visions of and for the formalized world of work.

As with other constructs of binary oppositions (see Goody 1977, 36), the formal-informal dualism carries an ethnocentric bias and implies an apparent order, which, however, is based on vague meanings. In their most basic definitions, prominently put forward by the ILO, the informal economy and informal employment are negatively defined.³ Informality, in general, is largely demarcated by what it is not: formal. It is variously understood as non-formal, non-organized, non-regulated, non-taxed, non-protected, etc. The firm establishment of the concept and category of economic informality, despite its elusiveness, in the institutional infrastructure of international organizations and national governance is striking, as it is premised on hunches rather than sound analytical and statistical evidence. An ILO report published in 1991 admitted that 'even after two decades of investigation ... there is still no generally accepted definition of the term "informal sector". All we know for certain is that it exists' (ILO 1991: 1). More than 30 years later, the quest for better definitions and methods for capturing the informal economy continues (cf. Charmes 2020; Elgin 2024).

Critical contributions have noted how the formal-informal dualism, grounded on presumptions of difference that present heuristically useful simplifications rather than analytically accurate descriptions, has had three main problematic effects on theorizing and policymaking. First, in the realm of knowledge production, it has created new branches of research on the basis of conceptualizing the informal economy as confined to the peripheral economies of the Global South. As informal income generation is seen as escaping the measurements of conventional methods of data collection in the fields of economics and labour market research, research has largely emphasized dissimilarities to and disconnections from industrialized, formalized economies, particularly with a view towards labour. Epistemic and disciplinary divisions along these lines reflect ahistorical and modernist thinking which still informs the study of the informal economy (Breman 2023; see also Harrod 2007). Indeed, a convergence of scholarship on informalized labour in the South and precarized labour in the North has been observed only relatively recently, in the face of overwhelming evidence of similarities and connections between these global dynamics (see Siegmann and Schiphorst 2016). At the same time, the conceptual divisions between formalized and informalized labour continue to have profound effects on labour identities and the collective worker organization, as I will discuss in Chapter 4 of this book.

Second, the formal-informal dualism, or 'residualism' in Nick Bernards' (2018) terms, has covered up the structural and integral position of informalized and precarious labour within global capitalism. This concerns the causes of economic informality which, in mainstream analysis and policymaking, are seen as an outcome of deferred economic and political

development, the exclusion or exit from formalized capitalist markets, and political and institutional failure. Such an understanding neglects elements specific to present-day capitalist development, such as global value chains, the de facto integration of informalized labour into the circuits of production, the insufficiency of opportunities of formal wage employment, and the role of deliberate state policies (Bernards 2018; Breman and van der Linden 2014; Bieler and Nowak 2021). Relatedly, it obscures the valuable contributions made by informalized and precarious labour, often the working poor, to both national economies and local communities. Such labour remains often underpaid and undervalued while providing essential services, especially where formal provision systems are lacking (e.g. Crush and Frayne 2011). Bernards (2019, 298) also points out that in many instances labour and services in the informal economy subsidize the formal economy by enabling social reproduction at low wages, and workers often depend on livelihoods that cut across formal and informal income-generating activities.

Third, irrespective of the informal economy demonstrably encompassing the majority of all work performed globally, the vast bulk of academic and political discourse treats it as a deviation from standard employment relations in regularized markets, which continue to present the norm and benchmark for economic activities. The formal-informal dichotomy has an in-built formality bias, as Ravi Kanbur notes on the blueprints of economic frameworks which lead analytical and policy discourses. In Kanbur's assessment, they inappropriately aggregate informal economic activities, displaying mindsets which portray informality 'as a mass or a lump, and indeed a problem to be addressed' and which 'date back at least to colonial times' (2017, 2). Along similar lines, Donatella Alessandrini et al. (2022) see a normative architecture at play in international institutions which promotes the 'dream of formality' as the norm for legislation, jurisdiction, and policy at the international as well as the domestic level. Formality, while presented as attainable, however, does not result in complete integration or exclusion of surplus labour, but rather, by creating the expectation of inclusion, serves as a vehicle for expanded value capture. Following Kalyan Sanyal (2007) and Gargi Bhattacharyya (2018), they suggest that formality as an elusive goal follows the logics of racialized capitalism in procuring and disciplining cheap and precarious labour (Alessandrini et al. 2022).

Dualist and residualist conceptions have not only framed the informal economy as secondary, but they have also instructed a set of competing, partly overlapping and partly conflicting, political agendas on how to solve the 'problem' of informality. The different perspectives underlying these agendas have been subsumed into four major theoretical perspectives, commonly labelled the dualist/modernization perspective, legalist/neoliberal perspective, structuralist perspective and postmodern/network perspective (see Carr and Chen 2001; Williams and Gurtoo 2012). Three main ontological points of contestation can be pinpointed among the four perspectives. First, each associates different types of employment and economic units with

informality (Barnes 2010, 24); second, they diverge on how they theorize power relations between the formal and informal economy; third, and fundamentally, they disagree over what the ILO has called the ‘dilemma’ of the informal economy: ‘whether to promote [it] as a provider of employment and incomes; or to seek to extend regulation and social protection to it and thereby possibly restrict its capacity to provide jobs and income for an ever expanding labour force’ (ILO 1991, 2).

As they are of relevance for the politics of informality discussed in the book, it is worth briefly outlining the main tenets of the four perspectives. Influenced by modernization theory (Rostow 1960), the dualist perspective posits a sharp divide between modern, capitalist modes of production on the one hand, and traditional, pre-capitalist economic organization on the other. To dualists, the formal and informal economy exist in parallel and are largely independent of each other, with no or little exchange between them. Rural, peasant, and unskilled labour are associated with poverty, low productivity, and underdevelopment. The modernization perspective expects that, with economic development and growth, informal income generation will disappear (Lewis 1954). Such rigid two-sector models based on the traditional-modern dualism and on assumptions of linearly proceeding stages of economic development have been refuted in recent decades as simplified and, moreover, empirically proved wrong by the expansion of the informal economy (Chen et al. 2004). The notion of small-scale, low-productivity industry has also made way for broader definitions, not least with the conceptual shift from ‘informal sector’ to ‘informal economy.’

The structuralist perspective, seeking to address the theoretical shortcomings of dualist models, proposes a more nuanced view of the informal economy as a continuum of labour and employment relations that are integral to formal economies. In this view, the informal economy presents a cluster of relationships of production and exchange which are interlinked with the formal economy (Moser 1978; Castells and Portes 1989). In contrast to the dualist perspective, the informal economy is not associated with poverty and low productivity, although workers in informal production structures often work for their survival and are prone to exploitation by formal market actors who utilize the absence of regulation to maximize profits (Castells and Portes 1989). By and large, the structuralist and dualist perspectives share the presumption that because of poorer working conditions and fewer benefits, informal economy workers would prefer to shift to the formal economy but are prevented from doing so by structural constraints. As power relations between informal and formal market actors favour the latter, actors influenced by the structuralist perspective argue for expanded and more effective regulation to protect workers (e.g. ILO 2013a).

The most outspoken criticism of the structuralist school of thought has been put forward by advocates of the neoliberal or legalist perspective, most prominently by its leading figure, Peruvian economist Hernando de Soto. It contrasts with the structuralist perspective by portraying those in the

informal economy as micro-entrepreneurs and micro-capitalists as opposed to proletarians and wage workers (de Soto 1989, 2001). 'Exit' is emphasized over 'exclusion' as entrepreneurs are presumed to choose informal income generation rationally, to avoid political barriers as well as bureaucratic and legal restrictions and to operate with lower costs and higher profit margins (Perry et al. 2007). The 'real problem', according to de Soto, 'is not so much informality as formality' (1989, 255). As a solution, this perspective proposes the simplification of regulations and bureaucratic procedures and the implementation of property rights. This is seen to enable the participation of entrepreneurs in formal, competitive markets, thus reducing unemployment and poverty and stimulating growth (de Soto 2001). While the neoliberal perspective acknowledges exchanges between informal and formal markets, entrepreneurs are seen as maintaining their independence vis-à-vis state regulation (Carr and Chen 2001, 6).

The notions of choice, independence, and autonomy, as well as the focus on self-employed individuals and micro-entrepreneurs, are shared by different strands of the postmodern or network perspective. Consisting of 'a small tributary of critical, postcolonial, post-structuralist, post-development and post-capitalist thought' (Williams and Gurtoo 2012, 395), the main thrust of this perspective is to see informal activities within their wider social and cultural contexts. Ample space is given to values such as reciprocity, solidarity, trust, friendship, and personal freedom, which are emphasized in opposition to the presumption that economic interests and market logics alone drive informal activities (Williams and Gurtoo 2012; Polese and Morris 2015). The informal economy is seen as providing a refuge from modern capitalism and industrialism and its negative impacts (Amin et al. 2003) and as anti- and post-capitalist anarchic space (White and Williams 2014). A more moderate view within this perspective suggests that formal and informal economies should be understood in terms of their costs and benefits as well as advantages and disadvantages, warning that formalization risks undermining the many benefits informality holds. Formal and informal sectors should therefore be allowed to exist side by side (see Cross 2000).

However, it is important to note that all contestation between the different perspectives notwithstanding, to a varying extent they concur on conceptualizing the formal and informal economy as two distinct economic spheres, with the latter in need of specific interventions. Even when it is shown to be integrated into the formal economy, the boundary between the two, however defined, is reaffirmed. What to make of the thus demarcated informal economy has quite literally remained a matter of perspective, the competing ontologies of which are normatively informed and influenced by ideologies and 'political fantasies' (Saaritsa 2008, 30; see also Tranberg Hansen and Vaa 2004; Vainio 2012).

These debates are not merely abstract or academic. The drawing of the boundaries between formal and informal labour, and the design of governance frameworks based on those conceptions, not only depoliticize struggles

surrounding informalized labour while naturalizing formally recognized and regulated forms of labour exploitation, as Bernards (2018, 2019) has observed. As the developments in Tanzania and the experiences of workers described in this book reveal, such boundary drawing also crucially translates into real and tangible effects: conceptions of economic informality affect the institutional shapes of law, labour, and the state. In so doing they impact on the lives of those who labour at or outside the formal-informal boundary and who therefore often challenge the meaning(s) of informality, if not by words, then by their practices. However, the concrete ways in which conceptions of the informal economy become translated into policy interventions and embedded into everyday struggles of survival, accumulation, and resistance have been rarely studied to date (for notable exceptions, see Bernards 2018, 2019; Danielsson 2019; Alessandrini et al. 2022). With this book I seek to address this gap.

A process-oriented approach to informality as ontological commitment

Bringing to light the contested conceptions of economic informality and their role in the governance of everyday labour relations requires a focus on processes. This reflects the aim to break up the notion of the formal-informal delineation as rigid and fixed. It also makes it possible to tackle a central element of contestation surrounding debates on economic informality, which presents another issue separating the perspectives outlined above: the ontological underscoring of structure or agency in the constitution of informality. As the name implies, proponents of the structuralist perspective frame informality primarily in terms of structural constraints which are put in place by economic organization that follows the logics of capital accumulation and market competition. Although workers do have agency, it is often limited to survivalist struggles and is kept in check by powerful capitalist interests (e.g. Castells and Portes 1989). The neo-liberal and postmodern perspectives, in contrast, stress the agency of those generating an informal income; working outside of the purview of state regulation is presented as a matter of (rational) choice that offers multiple benefits (e.g. Cross 2000; de Soto 2001; Perry et al. 2007).

Whether to prioritize structure or agency is not only a dividing issue between different perspectives in the discussion of the informal economy as an empirical phenomenon in the life-world; its ontological, theoretical, and methodological implications have caused a rift in scholarly analyses on the subject. On the one hand, some academic research—often in attempts to counter a negative bias towards the informal economy and to highlight its beneficial sides—stresses the agency of people and their capacity to make use of, rather than being constrained by, the absence or exclusion from formal regulation and services. The informal economy and informal urban spaces are hereby cast as sites of resistance and activism, and as active contestation of an oppressive political order (e.g. Bayat 1997; Tripp 1997; White and Williams 2014). On the other hand, this appreciation of the agency of

individuals and groups risks overstating informality as a defining characteristic of people's lives, thereby overlooking the many links and nodes of exchange between what I refer to here and in subsequent chapters as the 'formal and the informal city' as interdependent parts of the postcolonial city. Furthermore, it neglects the unequal power relations between the formal and informal economy. Critiquing profuse emphases of the agency of the poor, Matteo Rizzo for instance considers the inattention to political and economic structures in this literature problematic. As he puts it,

the steady flow of romantic and unsubstantiated celebrations of the choices and repertoires of 'people at the grassroots' crowds out an understanding of the concrete realities they face, and thus any possibility of assessing the meaning and impact of their actions.

(Rizzo 2017, 7)

I will return to this issue, specifically in the context of the conception of informalized labour as part of a 'moral economy', in Chapter 6.

From these opposing views, it emerges that the question of structure and agency, with regard to its theorization by the perspectives outlined above and as a standpoint of research, is central to assessing the context, content, and consequences of informality. It partly overlaps and cuts diagonally across the question of whether to view informality as a 'problem' or a 'solution'. Research on informalized labour is hence implicated in the political and ideological debates on economic informality. The used concepts, theories, and methods are primary ingredients of a politicized discourse, influencing, shaping, and justifying interventions. This observation resonates with the work by Anna Danielsson (2016, 2017), who exemplarily highlights the significance and performative role of epistemologies in the making of expert knowledge and, hence, in the social construction of informal economies. Here, I follow Patrick Thaddeus Jackson in proposing that the choice and usage of certain concepts, their uncritical acceptance or alternatively their critical deconstruction is, in essence, founded on ontological commitment. Conscious and deliberate or not,

Ontological commitments, whether philosophical or scientific, logically precede substantive claims, and serve as the often unacknowledged basis on which empirical claims are founded. In this sense, ontological commitments are 'foundational' – not in the sense that they provide unshakable grounds that universally guarantee the validity of claims that are founded on them, but 'foundational' in the sense that they provide the conditions of intelligibility for those claims.

(Jackson 2010, 41, cited in Bruff 2011, 82)

Against this background and for reasons elaborated in the sections that follow, rather than *a priori* giving precedence to either structure or agency, I

propose to direct attention to processes of formalization and informalization. In so doing, I build on earlier interventions challenging static and essentialist understandings of informality. For instance, following on from their review of current debates on urban informality, Nicola Banks et al. (2019) argue for moving away from seeing informality as a fixed setting, sector, or outcome, but rather as a site of critical analysis for ongoing economic, spatial, and political processes of differentiation. Other takes on the informal economy have similarly pointed out its dynamic character. In his study of urban development in India, Tom Barnes (2010, 32) suggests that the measurement of informality ‘is an attempt to take an empirical snapshot of a dynamic process’. In his and other studies, mainly in the tradition of the structuralist perspective, informalization is thereby conceptualized as a process in which production and employment relations undergo transformations, and hence as by-product of capitalist accumulation processes (Barnes 2010; Castells and Portes 1989; Chang 2009). Processes of informalization have also been noted in the deliberate accounting and statistical capture of informal labour and their political implications (Bhattacharya 2007).

While providing a welcome turn away from static conceptions, these accounts, however, largely focus on changes in the size, composition, and power relations of and within the informal economy as an actually existing sphere of economic organization in the life-world. By contrast, I propose to understand informalization and formalization not merely as referring to economic and social dynamics in which people and their labour are shoved out of—or, respectively, into—formalized capitalist production networks and state regulation. Changes in material and macroeconomic conditions, as well as political choices regarding economic regulation, indubitably play a decisive role in the emergence, growth, and transformations of informalized economies. However, these factors alone cannot always explain why some ways of working and living are framed as informal and others, sometimes in very similar shapes and conditions, are not; or why and how, as the occurrences described in the beginning of this introduction have shown, the meaning of informality differs significantly for different sectors and different groups across time.

To enhance our understanding of these peculiarities, I suggest viewing informalization and formalization as products of immense discursive efforts. These discourses serve to establish certain ways of working as integral and others as peripheral to the functioning of the economy, including some and excluding others from regulation and protection. They often centre on the contestation of the legality and legitimacy of specific types of work and economic relations. To put it differently, informality in this book is understood *not only* a result of material factors and economic restructuring, *but also* by its discursive conceptualizations. It is not simply a realm ungoverned by state institutions but, simultaneously as a concept and an empirical phenomenon, an element of certain governance rationales and techniques.

The conceptual politics of informality

To approach these discursive governance tools theoretically, I draw on several theoretical strands of thought emphasizing the role of concepts for politics and governance, among them historian Reinhart Koselleck's work on social and political concepts, as well as the Cultural Political Economy (CPE) approach, which elaborates on the relevance of imaginaries in shaping economic structures and relations of production. With this, I understand informality, alongside informal labour, informal employment, informal economy, etc., to be not merely descriptive words but concepts. Koselleck (1982, 418) explains the relationship between words and concepts thus: 'Each concept is associated with a word, but not every word is a social and political concept. Social and political concepts possess a substantial claim of generality and always have many meanings.' Despite their ambiguity, social and political concepts contain substance; although they refuse to be defined 'correctly', their (many) meanings can nonetheless be captured and traced (Koponen 2017, 3). Concepts are central to our making sense of and structuring the world by linking words with facts, thereby creating relations and order. They are, however, also more than a link between words and facts; while they refer to facts, they give meaning to facts within the context of their wider surroundings.

Concepts fulfil a wide array of functions in everyday language, but their main significance emerges when they are used to achieve social and political goals. Contestation over meaning and order through the use of concepts works across time; as Koselleck maintains, the history of concepts is always also integral to social history. The use of concepts for political goals, however, is not confined to the past and the present. By defining, asserting, and enforcing certain political or social positions, semantic struggles over the use and meaning of concepts also reach into the future (Koselleck 1995, 114). The deployment of, and a preference for, certain concepts at the expense of others, carry forward ideas and visions of how current social and political order should be maintained or transformed. Concepts, in other words, shape the world in which we live.

Political philosopher John Gray similarly argues that concepts are essentially contested. Like Koselleck, he asserts that concepts do have meaning, but their contestability implies that their meaning cannot be unequivocally distilled as they have more than one 'correct' meaning. Importantly, Gray adds that an essentially contested concept does not stand by itself. It always appears in the context of a number of likewise contested concepts and meanings to which its interpretation is tied:

An essentially contested concept is a concept such that any use of it in a social or political context presupposes a specific understanding of a whole range of other contextually related concepts whose proper uses are no less disputed and which lock together so as to compose a single, identifiable conceptual framework.

(Gray 1977, 332)

Getting a sense of the meaning of the concept hence requires more than merely taking into consideration the temporary and spatial context in which a concept is uttered, relations between speaker and audience and the political and social situation, as well as the previous and contemporary usage of the concept in a given epoch and language community (Koselleck 1995, 110). Following both Koselleck and Gray, grasping the underlying meaning(s) of a concept further implies connecting its usage to a set of different concepts which are likewise interlinked with the horizon of experience and the wider thought and value systems of speaker and audience. Concepts and their meaning are inherently tied to social and political orders as well as their preservation and transformation. In the case of informality, this can be exemplified by an array of other contested concepts in the context of which it is used: specific understandings of economy, labour, (good) governance, and, not least, development.

Understanding the usage of apparently neutral, descriptive terms as essentially contested, political concepts sets the stage for what international relations scholars Christopher Hobson and Milja Kurki (2012; see also Kurki 2010) call ‘conceptual politics’. They define the term as

the ways in which contested concepts ... are interpreted, used and fought over by actors, and how certain meanings and definitions come to influence real world phenomena. From this perspective, the way concepts are understood is not somehow prior to, or removed from, politics, but is an unavoidable component.

(Hobson and Kurki 2012, 3, emphasis omitted)

It is important to emphasize that conceptual contestation and the politics surrounding it are by no means solely discursively constructed. As Koselleck makes it clear, contestation centres on the multiple meanings of a concept which are not devoid of substance. Establishing the relationship between concepts, or language and signs more broadly on the one hand, and social and material structures on the other, is a key challenge and major task of the social sciences, particularly when taking an interest in the political organization and structures of the economy. One attempt to bridge this gap has been undertaken by proponents of CPE, most prominently Ngai-Ling Sum and Bob Jessop. They propose to bring together Marxist political economy with Gramscian and Foucauldian analyses of hegemony and power in a transdisciplinary approach in order to establish relations between the semiotic and structural (material) dimensions of social organization. Presenting a rather complex macro-theoretical framework, their aim is to make the linguistic and cultural turn fruitful for a study of political economy. In this analysis, the usage of language and signs is interdependent and co-evolving with the material structures of social order (Sum and Jessop 2014, 184–186).

Instead of concepts, Sum and Jessop identify a central role for ‘imaginaries’ that are central not only in the struggle over ‘hearts and minds’ but

also for ‘the reproduction or transformation of the prevailing structures of exploitation and domination’ (2014, 165). Imaginaries are used by various actors to establish a hegemonic or dominant ‘frame’, a process which, however, remains contested and incomplete so long as it is resisted. On the other hand, once they become accepted as self-evident, imaginaries also become institutionalized and fortified in, among other sites, the economic relations of production (2014, 168). Although Sum and Jessop do not discuss the relationship between imaginaries and concepts, it can be inferred from the examples used in the respective theoretical texts that imaginaries appear to be broader in scope than concepts insofar as hegemonic economic imaginaries, as captured by Sum and Jessop, resemble paradigmatic agendas involving multiple sites of simultaneous contestation and transformation.⁴

In a reading of Koselleck alongside Sum and Jessop, their understanding of the role of concepts and of imaginaries appears to overlap: both concepts and imaginaries serve to give meaning to facts and structures in an attempt to challenge ‘old’ meanings and replace them with ‘new’ ones. The meaning of neither concepts nor imaginaries is pre-given, but is dynamically co-produced by material and semiotic practices which they in turn shape; both operate within wider networks of other discursive constructs; both always have multiple, contestable meanings; and both are elemental in establishing hegemonic frames of meaning which are, however, always prone to contestation. Drawing on a combined reading of Koselleck’s thought and the CPE school, I will explore how the informal economy, as a politically charged concept and imaginary, entails a strong normative content and competing agendas which not only affect the delineation of the informal itself but, along with it, the formal institutions of law, labour, and the state.

Law, intersectionality, and legitimacy

The definition of economic informality, outlined above, indicates that the boundary between formality and informality is primarily an outcome of the relationship between labour and the law. However, somewhat contradicting the formal-informal binary implied in its definition, in light of its acknowledged heterogeneity, informalized labour and employment have also become framed as being placed ‘at the fringes of the law’ (ILO 2002, 3). This formulation opens the view towards the fuzziness of the formal-informal boundary. Recalling the legal and regulatory shifts in the sectors of street vending and domestic work described at the beginning, it directs the analytical focus towards the more subtle movements in processes of informalization and the relativity and relationality of informal work. As argued by Marxist, Gramscian, feminist, and critical legal scholars, among others, the law is not a politically or socially neutral institution but is embedded in politico-economic conflict, social struggles, and power relations (Balbus 1977; Frug 1992; Litowitz 2000). When legislation and law enforcement brand informal activities as illegal or criminal acts, or render them

unprotected, legal arguments become more deeply involved in the politically and ideologically informed disputes between different perspectives on informality. Conversely, the dilemma of the informal economy, whether it represents a solution to inadequate regulation or a problem that must be corrected by better regulation, hinges not least on legislation and its enforcement.

To better capture the dynamics surrounding the relationship between law and informality, in addition to paying attention to processes of conceptual contestation as outlined above, I suggest adopting the analytical lens of intersectionality. This framework, drawing on black feminist scholarship, postulates that the law is embedded in social stratification and unequal power relations along the lines of multiple intersecting and oppressive social categories. Originally with a focus on gender and race, it emphasizes the interconnections of law with political, economic, and socially unequal power relations. In establishing dominant norms and ways of thinking, the law presents a political and politicized mechanism which can be deployed to produce or to reduce social inequalities (Crenshaw 1989). Rather than operating in isolation from one another, categories of oppression and discrimination, such as gender, ethnicity, class, sexuality, or disability, affect relations between the law and legal subjects in multiple ways. Individuals and groups who are discriminated against and excluded by the law may belong to one or several social categories at the same time (Crenshaw 1989, 149). The framework of intersectionality both challenges the assumption of legal neutrality and highlights the mismatch between the law and the complexities of daily lives:

[T]he lack of correspondence between legal accounts of the social world and the ‘real experiences’ of ‘real people’ ... is a general problem deriving from law’s tendency to ‘compartmentalise’—that is, to require experience to fit within ‘prefabricated’ legal categories ... it is of particular concern in an intersectional context because the ‘problem’ of intersectionality appears to flow directly from the limits of the relevant categorical structure ... [L]aw derives legitimacy from belief in its capacity to govern the messy complexities of everyday existence. This presupposes that law accurately captures and reflects those complexities.

(Conaghan 2009, 27–28, references omitted)

In this light, informality and questions over the legitimacy of informal labour on the one hand and of state regulation on the other can be seen in the context of the tendency of the law to compartmentalize complex lived experiences and to fit them into clear-cut, generalizable categories. Regarding the regulation of work, scholarship has pointed towards the shortcomings of labour law which, even in formal economies, excludes large segments of the workforce. The categories for employees or workers who qualify for legal protection are usually narrowly defined and exclusively available only to a

limited number of workers (Davidov et al. 2015). This applies all the more to labour relations and workers in the Global South, since labour law is strongly footed on the Standard Employment Relationship⁵ and historically rooted in the experience of the industrialized North (Sankaran 2011).

As already discussed, however, seeing informality merely in terms of exclusion from the law falls short of capturing its varying degrees. This issue has so far not been sufficiently addressed in the industrial relations and labour law literature with respect to informalized labour, perhaps due to the reluctance of these fields to engage with the informal economy. By contrast, the importance of social categories for legal regulation has been noted with regard to precarious work which is on the rise in Western countries;⁶ For instance, Leah Vosko defines precarious employment as

work for remuneration characterized by uncertainty, low income, and limited social benefits and statutory entitlements. Precarious employment is shaped by the relationship between *employment status* (i.e. self- or paid employment), *form of employment* (e.g. temporary or permanent, part-time or full-time), and *dimensions of labour market insecurity*, as well as *social context* (e.g. occupation, industry, and geography) and *social location* (or the interaction between social relations, such as gender, and legal and political categories, such as citizenship).

(Vosko 2010, 2, emphasis in the original)

This definition underscores the interplay of multiple structural, institutional, and social categories, which, in turn, are intersectionally constituted. It highlights that coverage of legal and social protection depends on where, when, how, and what work is being done and, importantly, by whom; put differently, it draws attention to both context and identity (see Hunter and de Simone 2009). Such an understanding also acknowledges that non-existent, insufficient, or even hostile formal governance frameworks affect workers not in absolute but in relative and relational ways.

For the analysis pursued in this book, acknowledging workers' position along the continuum between the formal and the informal as intersectionally constituted offers an opportunity to go beyond the formal-informal and the Global North-South binaries and to pay attention to diversity and difference. This is particularly relevant in the study of workers' experiences in southern and postcolonial contexts. Moreover, the framework of intersectionality connects questions of legality with those of legitimacy. As mentioned above, the legitimacy of the law is tied to its capacity to capture complex and messy social realities. This is key to understanding informality as it arises from the disparities between state regulation and economic and social organization. In exploring how well laws can account for the experiences and needs of those affected by one or several categories of exclusion, an intersectional approach links legal with social norms. It helps to illuminate how legal regulation of the economy—or the absence thereof—is not merely a matter of neutrally

existing laws and their enforcement, but of political, normative, and, at times, ideological discourses and practices. Thus conceptualized, legal and social categories can be seen to interact in the political processes of informalization and formalization.

Doing research on and in an ‘informal city’ within global capitalism

In studying concrete instances of informalization of labour in an African metropolis, the analysis in this book sets out to respond to the call for critical political economists to study in more theoretical and empirical detail the ‘integral but fraught role of regulatory processes in producing the boundaries between ‘normal’ and ‘irregular’ forms of labour, and in securing the reproduction of prevailing modes of accumulation in the process’ (Bernards 2019, 302). As Bernards (2019) points out, the informalized forms of labour which are prevalent in Africa, and increasingly spreading beyond the Global South, are inherently linked to the governance of global circuits of capital accumulation, interlinkages which so far are under-researched and warrant deeper exploration. This raises the question of how best to study the abstract understandings and concrete implications of informality, and more importantly, how to do so without implicitly replicating the formality bias engrained in its very definition and conceptualization.

I approach this task, in correspondence with the theoretical-conceptual orientations and ontological commitment outlined above, by locating constructions of informality as occurring at the nodes of local and global discourses and practices. In so doing, I follow Chandra Mohanty’s (2003, 501) argument for a need to link abstract discussions with grounded, particularized analysis. The empirical site I chose for this endeavour—or, perhaps more accurately, the place in which the questions and reflections of this book emerged and imposed themselves on me—is Dar es Salaam and, specifically, informalized labour in the sectors of street trade and domestic work. The study draws on interview material and notes from participant observation collected over a period of eight months between 2014 and 2016, as well as on policy documents and media reports as primary sources. Interviews consisted of formal, semi-structured interviews with government officials, representatives of trade unions, international and non-governmental organizations, as well as local advocacy groups and informal worker associations on the one hand, and more informal, usually unstructured and open-ended, conversations and focus group discussions with street vendors, domestic workers, and other informal economy workers on the other hand.⁷

The two sectors present a combination of similarities and dissimilarities inviting interesting observations. Both sectors are commonly considered vital in their provision of informal employment and livelihoods, while domestic workers and street vendors both count as particularly vulnerable groups in the informal economy. However, as described above, the meaning of informality differs considerably. In Chapters 2 and 3, I elaborate in detail how each

of the sectors classifies as informal in its own way: street trade is a publicly visible occupation that is not covered by Tanzanian legislation, whereas domestic work is mostly performed outside the purview of public regulation in private homes but is fully covered by the law. Hence, the two sectors almost archetypically exemplify the definition of informal work which is excluded from legal coverage either by its text or its practice. While their regulation is too dissimilar for a systematic comparison, in addition to their being internally too diverse as well, examining the two sectors side by side offers insights into how informality works differently across different labour regimes each of which operates according to distinct logics. The approach taken here therefore presents a loose juxtaposition to unpack the category of economic informality.

Dar es Salaam, a fast-growing metropolis with a largely informalized economy, is in many ways representative of a postcolonial city in Africa, and a good example of key current trends in economic and urban development (see Rizzo 2017). At the same time, as a result of doing ethnographic fieldwork which entailed much ‘hanging out’ and participant observation, the research became an embodied experience embedded into what Karen Tranberg Hansen and Mariken Vaa (2004) have termed the ‘formal’ and the ‘informal city’ (see also Chapter 2). This refers not only to physical spaces—the air-conditioned and guarded offices in the city centre on the one hand; backstreets, sidewalks, and private homes on the other—but also to diverging conceptions and practices of informality. The sharp contrast in the importance bestowed on the ‘problem of informality’ between white-collar officials and blue-collar informal economy workers, described at the beginning of this introduction, is a case in point. Moreover, research in the two cities demanded two different sets of methods for data collection, including differences in dress codes, language, mannerisms, and conceptual toolkits, making data collected from official interviews hardly comparable to information and knowledge slowly gleaned over the course of many informal encounters and brief conversations. This also raised the ethical dilemma of representation, particularly of the work lives of people dwelling in the ‘informal city’, about whom I now write in a language and jargon very different from their own. Indeed, if we understand writing as a process of formalization—putting work lives into books, capturing them, and making them known through the use of established analytical terms and concepts—this is a problematic move.

These ethical concerns, and their implications for the validity of the claims I put forward in this book must be taken seriously. Having the privileged position of moving in between the ‘two cities’, however, afforded me deeper insights into the workings of informality. With their manifold interdependencies, connections, and frictions, I experienced the two cities as a microcosm of the ambiguity of the formal-informal distinction at large, a subject to which I return throughout the book.

Yet some qualification is in order regarding the connections between ‘the global’ and ‘the local’, between abstract discourses, expert knowledge, and

everyday life. First, it is important to clarify that connectedness and continuities in the conceptions and governance of informalized labour do not imply sameness. Jan Breman points out that, when analysing precarious and informalized labour in Asia and Africa, attention needs to be paid to long-term colonial and postcolonial patterns of exploitation between the capitalist centres and peripheries. He highlights the adverse effects which improvements in labour regulation in the centres had on the colonies where, in response, exploitation intensified yet further. There is, he concludes, ‘not one but a variety of regimes of informal/precarious labour’ (Breman 2013, 137). Second, given these global patterns of exploitation and inequality, it would be both analytically and politically short-sighted to conceptualize processes of formalization and informalization in a unidirectional manner, ignoring important nuances in local discourses and practices in which the meanings of informality, with all their political baggage, are contested and resisted.

To avoid these pitfalls, I draw on anthropologist Gillian Hart’s conception of ‘space-time’ as ‘actively produced through situated, embodied material practices, and their associated discourses and power relations’ (2006, 994). Hart’s approach, building on the work of Antonio Gramsci and Henri Lefebvre and envisioned as a method of critical ethnography, offers useful elements to theorizing formalization and informalization as *ongoing* and continuously contested processes. Similar to my understanding of the informal economy as both a social concept and a real-life sphere of economic and social organization, for Hart, ‘material “facts” ... are as important as their meanings—and they must be understood together in terms of multiple historical/geographical determinations, connections, and articulations’ (2006, 984).

Hart cautions against viewing local practices, processes, and politics merely as variations or impacts of global dynamics and other pre-given forces. While they are interconnected with wider, global processes, they are not pre-determined by them; rather, they may play out quite dissimilarly even in comparable and similar contexts. Nuances in historical trajectories, specific local geographical circumstances, political institutions and, not least, in the identities of political subjects may lead to sharply diverging outcomes. Furthermore, political struggles and contestation in specific locations do not take place independently of each other, but overlap and connect with struggles in other arenas, sometimes even those at a considerable geographical distance. There is, thus, not a simple connection between the global and the local; rather, global and local social forces interconnect in multiple local, regional, national, and transnational arenas. The importance and interplay of social categories—such as gender, ethnicity, class, and nationality—likewise vary in different contexts, shaping political struggles in unique ways (Hart, 2006). This postulation is consistent with the focus on processes and intersectionality discussed above. In this sense, informality with its vaguely defined and always contested boundaries presents a fluid space, the concrete manifestation of which becomes an informalized sector, workplace, or activity.⁸

Contribution and outline of the book

This book is an inter- and multidisciplinary undertaking, drawing on and contributing to discussions in the broad and diverse fields of (global) political economy, labour studies, urban studies, and development studies. Challenging the formal-informal dualism and zooming in on the politics involved in the making of the boundary between formalized and informalized labour, it adds to a growing body of literature investigating the performative role and power of conceptions and constructions of informality. It makes a threefold contribution: theoretically and conceptually, it moves beyond static understandings of the informal economy, highlighting instead the dynamic and fluid, as well as the inherently normative nature of the formal-informal demarcation. The orientation towards processes and conceptual politics, sketched out above, offers a novel and deeper understanding of informality.

Methodologically and empirically, by combining the more 'formal' methods of document analysis and interviews with more unstructured, 'informal' ethnographic notes from conversations and participant observation, it provides insights into how abstract conceptions and discourses surrounding informality are enacted and contested in concrete settings. These contestations are discerned at the level of both the state and municipal governance, as well as the everyday routines facing informal economy workers. Such an analysis allows us to recognize people and their agency while also being attentive to larger political and economic structures, reflecting the ontological commitment described above. Tanzania, and specifically the postcolonial metropolis of Dar es Salaam, offers a rich site for analysing the manifold inter- and disconnections between the formal and the informal city; at the same time, the loose juxtaposition of the two dissimilar sectors of street vending and domestic work brings into relief the many facets of informality.

Finally, the arguments and material presented in the book are of political relevance. They show how economic informality neither emerges outside of, or independently from, formal institutions, nor does it present an unavoidable or temporary residual of economic development. Instead, they point out how the normative infrastructure built on formality as the norm draws on specific conceptions of development and of political and economic order, embedded into conflicts around survival and accumulation as well as stratification processes. Conceptions of informality and the interventions based on them are seen under this lens to normalize and legitimize specific forms of social organization, manifest in the formal institutions of law, labour, and the state, just as much as they aim to tackle the 'problem' of informality. This has analytical and political repercussions for understanding workers' struggles in the informal economy as integral to labour struggles more broadly, as well as for conceptualizing the connections between the formalized and the informalized worlds of work. Ultimately, it implies that processes of informalization and precarization can be altered, beginning with how we think of informality.

The arguments in the book are developed over the five chapters that follow. In Chapter 2, I set the stage for the analysis in the book, describing how informality has been constructed differently in the sectors of street vending and domestic work in Tanzania. The focus is on the legal and political apparatus of the state as well as on the historical trajectories in defining and regulating 'informal' work. Drawing on legal texts and historical analysis to trace conceptions of informality, the chapter illustrates how this process has not been consistent, linear, or final. Definitions of and responses to informality have varied significantly across sectors and over time, reflecting a dynamic process in which the state must maintain order while responding to shifts and pressures from both outside and within. In this analysis, informality of certain forms of labour presents a temporary outcome of the interplay of the (national and global) political economy, shifting governance rationales, and locally specific conditions. Although inconsistent, the dualism and residualism engrained in the concept of informality continue to inform negative attitudes towards informality among elites and decision-makers, while the formal-informal dualism finds its expression in the stratified spheres of the 'formal' and the 'informal city', based on divisions in class and wealth.

Plunging into the informal city, Chapter 3 switches tone and turns towards the use of ethnographic notes to explore informality in the everyday spatial and social hierarchies as well as the labour relations in small-scale trade and domestic work. Based on the work-life stories of street vendors and domestic workers, I dissect the interlinkages between (in)formality and (in)visibility of work. The chapter proposes that informality, reflected by (in)visibility, is constituted by multiple factors, among them legal frameworks and the material conditions of the workplace but also, and importantly, the social position of individual workers. Informality emerges not as a single or fixed category, but as relative, relational, and intersectional, affecting workers differently and contingent on social categories such as gender, class, education and professional experience, age, and marital status. The (in)visibility of informalized work is moreover shown to be enmeshed in contestations of the legitimacy of state and municipal governance as well as of appropriate institutions for regulating work. The formal-informal dualism, narrowly reflecting norms of the historically exceptional standard employment relationship, falls short of capturing the diversity of informalized labour relations and, in eclipsing structural conditions, contributes to informalization processes.

Chapters 4, 5, and 6 discuss how conceptions of informality come to bear not only on constructions of the informal economy and of informalized labour, but also, simultaneously, to reshape labour, law, and the state. In Chapter 4, I analyse the interlinkages of the formal-informal delineation with class, workers' power, and collective organization of an informalized workforce. The main argument is that structural and associational power of workers reflect, and are reflected in, processes of (in)formalization. The chapter concludes with a discussion of how changing political and legal

contexts—the inclusion of domestic work into the Labour and Employment Relations Act and the consecutive promotion of the Domestic Workers’ Convention, and the policy opening under Magufuli—have converged with wider shifts in discourses on informal work, enabling the emergence of new local and transnational alliances that have further challenged notions of informality.

Chapter 5 examines how interventions that allocate rights as well as responsibilities to people in irregular labour relations are based on specific, often conflicting conceptions of the informal economy, and how such conceptions, in turn, shape legal and political reforms that re-set the boundary between formal and informal work as well as the relationship between the state and the market. The empirical focus lies on the Decent Work Agenda and Legal Empowerment of the Poor and their respective conceptions of rights and of rightsholders in Tanzania. Challenging the portrayal of the informal economy as a pre-given, blank canvas onto which rights-based approaches are neutrally applied, I highlight the role of these interventions in (re)casting informal economy workers as legal subjects and in (in)formalizing work. While the former follows a structuralist and the latter a neoliberal conception of the informal economy, both reaffirm informality and contribute to processes in which advantages and disadvantages become unevenly distributed.

The sixth and final analytical chapter is concerned with how the boundary between the formal and the informal economy corresponds with the configuration of the role of the state and its relationship with informalized labour. This chapter engages explicitly with informalization as a vehicle for neoliberal agendas in remaking the institutions and politics of the state. More than merely a result of state policies, the informal economy emerges as a site for testing and contesting the legitimacy and effectiveness of the state vis-à-vis informal economy workers, as well as an arena for the enactment of neoliberalism. I illustrate this through the use of four examples: the building of the Machinga Complex, a shopping mall for ‘informal’ small-scale traders; the attempt by the Magufuli government to tax street vending; competing prescriptions for formalization, one with structuralist and the other with neoliberal leanings; and finally, the conception of the informal economy as a moral economy.

In the concluding chapter, I summarize the main arguments and findings of the book, and outline further research avenues. In light of the critical role played by conceptions of informality, I address the question if, and how, the concept should be further used. The observations presented in this book suggest a critical engagement with the concept of informality, with the aim of overcoming its ambivalent uses.

Notes

- 1 *Sekta isiyo rasmi* literally means ‘unofficial sector’ in Swahili, and is more commonly used in Tanzania than *uchumi usio rasmi*, the ‘unofficial/informal economy’.

24 *Processes of Economic Informalization*

In line with established international definitions, I use ‘informal economy’ throughout the book, and ‘sector’ to speak of the economic sectors of e.g. small-scale trade and domestic work. For details on the share of informal employment in the Tanzanian economy see also ILO (2018).

- 2 This translation is taken from the 1995 film *The Usual Suspects*. In the original, the quip reads ‘*La plus belle des ruses du diable est de vous persuader qu’il n’existe pas*’ (‘Le joueur généreux’, Baudelaire [1862] 1964, xxix).
- 3 ‘The informal economy refers to all economic activities, excluding illicit activities, by workers and economic units that are, in law or in practice, not covered or insufficiently covered by formal arrangements. Informal employment refers to working arrangements that are de facto or de jure not subject to national labour legislation, income taxation or entitlement to social protection or certain other employment benefits’ (ILO 2023, 13).
- 4 The concepts under discussion are, among others, ‘class’, ‘citizenship’ (Koselleck 1995), and ‘democracy’ (Hobson and Kurki 2012), whereas some of the imaginaries referred to are the ‘knowledge-based economy’ and the ‘New Green Deal’ (Sum and Jessop 2014).
- 5 The Standard Employment Relationship is defined ‘by a full-time continuous employment relationship, where the worker has one employer, works on the employer’s premises under direct supervision, and has access to comprehensive benefits and entitlements’ (Vosko 2010, 1).
- 6 For a discussion of the relationship between informal and precarious work, see Siegmann and Schiphorst (2016).
- 7 The latter are anonymized through the use of pseudonyms.
- 8 I discuss the social construction of informalized workplaces of street vendors and domestic workers, along the lines of the construction of visibility and invisibility, in Chapter 3.

2 ‘Legitimate Lawlessness’

Legal and Political Constructions of Informality

In this chapter, the title of which borrows from Andrew Burton’s (2005) historical account of irregular economic activity in colonial Dar es Salaam, I set the stage for the analysis in the book, describing how informality has been constructed differently for street vending and domestic work in Tanzania. This requires a focus on the legal apparatus of the state which, as Ananya Roy remarks, ‘has the power to determine ... what is informal and what is not, and to determine which forms of informality will thrive and which will disappear’, thereby constructing and reconstructing ‘categories of legitimacy and illegitimacy’ (2005, 149). However, I also demonstrate that this process is neither consistent, linear, nor final. Definitions of and responses to informality have varied across sectors and over time, thereby reflecting a dynamic process in which the state must maintain order while responding to shifts and pressures from both outside and within. The informality of certain forms of labour, then, has presented a temporary outcome of the interplay of the (national and global) political economy, shifting governance rationales, and locally specific socio-economic conditions.

As in many other cities across the Global South, amid a continuing lack of employment opportunities, street trade and domestic work have burgeoned in Tanzania in recent decades to accommodate ever-growing numbers moving from rural areas, primarily to the bustling metropolis of Dar es Salaam. The two sectors present key lifelines for many Tanzanian women and men of all ages. Offering entry-level jobs, the sectors are particularly attractive to those coming from rural areas and those with lower levels of formal schooling, simultaneously serving to absorb the jobless from all regional and professional backgrounds. Yet, although street trade and domestic work can be said to be of comparable importance to the national economy as well as to the individuals and communities involved in them, and although Tanzanians performing the work in the two sectors often share similar socio-economic backgrounds and face similar challenges, the institutional settings—legal and political—in which this work takes place are far from alike.

The divergence between street vending and domestic work is captured, aptly though perhaps inadvertently, in two English-language books which

DOI: 10.4324/9781003294122-2

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were both published in Tanzania at the end of the 2000s for an adolescent audience at secondary school level (Lukindo 2008; Lema 2011).¹ They depict the stories of two young women journeying from their respective rural villages in Tanzania to Dar es Salaam: Rehema leaves her parents to find work in the country's largest city and commercial hub. She becomes a domestic worker for a wealthy family, and struggles with the arduous work she is expected to undertake and exploitation. Succumbing to the advances of her employer's husband, Rehema soon becomes pregnant. Another domestic worker, the gardener, helps her to confront her employers about the pregnancy. With the support of the gardener's niece and legal councillors, Rehema gets over the initial shock and shame and claims her right to child support. She returns to school, is able to fulfil her dream of attending higher education and studies hard to become an interior designer. Eventually, she starts her own company and runs an organization which aids other young women in their quest for a better life.

Sara is an orphan and, like Rehema, a strong-minded girl. Sara ventures into Dar es Salaam to become a child of the streets. She makes a living by washing cars and is surrounded by a group of young *machingas*, as hawkers are called in local slang.² Together with a group of street children who become her close friends, Sara encounters poverty and the hardships of living from hand to mouth. Her uncompromising nature earns her the respect of the street boys as well as the admiration and affection of a well-to-do businessman. He pays for an operation on Sara's eye and, with his support, she is able to set up a small street kitchen business. On her own initiative, Sara establishes a Savings and Credit Cooperative Organization with other poor women. Aware of the constant risk of changing luck, she works hard and saves her profits, hoping to own a proper restaurant one day.

The two stories teach important lessons. Sara and Rehema come into contact with the attractions and dangers of rural–urban migration: the loss of close family ties in exchange for the volatile liaisons of city life; the temptation of easy money and dependency on men and women of wealth; the desire to gloss over their modest subsistence by shining in beautiful, expensive dresses; encounters with prostitution, HIV/Aids and crime; the death of a friend. Both young women achieve success owing to their wits, industriousness, and perseverance, and in the process become positive role models to others. However, their stories are marked by a fundamental difference. Apart from the sporadic support of older men and women who act as surrogate parents, Sara and the other street children are left to survive on their own, toiling for petty cash. While the city offers opportunities and space for their community of friends, street life teaches them that, ultimately, they must fend for themselves. Rehema, conversely, benefits from several institutions when turning her life around: first from an acquaintance in the women's media association, then from legal advocates at the court, and finally from the education system. In short, upon arriving in Dar es Salaam, the girls have different paths laid out for them.

Although Sara and Rehema are fictional characters, the common themes explored in the books, as well as the divergence in the two stories, are more than just the upshot of the two authors' vagaries. They neatly capture the central trajectories of street trade and domestic work, mirroring many of the experiences I recorded during my stays in Dar es Salaam between 2014 and 2016. They also tap into more widespread perceptions and imaginaries of informal labour in the two sectors. In depicting their struggles as well as their resourcefulness, the books follow a common trope to portray adolescent girls as 'signifier[s] of modernity and progress ... reiterating a liberal ideal whereby subjects have limitless capacities for realizing their dreams' (Jauhola 2013, 88). As the heroines of their stories, Sara and Rehema also exemplify admirable behaviour and appropriate, gendered norms for working women who cope bravely with various hardships yet do not engage with, let alone challenge, the political and institutional settings that frame their working lives.

This chapter touches on the gendered, racialized, and class norms behind the legislative and regulatory constructions of informality in the two sectors over four sections. In the next section I trace the conception and negative stereotyping of unregistered and unlicensed labour to their colonial roots and postcolonial manifestations. The two sections that follow sketch out the legislative frameworks governing street vending and domestic work, respectively, rendering the former informal *because of* and the latter *despite* the law. The final section draws parallels between the dualism and residualism engrained in the concept of informal economy and the division between a 'formal' and an 'informal city,' based on divisions in class and wealth.

The emergence of the 'second economy'

The different ways in which informality has been conceptualized for street trade and domestic work in mainland Tanzania need to be contextualized within past and present discourses on informalized labour. Indeed, the categorization of labour as 'formal' or 'informal' presents yet another instance of framing work in the binary terms, such as legal-illegal, productive-unproductive, or orderly-unorderly, that have informed the governance of African labour since the beginning of the colonial period. Tanzania was no exception to those dynamics. Historical accounts of labour regulation and exploitation have shown how the application of such normative categories by the ruling classes, both colonial and postcolonial, served to discipline and, ultimately, 'develop' a labouring class. Although these processes were riddled with internal contradictions and conflicts between the administration by the colonial state, the metropolitan parent state, and agents of industrial capitalism, and integration of the colony into the circuits of capitalist expansion was therefore by no means predetermined or straightforwardly intended, these early beginnings laid many of the foundations enabling capitalist accumulation (Koponen 1994). The rapid economic and social transformations

during the German and later the British colonial eras, the Depression of the 1930s, the Second World War, and later the struggles towards independence saw the emergence of a class of wage labourers, many of whom left their home regions to search for employment in the cities (for details see Koponen 1994; Shivji 1986). From the independence of Tanganyika in 1961 and its unification with Zanzibar in 1964, to the mid-1970s, the urban labour force grew rapidly but, resonating with Keith Hart's (1973) findings in Ghana, met with insufficient opportunities for formal employment. The oversupply of labour led to a drastic fall in incomes and a sharp rise in poverty among households which had to rely on incomes from work outside the state-regulated economy. Legislation and the response of the state were not in favour of poor rural-urban migrants. The 'problem of vagrancy' was inherited from colonial times, as were penal laws concerning 'idle and disorderly persons' and 'rogues and vagabonds' (Shaidi 1984, 83-84).³ Since their rough-and-ready occupations and services were not registered with the government, Tanzanians struggling to survive in the cities were in a vulnerable position, tolerated at best and criminalized at worst. Urban dwellers without formal employment were frequently cast as the enemies of hard-working rural peasants and the socialist state. They were labelled as 'undesirable', 'unproductive' and, in the words of President Julius Nyerere, 'criminals and idle parasites' (cited in Burton 2007, 131).

The alleged idleness and disorderliness of people in unregistered employment was prosecuted as a criminal offence. Harsh rhetoric was coupled with urban raids followed by forced relocations to rural villages or forced labour on plantations. From the mid-1970s, the government attempted to relocate urban residents without formal employment back to the villages, sometimes by force. It also pursued policies encouraging young Tanzanians to take up life in rural communities. However, both the so-called Operation Kila Mtu Afanye Kazi ('every person must work') and 'education for self-reliance' initiatives failed to stop the influx of job seekers into the cities (Shaidi 1984; Mwaiselage and Mponzi 1999). Government attempts to curb rural-urban migration and informal employment notwithstanding, the lack of formal job opportunities, low agricultural output, rural poverty and, not least, the restrictive economic policies of the socialist state continued to propel waves of Tanzanians, especially the young, to take up low-entry, unregistered work in the cities. What was termed the 'informal sector', originally limited to survivalist and legal self-help schemes in urban contexts, swelled to become what T.L. Maliyamkono and M.S.D. Bagachwa (1990) call the Tanzanian 'second economy', spread across all economic sectors and the whole of the country. In consequence, the 'overexpansion of the informal sector pose[d] a challenge to the state legitimacy of many African countries' (1990, 35), including that of the Tanzanian state.

In 1983, in a nationwide 'war against economic saboteurs and marketeers', the government attempted to restore its authority and power, return to its economic development path, and quell all unauthorised economic activities,

often by desperate means (Maliyamkono and Bagachwa 1990, ix). Amid high levels of unemployment and crackdowns on all unregistered economic activity, the government passed the *Sera ya Nguvu Kazi*, known in English as the Human Resources Deployment Act (1990, 32). The Act sought the 'establishment of a machinery designed to regulate and facilitate the engagement of all able bodied persons in productive work and for connected matters in the best economic interest of the nation' (URT 1996, para. II (i) 1.1). It required all Tanzanians to register with their local government branch, following which they would be issued with a labour identification card. Local authorities could then classify economic activities as lawful or unlawful. In Dar es Salaam, the entire spectrum of informal activities was initially declared to belong to the latter category. All those found offering goods or services without a license were considered 'loiterers', and offenders so classified could be forcefully deported to rural areas or sent to work on the sisal plantations (Shaidi 1984).

Three views ingrained into the Human Resources Deployment Act are noteworthy: first, unused labour power was to be directed to rural areas with the goal of increasing agricultural production; second, both 'clandestine employment' (Maliyamkono and Bagachwa 1990, 32) and unemployment were viewed by the government as a threat to formal, licensed activities and economic growth; and third, it affirmed that the definition over what counted as 'productive' work lay with the state and its administrative bodies and depended on the perceived economic interest of the nation. Although categorized under different names, conceptions of informal income generation thus have a long history of being tightly interwoven with ideals of national economic development and notions of productive labour.

These views, however, were quite out of touch with the social realities faced by the majority of Tanzanians. Contrary to the negative stereotyping in official discourse, Tanzanians taking up unregulated occupations saw themselves compelled to resort to informal activities due to low agricultural output, an absence of employment opportunities, and sinking real wages (Burton 2007). Furthermore, low productivity and real wages encouraged those in formal employment to resort to informal activities in addition or as alternative to their registered work, thus expanding 'second economy' activities to middle-class, white-collar employees and bureaucrats (Maliyamkono and Bagachwa 1990). Implementation of the Human Resources Deployment Act enjoyed little legitimacy across most of society, proved to be unreasonably costly for the already overburdened state bureaucracy and was largely ineffective, since urban dwellers usually returned not long after they were deported (Maliyamkono and Bagachwa 1990; Shaidi 1984).

The drift towards informalization on a massive scale was exacerbated by the structural adjustment and economic recovery programmes, designed by international financial institutions (IFIs). The measures dismantled formal employment yet further and compelled hundreds of thousands of Tanzanians to seek incomes from informal activities to compensate for declining real

wages, inflation, and soaring food prices and living expenses. Towards the end of the socialist era, both domestic economic developments and policy agendas imposed by IFIs were contributing to the enormous expansion of the Tanzanian informal economy. The post-socialist state continued the policies of its predecessor, repeatedly meeting survivalist self-help schemes with repressive government measures in attempts to maintain control over the economy, without, however, providing sufficient income alternatives (Tripp 1997).

Yet aggressive rhetoric and policy measures casting unregistered work as an impediment to economic growth and the national interest have never been applied consistently to all branches of the economy but have varied across time and types of work. As the next two sections illustrate in the examples of the dissimilar sectors of street trade and domestic work, the recognition of work as legal or illegal, and as legitimate or illegitimate in the eyes of the state, has also always reflected conceptions of appropriate order based on race/ethnicity, gender, and class. Finding their expression most ostensibly in legislation and law enforcement, these have created different, often contradictory, pathways to (in)formalization.

‘Tug of war’: informal *because* of the law

Since the colonial period, unlicensed vendors have borne the brunt of laws and by-laws penalizing unregistered economic activity. The most visible occupation of the urban informal economy (Roever and Skinner 2016, 359), street vending has been seen to epitomize ‘vagrancy’, ‘loitering’, and ‘idleness’ more than any other form of work, apart from drug trafficking and prostitution, and has been criminalized along with the latter. During the period of colonial rule this particularly applied to male African traders, long seen as a threat to orderly urban development, the businesses of predominantly Indian shopkeepers and, importantly, to European women as well as the property of the colonial and later the emerging African upper- and middle classes. Not unlike today, the presence of street traders symbolized unwanted rural–urban migration as well as unemployment and underemployment and, crucially, affronted strict hierarchies of race, gender, and class (Burton 2005).

The governance of street vending has been characterized by legal limbo for a century. Just as in many urban centres across Africa and the Global South, street traders in Tanzania have found themselves in a gruelling position somewhere ‘between tolerance and clearance’ (Brown et al. 2015, 2244). While urban street vending has continued to attract an influx of the unemployed and the underemployed, the municipal authorities have frequently been eager to limit the number of traders by restricting the issuing of licenses and removing those operating without one. Amendments to the Human Resources Deployment Act in the 1980s, which had largely failed to reduce informal economic activities, presented one attempt to deal constructively

with the persistently vast number of street vendors in Dar es Salaam. Under the changed by-laws, small-scale trade was recognized as a means to combat unemployment. Vendors could obtain the so-called *Nguvu Kazi* licenses, which were easily available and allowed peddling in the streets. This solution proved to be temporary, however. As migration steadily outgrew urban capacities to accommodate the flow of newly arriving traders, distribution of the licenses stopped again in 1993 (Mwaiselage and Mponzi 1999, 7), leaving the legal status of street vendors once again in limbo. Formerly issued peddling licenses effectively became void ten years later with the passing of the Business Licensing Act of 2003 and the Finance Act of 2004 (Lyons and Brown 2013).

The new legislation eschews the wording of earlier laws such as the Penal Code or the Human Resources Deployment Act, according to which ‘idle and disorderly persons’ can be forced into ‘productive’ work in the national interest. It nonetheless continues to discriminate against informal small-scale trade, specifically street vending and hawking. Without an official business license, small-scale traders enjoy no legal protection even when located in a designated market area. Street trade in unauthorised areas is illegal and has been criminalized as a violation, first, of laws and city by-laws on the use of public space⁴ and, second, of business registration and licensing laws. The Business Licensing Act and the Finance Act, which effectively replaced the *Nguvu Kazi* licenses, require all business activities to be properly registered. Although the objective of the Business Licensing Act was to simplify business formalization and encourage registration, it does not sufficiently account for the activities of small-scale traders. Despite subsequent further simplification of the registration process, obtaining a license remains tied to extensive efforts and costs which are too high for many traders to meet (Msoka and Ackson 2017). Importantly, a fixed physical and postal address continues to be a condition for business registration (URT 2007, para. 13[m])—a requirement which, by definition, excludes all street vendors operating in non-designated areas and, moreover, all hawkers.

When found to be in violation of the laws and by-laws, traders face harsh penalties, usually a fine of 50,000 Tanzanian shillings (approximately US \$25) or three months’ imprisonment. In addition, violations are tried under criminal rather than civil law and, once convicted in court, traders carry the stigma of a criminal record. Whenever possible, therefore, traders forfeit their right to trial and agree to pay the fine.⁵ Tulia Ackson (2015) notes how the laws and by-laws thwart fundamental rights guaranteed in the Constitution, such as the right to work and the right to life, as well as the national policy goals of employment creation and poverty reduction. The contradictions and conflicts between national and municipal laws bar street vendors *de jure* and *de facto* from recourse to legal protection against displacement or confiscations, as well as from social protection. Not only is little attention paid to the needs of street traders throughout the legislative process, but their exclusion also serves the interests of local government authorities (LGAs)—that is,

regional and municipal councils and town planners—at the expense of the vendors:

Although laws relating to land and planning take cognisance of the commercial aspects in land planning, they do not expressly provide for issues pertaining to street vendors. Land designated for commercial purposes surprisingly confines itself to markets which are established and managed by the LGAs. Falling within their jurisdiction, LGAs are able to easily collect charges and fees at these markets. While this arrangement is attractive to the LGAs, it leaves street vendors on the periphery of the protection given by law and the Constitution.

(Ackson 2015, 152)

The laws and by-laws, deliberately excluding vendors as well as criminalizing and penalizing their work, hence repeat longstanding patterns of disciplining proletarian and semi-proletarian labour. In common with other urban centres across the Global South (Boonjubun 2017; Rogerson 2017), the resulting situation has been one of a ‘tug of war’ between local authorities and traders, characterized by simmering conflict and permanent insecurity (Owusu-Sekyere et al. 2016). The period from 2006 to 2016 was characterized by routinized, frequent clearance raids across Dar es Salaam, and several large-scale evictions that made headlines. Clearances mandated by the Prime Minister’s Office took place in all major Tanzanian cities in 2006, for example, with an estimated one million traders losing their livelihoods (Lyons and Msoka 2010, 1088). In 2011, roadside markets were demolished on Morogoro Road in Dar es Salaam along the 11-kilometre stretch between Magomeni and Kimara to facilitate construction of the Dar es Salaam Rapid Transit (DART) Project (Ka’bange et al. 2014, 181). In 2013, a visit by US President Barack Obama prompted the regional and municipal authorities in Dar es Salaam to purge vendors from major roads and the city centre (The Citizen 24 June 2013, 2 July 2013).

As is common during what street vendors referred to as the ‘political season’, the period before an election in which candidates and party leaders press LGAs to abstain from evictions in order to win traders’ votes, the presidential candidate of the ruling party Chama Cha Mapinduzi, John Magufuli, in 2015 promised to protect small-scale traders. Nonetheless, LGAs carried on with the crackdowns after his election. After the destruction of a street market in the city of Mwanza in December 2016 led to public protests, Magufuli stood by his promise: in a TV broadcast making big headlines, the president emphasized the industriousness of street traders and ordered municipal authorities to grant them suitable trading space (Global TV 6 December 2016). The move was followed by the introduction of the so-called *Wamachinga* identification cards in 2018 (see Chapter 6). The policy largely reflected the rationale of the Nguvu Kazi licenses, using street vending as a means to combat unemployment and stimulate bottom-up economic growth

by fostering small-scale business and entrepreneurship; however, it appears to have been even more short-lived than the previous licensing scheme. Magufuli's orders were resisted by regional and municipal authorities, leading to confusion and further conflict with traders (The Citizen 27 February 2017, 28 February 2017). Following Magufuli's death in office in 2021, street vendors lost their most powerful advocate in midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. Urban street vending has since become restricted again and forced relocations are back on the agenda (The Citizen 24 September 2021).

Work like any or no other? Informal *despite* the law

As recalled in the introductory chapter, informality has been given a very different meaning in the sector of domestic work. Since 2004, and hence several years before the adoption of the Convention on Domestic Workers (C189) at the International Labour Conference in 2011, Tanzania has granted the same rights to domestic workers as to workers in other sectors under the Employment and Labour Relations Act.⁶ Unlike in most other countries, general labour law applies to domestic work, including the fundamental principles and rights at work which the International Labour Organization (ILO) in 1998 declared as Core Labour Standards, namely freedom of association and the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining, the elimination of all forms of forced or compulsory labour, the effective abolition of child labour, and the elimination of discrimination in respect of employment and occupation. Moreover, under existing legislation, the rights of domestic workers include the essential right to strike (URT 2004, sect. 75). Domestic work, equivalent to other sectors, is regulated in terms of working hours, overtime and night work compensation, daily and weekly rest, as well as maternity, sick, compassionate and annual leave with pay (see Kiaga and Ackson 2016, 69–78). According to Tanzanian law, domestic workers are guaranteed a minimum wage depending on their employers' income. Since they qualify as employees, according to the letter of the law, domestic workers are also entitled to contribute to and benefit from social security schemes (2016, 84–85).

Tanzania's pioneering legislation resulted from two main factors. First, it was a direct outcome of a transnational campaign by the ILO and Tanzanian non-governmental organizations against child labour. As such, it attempted to bridge the gap between the goal of abolishing child labour and the prevalence of child domestic labour in Tanzania. The integration of domestic work into labour law offered to create a legal basis for regulating against the worst forms of child labour, while providing protection for children legally old enough to work whose families depend on their work for survival.⁷

Second, and in stark contrast to street vending, domestic work has historically been considered a legal and legitimate way of earning a living, although its respectability has shifted over time. During the German colonial period and under British administration, in what was then Tanganyika as in many other African countries, paid domestic labour, usually performed by a

houseboy, was a highly respected and well-paid profession (Koponen 1994, 656–657). Working in domestic service was held in good repute for a variety of reasons: contracts were more long-term and stable and incomes higher than in other jobs; domestic workers were able to build close relations with high-ranking colonial administrators and foreign business elites; and they had access to luxurious European goods and amenities—in short, domestic workers had access to the circles of power. This changed, however, in the 1940s, when economic bottlenecks curbed employment amid rapid urban population growth, driving labour supply up and wages down. ‘Rather than paying premium wages for numerous, highly specialized and experienced workers, [employers] hired inexperienced servants or youths who would perform more work for less money rather than join the ranks of the unemployed’, summarizes Robyn Pariser (2015, 113). With rising levels of rural poverty following independence, in the 1970s the competition for low-skilled and usually low-paid jobs in domestic service was increasingly extended to migrant women from rural areas. From the 1980s onwards, due to rural poverty and high unemployment rates, accompanied by growing demand for domestic workers in middle-class as well as working-class households, domestic labour has become increasingly feminized and low-paid.

Contrary to street vendors, whose perceived unruliness has led to their persistent exclusion from and prosecution by law, domestic workers have become included and protected to respond to the vulnerability and precarity they face. However, legislation in Tanzania has stumbled over a wider question concerning the regulation of domestic work: how to treat it simultaneously as ‘work like no other’ and ‘work as any other’ (ILO 2010, 13). Given its general application to workers in different sectors, the law falls short of fully accounting for the specific needs of domestic workers in regard to four aspects. First, the law does not take into consideration groups among domestic workers who are more vulnerable than others. Women, children, live-in and migrant domestic workers—both international and rural-urban—often face specific forms of vulnerability, involving specific forms of discrimination and exploitation based on structural factors such as gender, age, dependency on the employer, and lack of local social support networks. Such vulnerabilities are further compounded when the workplace is a private home with no external regulation and supervision mechanisms in place.

Second, private households are indirectly exempted from the regulations under the Tanzanian Occupational Health and Safety Act of 2003 due to legal procedures which would require official registration of the household as a designated workplace. The law does not provide for the specificity of private homes as employment sites to be open to labour and safety inspection while simultaneously respecting the employer’s right to privacy; this loophole potentially leaves domestic workers exposed to unsafe and unhealthy working environments. For live-in domestic workers, this may also mean being accommodated in unsafe and inadequate quarters (Kiaga and Ackson 2016, 82–83). Third, if abuse, harassment, or violent treatment of workers occur on

grounds other than discrimination, they are not subject to labour but to criminal law. While labour law recognizes domestic workers as employees and places the burden of proof on the employer, criminal law requires the prosecution to present proof of the crime. Contrary to other sectors, abuse, harassment, or violence in domestic work are likely to take place behind the closed doors of a private home, making it extremely difficult for victims to provide witnesses or proof in court. Prosecution procedures, moreover, tend to be lengthy, and domestic workers, particularly live-in domestic workers, might continue to be dependent on their employer for the duration of the lawsuit and hence refrain from filing a complaint altogether.⁸

Fourth, any legal framework requires at least minimally stable employment relations and clear job descriptions, and therefore cannot account for the fluctuation and multifaceted income strategies often involved in domestic work. The Labour and Employment Relations Act defines both employers and employees broadly, but the Regulation of Wages and Terms of Employment Order of 2010 distinguishes between a business employee, a domestic servant, and a family member.⁹ In practice, the details of the employment contract are tricky to pin down and the boundaries between these categories are often blurred. Oral contracts between domestic workers and their employers may be based on informal agreements or family or kinship commitments, and they may include work both in the employer's private home and registered or unregistered business, as well as multiple and frequently changing job duties.¹⁰ At the same time, certain rights and regulations, such as those concerning paid sick and maternity leave or social security schemes, only apply to employees who have been in an employment relationship for a given time period, usually six months (URT 2004, sect. 29). Different regulations covering the minimum wage apply, depending on whether labour is categorized as domestic work or an employment relation in a commercial enterprise (URT 2010a, para. 4). The law is therefore difficult to apply when domestic workers are hired casually or as day labourers, or when job descriptions and living arrangements do not fall squarely into prescribed categories.

These legal incongruencies exemplify the difficulty of applying labour law, originally conceptualized with a view towards the standard employment relationship (SER), to domestic work. As Leah Vosko (2011) points out, the SER presents a historical and geographical exception restricted to the experience of Western industrialized countries in the wake of the Second World War. It envisions full-time employment, a clear-cut employer-worker relationship, a social wage, and was designed with the male breadwinner and female caregiver as the norm. While these legal conceptions have become increasingly outdated in the light of changing labour markets in the Global North (Vosko 2011), their inherent separation between the productive tasks of the workplace and the reproductive tasks of the home has proved specifically unsuitable for domestic work, even more so in the context of low- to middle-income countries in the Global South. In the next chapter I will discuss in greater detail how work-life trajectories and employment

relationships of domestic workers complicate the assumptions and norms of standard labour regulation. The point here is that, although not stemming from deliberate exclusion as in the case of street vending, the informality of domestic work is partly also a consequence of law, despite the formal inclusion of the sector. In the Tanzanian case, the deficiency of legal norms stems from treating domestic work as ‘work like any other’, based on specific conceptions of the law designed for regulating capitalist accumulation processes in the historically exceptional conditions prevalent in the Global North, and on the separation between the productive and reproductive sphere.

However, another key factor keeping domestic workers outside the scope of regulation lies in the practice of the law, that is, in the severe restriction to enforcement mechanisms. The labour inspectorate in Tanzania is chronically underfunded and understaffed, limiting the implementation of labour laws across all legally formalized sectors.¹¹ The public-private distinction further leads to the exclusion of domestic work from regulatory frameworks in practice as private homes are directly or indirectly exempted from labour inspections, impeding implementation of the law. This affects inspections regarding the occupational health and safety of domestic workers’ working and living environment as well as the effectiveness of all regulations concerning fundamental rights at work, working conditions, collective organization and unionization, as well as the protection of domestic workers from abuse or exploitation more broadly. Hidden from the purview of the labour inspectorate, law enforcement bodies, and wider public scrutiny, the seclusion of the household creates an extra-legal space and thwarts following up the domestic workers’ rights, despite their enshrinement in the Labour and Employment Relations Act and other relevant pieces of legislation. Since domestic work, in this sense ‘work like no other’, is confined to the private home, what happens behind closed doors is often quite different from the situation anticipated by the legal norms: domestic workers are paid too little or denied their wages entirely; working conditions are more often than not in violation of domestic workers’ guaranteed rights along with the whole spectrum of employment standards and social protection; and domestic workers further report many instances of hazardous child labour, discrimination, and forms of unfree and forced labour, as well as physical or sexual abuse and violence. Although problems with law enforcement are common to all sectors, there was agreement among representatives of the ILO and of trade unions as well as among domestic workers that the overall low compliance with the law was due not only to the specific nature of the workplace, but also a widespread attitude of undervaluing domestic work as ‘women’s work’,¹² an issue to which I will return in the next chapter.

‘The informal sector should not be there’: views from the ‘formal city’

Continuing the twists and turns in the governance of unregulated economic activities from the colonial and the post-liberalization era to the present day,

the ‘informal’ or ‘second’ economy has remained a heavily contested subject in Tanzanian politics. Despite the pervasiveness and further growth of informal employment during the past three-and-a-half decades, to the government and the state, the regulation of the vast informal economy continues to present a long-standing conundrum. As an official of the Ministry of Labour and Employment phrased it,

[informal work] is the cry of the nation, but there are two schools of thought. One says that the informal sector should be there, and that it is part of our economy. The second school says that the informal sector is not supposed to be there ... the view prevails that the informal sector should not be there. This view is attractive in theory but not in practice ... you cannot ignore the majority of workers.¹³

The mismatch described in this statement, between the norm of formality and the everyday work lives of the majority of Tanzanians, puts into a nutshell the contradictions engrained into conceptions of informality. The chapters that follow will delve deeper into how these incongruities have affected the governance of informal work and the livelihood struggles of workers. Here, three aspects which are captured in this statement, and which featured prominently in my fieldwork experience, are worth highlighting.

The first is the persisting dualism in perceptions of the ‘informal sector’ as opposed to the rest of the economy. As indicated by the official, notwithstanding its omnipresence, it appeared that policymakers struggled to come to terms with the existence of an informal economy in Tanzania. This was despite growing recognition of the contribution of the informal economy in recent decades which partly resulted from the sheer scale of the challenge of providing livelihoods and services for millions of Tanzanians working in unregistered occupations, and partly from shifting international discourses. Similar to other African countries, the Tanzanian government has had to accommodate policy discourses by major international organizations such as the ILO, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Bank, which turned towards more embracing positions of the informal economy from the 1970s onwards and emphasized its importance for generating employment, securing livelihoods, and fostering economic growth (see Potts 2008; Bernards 2018). The growing acceptance of the informal economy became reflected in official statistics, where ‘[e]stimates on the size of the informal economy in Tanzania ... [have] radically changed over the years’, a change which ‘seems to have been driven, above all, by political authorities who initially viewed the informal economy as a problem and later as a potential for growth’ (Rizzo and Wuyts 2014, 4).

However, in official planning and policy at the national and local governance level, the informal economy has long remained strikingly absent, at least when compared to its actual size. To name a few instances, the ambitious Tanzania Development Vision 2025, signed in 2000 by President Benjamin

Mkapa, did not mention informality at all (URT 2000). The Second National Strategy for Growth and Reduction of Poverty (Mkakati wa Kukuza Uchumi na Kupunguza Umaskini Tanzania—MKUKUTA II)¹⁴ dedicated relatively little space to the ‘informal sector’, addressing it in passing, predominantly as an issue for tax and revenue collection (URT 2010b, 23, 39), and for the need to promote ‘easy transformation of informal sector to formal sector and for creation of productive and decent jobs’ (2010b, 51). Conversely, the most recent National Five Year Development Plan, under the heading of ‘Realising Competitiveness and Industrialisation for Human Development’, takes note of the pervasiveness of informal employment in the private sector. Based on the National Integrated Labour Force Survey of 2014, it estimates the share of informal sector employment at 21.7 per cent (URT 2021, 46), which is still far lower than the three-quarters of all non-agricultural employment estimated to be informal by the ILO around the same time (ILO 2012, 9). While acknowledging its existence, the Five Year Plan, however, frames informal income generation primarily as an impediment to economic growth and decent work (URT 2021, 46), and emphasizes the need for the formalization of informal enterprises and employment (see URT 2021, 49–51). A similar stance can be observed at the municipal level. As the urban informal economy by definition emerges outside of official planning, consecutive master plans for Dar es Salaam have stubbornly ignored and neglected the spread of informal settlements, thereby inadvertently facilitating their expansion (for a discussion, see Peter and Yang 2019).

The difficulty of recognizing and accounting for the informal economy relates to another aspect which came to the fore in the official’s explanation: the inherent residualism of conceptions of economic informality. During many of my interviews with representatives of government bodies as well as of trade unions, and occasionally the ILO, regardless of whether they were sympathetic to the plight of informal economy workers or not, the officials explained that the prevalence of informal employment and particularly street vending was linked with low levels of economic development in Tanzania and Africa. This was often contrasted with the image of the developed economies of Europe, where informality was presumed to have disappeared. These perceptions reflected a deep-seated and widespread modernist understanding of linear economic development which, similarly to its conception in the Five Year Plan, associated informality with backwardness, low incomes, low productivity, and low potential for growth. Deborah Potts (2008) notes how, among governments across Africa and over the past few decades, such modernist thinking has accompanied and oscillated with more positive perceptions of the informal economy as an opportunity for employment creation and bottom-up growth. While this reflects the fundamental paradox of the informal economy presenting simultaneously a by-product of and a ‘problem’ as well as a ‘solution’ for economic development, it also reveals the uneven and often self-contradictory effects of economic reforms. In Pott’s words,

The introduction of free market ideology also brought about some lifting of constraints on informal workers and trading. Unfortunately, the same ideology generally had such a negative impact on formal employment that the positive potential identified in the 1970s was largely swamped as millions were forced into informal sector activities, causing such intense competition that profit margins were frequently squeezed to survival levels.

(2008, 160)

Contradictions between economic development reforms and their actual effects on processes of (in)formalization raise attention to the third aspect characterizing common conceptions of the informal economy among policy-makers: their normative and, arguably, wishful nature. Finding its expression in the wording ‘the informal sector should not be there’, this thinking, as pointed out by the official, stands in contrast to much of Tanzanian reality. The resulting debates on whether the informal economy is part of the economy, and whether it is supposed to be fostered, tolerated, or eliminated, are, however, not only the subject of political arguments among decision-makers. The conceptual division between the acceptance of informality as part of the economy or the rejection of its presence has also become visible in everyday life in the urban economy of Dar es Salaam. To adopt a suitable metaphor coined by Karen Tranberg Hansen and Mariken Vaa, my research experience resembled a frequent shifting back and forth between a ‘formal city’ and an ‘informal city’, the two of them physically overlapping and integrated but split by social differences. The former consisted of the national and urban ‘government and its agents, institutions and rules and regulations that over time have been introduced in order to control urban space and economic life’. The latter was constituted by ‘extra-legal housing and unregistered economic activities’ which, however, from an unofficial standpoint, might be ‘not only functioning but normal and legitimate practices’ (Tranberg and Vaa 2004, 7–8).

Although the two cities were not strictly segregated from each other but were interlinked by constant flows of money, goods, and services—indeed, it would be impossible to imagine life in Dar es Salaam without encounters and exchanges between the two—they often appeared to exist parallel to each other, divided by glass walls which effectively confined people to one or the other side. I discuss in more detail in the following chapters how this separation exemplified gendered and racialized hierarchies based on class, wealth, income, and social status. Access to air-conditioned buildings, shopping malls, gated communities, and many public services was thereby largely reserved for elites and members of the middle class in formal employment, while unlicensed backstreet markets and street kitchens accommodated informal economy workers, many of them living and working in precarious conditions. With its vast informal share of the urban economy, Dar es Salaam presented a microcosm not only of the struggles surrounding (in)

formality in the Tanzanian political economy but also, using Chandra Mohanty's (2003, 506–507) term, of struggles for economic distribution between the One-Third and Two-Thirds Worlds more globally. The discrepancy and social distance between the two cities might offer one explanation for the reluctance of elites to recognize the informal economy, as well as for the persistence of negative attitudes towards informality, paired with modernist thinking. Again, this normative stance has deep roots, reflecting sentiments which Aili Mari Tripp (1989, 7), at the end of the socialist era, described as follows: 'In spite of its ideological emphasis on "bottom-up" grassroots participation, in practice, the state leadership has often adopted a paternalistic, all-knowing attitude towards people and sees its obligation to enlighten and bring "modernization" to the "traditional" sector from "top-down".'

Conclusion

This chapter illustrated how informality has been perceived and constructed differently over time and for different sectors in Tanzania. Two issues are worth underlining: first, the role of the state and of governments in setting the legal and political frameworks for informal work; and second, the non-linearity and inconsistency of processes in which some forms of labour become categorized as formal and others as informal. Informality of labour transpired not to be objectively given, but rather resulting from complex dynamics in which the state defined the formal-informal boundary by navigating between established norms, changing ideologies and strategies for development, shifts in the international political economy and discourses within international organizations, as well as internal pressures. As a result of these dynamics, despite their equivalent importance for generating livelihoods and providing services to millions of Tanzanians, street vending and domestic work have become informal in quite dissimilar ways, the former rendered informal by legal frameworks and the latter despite them. Finally, governance of the informal economy was shown to be informed by the dualism and residualism engrained into the concept of the informal economy, as well as to longstanding stereotypes and negative attitudes by elites. These steered not only interventions in national and urban development policies, but also overlapped with and became visible as material divisions in urban life, exemplified by the 'formal' and the 'informal city'. The relationship between (in)formality and (in)visibility in the urban space is explored in more depth in the next chapter.

Notes

- 1 Elieshi Lema's novel *In the Belly of Dar es Salaam* received the Burt Award for African Literature which 'is aimed at producing books which show the local situation' in the English language; Dorothy Lukindo's *Rehema the Housegirl* was

- approved by the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training as a reader in English for forms 1 and 2 of Tanzanian secondary schools.
- 2 The exact origins of the term are unclear. It is likely to have been created and popularized by the media in the 1990s, building on a common but unfounded belief that many hawkers originate from a tribe of the same name in southern Tanzania. However, there is no tribe of that name, only a parliamentary constituency in the Lindi region called Mchinga (Liviga and Mekacha 1998, 9). Another explanation is that it is a playful response to ‘marching guys’ in English. The term is used colloquially to describe mobile peddlers and hawkers working on the streets. Recently, it has also become common for stationary traders with small stalls as well as small-scale traders more broadly (see also Chapter 6). Throughout the text, I use the anglicized plural *machingas*.
 - 3 Tripp (1989, 25–26) identifies the source of this legislation as located even more deeply in history: ‘The Penal Code amendment and the variations on it that followed had their origins in British vagrancy laws which date back as far as 1349. They were enforced by the authorities more vigorously in 18th and 19th century England as a means of securing cheap labor for industry and to round up so-called criminals. These laws were transferred to Tanzania in the form of the Penal Code, which targeted prostitutes, beggars, gamblers, suspected thieves, rogues and vagabonds.’
 - 4 These are the Highways Act, the Local Government (Urban Authorities) Act of 1982, the Land Act of 1999, and the Land Use Planning and Urban Planning Acts, both dated 2007. For a detailed discussion see Ackson (2015).
 - 5 Interview with a municipal solicitor at Kinondoni Municipal Council, March 2015.
 - 6 The following description applies to mainland Tanzania, as Zanzibar has its own labour laws and regulations.
 - 7 Interviews with the Regional Coordinator of the International Domestic Workers Federation and the Programme Manager at the Kiota Women’s Health and Development Organization, March 2015.
 - 8 Interview with the National Programme Officer, Domestic Workers, at the ILO, March 2015.
 - 9 “[D]omestic servant” includes any person employed wholly or partly as cook, house-servant, waiter, butler, maidservant, valet, bar attendant, groom, gardener, washman or watchman, but an employee shall not include any such employee employed wholly or partly in connection with or in relation to any commercial or industrial enterprises; “family” means an employee and his or her spouse and the children of such an employee’ (URT 2010a, para. 2).
 - 10 Interview with the Deputy General Secretary of the Conservation, Hotel, Domestic and Allied Workers Union (CHODAWU), February 2015.
 - 11 See note 10.
 - 12 Interviews with the Director of CHODAWU, February 2015; the National Programme Officer, Domestic Workers, at the ILO, March 2015; and focus group discussions with domestic workers, January and March 2015.
 - 13 Interview with an economist at the Ministry of Labour and Employment, February 2015.
 - 14 MKUKUTA II was to be implemented from 2010/2011 to 2014/2015.

3 ‘At the Fringes of the Law’ Labour Relations and Intersectional (In)visibility

The differences in the public perception and legal regulation of street vending and domestic work observed in the previous chapter call attention to the connection between the law and the visibility of the respective workplaces, which appear to be two contradictory sides of the same coin: for street traders, visibility in public spaces puts them in conflict with restrictive laws and by-laws, whereas the invisibility of domestic workers in private homes prevents their access to legal protection. The questions that arise are how and why domestic work, which is legally recognized, largely continues to remain hidden while street trade is criminalized and penalized despite its long-standing omnipresence in Tanzanian cities. In this chapter, I address these questions while also sketching a portrait of street vending and domestic work in Dar es Salaam, thereby taking a closer look at what happens ‘at the fringes of the law’ (ILO 2002, 3). Continuing the discussion from the previous chapter, in which I illustrated the construction of informality by legislation and its enforcement based on the conceptions by those in power, I focus here on the factors and processes which bring work into conflict with the law or, respectively, move it out of its sight.

Many studies on informal small-scale trade and domestic work focus on the notion of (in)visibility in public and private spaces. The literature on street trade highlights the struggle over public space as a central issue in the incompatibility of street vending with urban policies and municipal by-laws (Morange 2015; Roever and Skinner 2016; Brown 2017). Research on domestic work similarly explains the informality of the sector as a result of its being closely connected to the invisibility of the private home; reports speak of the ‘invisible suffering’ (Caritas 2009) and ‘invisible exploitation’ (OSCE 2010) of the ‘invisible labour force’ (ILO 2015a, viii). A closer look, however, shows that (in)visibility in both sectors overlaps with highly politicized issues such as migration, citizenship, legal and social inclusion, and intersecting social categories. Both visibility and invisibility carry with them restrictions as well as opportunities, and may, hence, also be actively sought by vendors and domestic workers. The argument of this chapter is that informality, reflected by (in)visibility, is not objectively given by legal frameworks and the material conditions of the workplace alone but is constituted

DOI: 10.4324/9781003294122-3

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on multiple levels. Notions of (in)visibility are thereby central to the conceptual politics surrounding the ‘informal economy’. Processes of visibilization and of invisibilization, which determine if and how street vendors and domestic workers are seen—and see themselves—in private and public spaces, are closely intertwined with processes of formalization and informalization, although not necessarily in a straightforward or unidirectional manner.

Following this line of thought and drawing on the work-life stories of street vendors and domestic workers, I dissect notions of visibility and invisibility as they are associated with informal work. This chapter discusses conceptualizations of informality with the use of ethnographic notes on spatial and social hierarchies in small-scale trade and domestic work and analyses the intersections of (in)visibility with gender, class, education and skill levels, age and family status, as well as ethnicity.¹

Specific attention, I suggest, needs to be paid to underlying labour and employment relations in the two sectors. The importance of labour relations is commonly overlooked in the literature on street trade. The focus on the struggle for urban space often leads to the neglect of questions concerning ownership of capital and the means of production among street vendors, reflecting a ‘political economy blindness’ which characterizes much writing on urban informality in Africa (Rizzo 2017, 104). Regarding Tanzania, with a single exception (Brown and Lyons 2010), recent literature on small-scale trade conceptualizes the daily chores of street vendors as the profit-seeking of micro-capitalists rather than the wage-earning of workers. Street vending is frequently referred to as a ‘micro-enterprise’ (Lyons and Msoka 2007, 10) or ‘Street Vending Business’ (Mramba 2015); traders are labelled ‘micro-entrepreneurs’ (Tripp 1989, 29) or ‘small-business entrepreneurs, generally own-account or self-employed’ (Brown et al. 2010, 667). Following the conceptualization of vendors as ‘entrepreneurs’ and of street trade as ‘business’, public urban space tends to be perceived in somewhat limited terms as potential market space; policy interventions are understood as part of managing the streets as a business environment. Access to space is indubitably vital to traders, yet, especially if we are to conceive of public space as market space, it is important to ask how small-scale trade is organized and how access to, and profits from, public space are distributed. These details are crucial to reaching a better understanding of the ongoing legal and political discrimination of street vendors and, furthermore, the limitations of policy interventions in the sector, which I analyse in the later chapters of this book.

In contrast to the literature on street trade, research on domestic work in Tanzania (Bujra 2000; Pariser 2015; Kiaga and Ackson 2016) has addressed both its legal regulation and the complexities of its specific labour relations; however, the connections between them and (in)visibility warrant deeper exploration. I propose that, rather than being inherently invisible, domestic work complicates the clear-cut distinctions between public and private

spaces, professional and personal relations, and productive and reproductive work, which lie at the heart of mainstream definitions of labour and employment. While the private household as a workplace hampers the enforcement of labour law, the (in)visibility of domestic work also depends on the extent to which it is recognized as productive work, which, as I illustrate below, is firmly rooted in longstanding notions of gender, further intersecting with ethnicity and class.

Labour and capital in small-scale trade

Since small-scale trade offers an entry-level income-generating opportunity, it is not surprising that traders are ubiquitous in Dar es Salaam and other major Tanzanian cities. Their exact number is unknown since only a few have their presence and activities registered. The Basic Demographic and Socio-Economic Profile Report of the Tanzanian government listed the number of ‘Street Vendors and Related Workers’ in 2012 as 546,436 of whom 424,577 operated in urban areas (URT 2014, xi). In contrast, for Dar es Salaam alone, other studies estimated the number to range between 700,000 traders in 2008 (Lyons and Msoka 2010, 1082) and over one million in 2014 (Mramba 2015, 120). This discrepancy may exist for both statistical and political reasons, and the numbers are impossible to verify. In any case, it can be assumed that during the time of my research, approximately 10–20 per cent of Dar es Salaam’s estimated four-and-a-half million residents depended on small-scale trade for an income for themselves and their families, even when considering that actual residence numbers might be much higher than in the official census.

Those working in small-scale trade could be found all over the city, in designated market spaces but far more commonly, and more problematically, outside of them along the roads, intersections, and back streets. All manner of goods were for sale on the pavements, ranging from cooked food, vegetables and fruit to new and used clothes and shoes, small electronics, cosmetics and soaps, books and stationary supplies, handicraft and artwork, ovenware, and household utensils. Even makeshift photo studios emerged occasionally. Street traders displayed their merchandise on racks, tables, mats, or on the ground; clothes, fabrics, and hats were draped on nearby fences and walls to attract customers. Some traders peddling fruit and vegetables used pushcarts and bicycles to transport and exhibit their wares, while others maintained permanent kiosks selling confectionery, bottled water, and soda. The hawking *machingas* were likewise omnipresent, with a wide range of goods on offer.

Contrary to the widespread and simplistic categorization of small-scale traders as self-employed entrepreneurs noted above, I found considerable variety in terms of labour relations and ownership of capital in the sector. The vendors with whom I conversed displayed a broad spectrum of income levels and livelihood strategies. Among the small-scale traders I interviewed, five *machingas* were selling merchandise for other traders or retail shops, and one of the stationary traders was employed by the owner of a street kitchen.

These vendors were casually hired, earning a low daily wage or commission on sales. Another three *machingas* depended on additional sources of income to acquire the necessary capital for their street vending business or to compensate for low sales. Eleven traders (six *machingas*, one stationary trader, and four market traders) shared their production materials and other facilities, such as equipment or storage space, in a group or collective. Two vendors ran their business together with unpaid family members. In sum, of 33 interviewed traders, 27 could be categorized as self-employed, of whom only 11 were the sole and independent owners of their 'micro-enterprises'.

For many small-scale traders, being a self-employed micro-entrepreneur presented an ambitious goal, not a condition *ex ante*. The ideal-typical path to success described by optimistic traders included the following steps: most vendors, especially youth migrating from rural areas to Dar es Salaam, would begin with little or no starting capital at all. Peddling low-cost items such as single cigarettes or roast groundnuts, assisting more experienced vendors (often kin or acquaintances from the same region or village), or selling wholesalers' merchandise on commission would allow traders to accumulate small savings which could then be invested in more pricey merchandise with larger returns, such as small electronics, or in buying equipment such as a pushcart or a table. Ideally, with experience and age, incomes and savings would increase while the initial mobility of a *machinga* made way for a fixed business under a roof and, ultimately, one's own shop or restaurant. This path presented a hierarchy among small-scale traders, with high mobility and low capital at one end and the reverse at the other. The lines between survival and petty accumulation, wages and capital, and employment and self-employment were, thereby, often blurred.

The intricate relationship of starting capital, employment, and commercial premises also preoccupied Lawrence, who made a living through the sale of *mitumba* (second-hand clothes) which he bought wholesale at Karume Market. In his mid-twenties, he had just graduated from college with a degree in accounting and was pondering his plans for the future:

I've done this business while I studied at the college. It was very hard, the conditions are bad, I had to fight a lot. Now my plan is to get employed. When I get employed, I get the capital, then I can continue the business. My target is to construct that business, to reach the highest point, then I'll have my own shop, my own company ... There is not enough employment ... It's better to be self-employed, because you're free. To find yourself a job in this country is too hard ... But I studied a lot of things, research methodology and marketing. You have to do anything, whatever is needed, you cannot choose. Later, I'll start my own firm.²

Lawrence was very well informed on the workings of the Tanzanian *mitumba* market, had acquired useful sales skills and had reinvested his profits to secure himself a slot at a popular market. Armed with a college degree, he

was hoping to find formal employment, and to invest his wages in the expansion of his business.

For many small-scale traders, however, the path from hawking to successful shop ownership did not follow a straight line and was fraught with risks. Family responsibilities, sickness, accidents, theft and, not least of all, confiscations and evictions could set traders' work back years, forcing them to start all over again or even return to their home villages empty-handed and in need of support. On their way to becoming independent businessmen and women, small-scale traders experienced many hardships. Frederick, for instance, a *machinga* in his late thirties who had been selling wall maps and posters to commuters for more than ten years, found himself unable to expand his business since his revenue was too low to accumulate; in addition, he had to spend much of his income on the care of his ailing parents.³ Clement, about the same age as Frederick and a single parent, was forced to take up shoe shining and mending from scratch after his kiosk was demolished during the 2006 evictions. The loss of his income and status had led to a fundamental rupture: his wife had left him and their small child, and he had been obliged to live from hand to mouth ever since. 'All I had was destroyed ... I lost my life that day', he remembered.⁴

While some traders, like Lawrence, accumulated savings and expanded their business over time, Frederick's and Clement's incomes were insufficient to consider developing their precarious work arrangements into fully fledged businesses. Differences in education also played significant roles here. Unlike Lawrence, both Frederick and Clement had dropped out of secondary school; both had taught themselves English after coming to Dar es Salaam. Their attempts to find a niche in small-scale trade had kept them alive but their income-generating activities had not evolved into successful, secure businesses. Clement's accomplishments had been ruined by eviction, while Frederick was struggling to overcome the vicious cycle of poverty.⁵

Along the continuum from survival to accumulation, incomes and profit margins varied significantly among small-scale traders. Low entry costs and capital requirements, and the advantages of hawking and peddling for wage or commission, had the downside of low returns. The average incomes of the traders I interviewed ranged between 4,000 and 60,000 Tanzanian shillings (between US \$2 and US \$30) per day and were significantly higher among older and stationary traders. This reflected the findings of an earlier study by Michal Lyons and Colman Msoka (2007), according to which 17 per cent of small-scale traders earned less than 3,000 Tanzanian shillings and 27 per cent more than 11,000 Tanzanian shillings per day.

The same study also found that women were over-represented in the poorest group of traders, and that profit margins were higher for older traders as well as for traders from the region. Traders aged 25 years and above tended to earn more than traders below that age. Lyons and Msoka concluded that this hints at the potential for growth in the sector of small-scale trade (2007, 19–20). My conversations and participant observation

corroborated these findings, revealing that the poverty, incomes, and profit margins of small-scale traders were affected by gender, age, and education. While street vending did offer upward mobility, it had to be noted that opportunities to accumulate and expand were not distributed evenly among traders; rather, livelihood strategies were constituted by multiple intersecting factors. As the examples of Frederick and Clement showed, not all traders were able to expand their businesses, and failure to do so was often perceived as shameful. Similarly, Rashidi, a 50-year-old, door-to-door *mitumba* trader, experienced hawking as a degrading income strategy for a man of his age, whereas for many younger *machingas*, hawking was associated with opportunities and ambition.⁶

These intersections are neither new nor coincidental; rather, they present a continuation of longstanding developments in the Tanzanian economy as well as the relative position of traders in the labour market. Conducting an analysis of the urban informal economy during the mid- to late 1980s, Aili Mari Tripp reported:

Women and men, however, engage in different kinds of enterprises. Women are mainly involved in the making and selling of pastries, fried fish, porridge, beans, tea, soup, retail charcoal, firewood, kerosene and flour. Men, on the other hand, tend to be the tailors, market sellers, carpenters, masons, launderers, mechanics and shoemakers ... One constraint that keeps youth and women locked in certain low income generating projects (e.g., street vending) and keeps them from branching out into more lucrative ventures is lack of capital, which in turn is reflected in the low incomes derived from their projects. Men, for example, reported four times higher starting capital than women and had 5.4 times higher returns from their businesses.

(Tripp 1989, 14)

While small-scale and street trade in Dar es Salaam has expanded and diversified enormously since Tripp's study, two of her observations carry continued validity: first, among a broad range of income-generating activities, street vending ranks low in terms of capital requirements and income levels, and is hence an attractive entry-level occupation to the poor, predominantly youth and women.⁷ However, this section has demonstrated important differences among street vendors, indicating that hawking is the most common occupation for those lacking starting capital. Contradicting the view of informal work as an active choice of 'exiting' the formal economy (e.g. Perry et al. 2007), for many, street trade is not an enterprise, but a job.

Second, the relative security and lucrateness of street vending are contingent on traders' capital, income margins, and position in the hierarchy of small-scale traders. These differences in terms of gender, age, income levels or mobility are often overlooked in discussions on the use of public space for street vending, as 'the dichotomy between formal and informal activities in

urban development discourse has somehow positioned street vending as a static activity' (Malasan 2019, 53). The next two sections explore how informality is rather dynamically interlinked with visibility, mobility, and intersecting social categories.

'Everyone can see me': visibility, informality, and the law

Notwithstanding the omnipresence and centrality of street vending in city life, at the time of my research it was treated as an aberration from legal and social norms by city authorities and, until late 2016, by the national government as well. The hostility towards street vendors was most sharply exemplified by frequent clearance raids and evictions carried out across Dar es Salaam. On a weekday evening in February 2015, I witnessed a particularly rough raid close to Kariakoo Market. Members of the municipal auxiliary police, accompanied by *mgambo wa manispaa*—groups of law enforcement troops hired on short-term contracts—were cracking down on makeshift sidewalk stands amid the traders' screams of panic and despair as they rushed to escape. Under the watch of uniformed and armed policemen, the auxiliary police and *mgambos* kicked and knocked the carefully arranged piles of foodstuff into the street, where heaps of fresh fruit, vegetables, and spices were instantly crushed into mud-spattered pulp under the wheels of the crowded *daladala* minibuses that slowly rolled towards Msimbazi Street. Arrested traders were shoved into a police vehicle while commuters and bystanders gaped curiously at the brouhaha. As I approached a group of a dozen vendors who had taken refuge at a safe distance in a narrow shopping arcade, the expressions on their faces left no doubt that the destruction amounted to more than the hundreds of thousands of Tanzanian shillings worth of food tossed to the ground: the men stood stern-faced with clenched fists; two women cried and lamented loudly about how to feed their children; one young man, his eyes rolling and hands waving wildly, implored me to 'go tell the people in [my] country about this injustice'.

The tensions between the legal regulation of public space and the visibility and informality of street vending were brought into stark relief during two interviews, one with the legal officer of Kinondoni Municipal Council and the second with a street trader. Interviewing the municipal solicitor shortly after the incident in Kariakoo, I received an answer ringing with anger and frustration when I inquired about the raid. The official admitted that some of the methods used by the auxiliary police were questionable but insisted that harsh measures were inevitable. In his view, the fault did not lie with law enforcement. 'So, you ask why the fruits were thrown into the street. But why don't you ask why we see them selling the fruits on the streets? The vendors are stubborn!'⁸ His choice of words hinted at what, from the viewpoint of the authorities, aggravated the traders' recalcitrance: selling their merchandise in plain view, especially in a crowded hub like Kariakoo during rush hour, constituted ostensible and unacceptable defiance of public order.

The official described the utilization of non-designated space for informal trade as a criminal act. The law was clear: '[The street traders] are breaking the law when they are doing informal business'. To my consecutive question—what precisely distinguished 'informal' from 'formal' street trade?—the prompt and somewhat tautological response was, 'What makes these traders informal is that they don't comply with the law. When they get a license and go to the market areas it's not illegal'. The solicitor pointed out that it was possible for the government to change the laws and legalize street trade. The feasibility and desirability of such legal changes were, however, another question, given the limitations of the city's infrastructure to accommodate large numbers of traders, as well as the need for more long-term solutions to the root causes of rural–urban migration. In the meantime, the municipal authorities were obliged to implement by-laws in accordance with government laws. The city's administration was hence confronted with the 'problem' of street trade which could be solved only through 'money and force'.⁹

In contrast, the perspective of many traders was summarized in the spontaneous reaction by Lazaro, who sold baseball caps and beanies which he displayed on a small mat alongside Uhuru Road. When I asked him why he chose to work informally, he exclaimed, 'Informal? But I'm here, on the street! Everyone can see me. How can I be informal?' After I clarified that my question referred to official registration and licensing procedures, he claimed that, apart from the clearance raids by the *mgambos* to whom he had to pay fines or bribes, the government did not care about a business as small and unsteady as his.¹⁰

Lazaro's response captured how for most street vendors—and Tanzanians making a living in the informal economy more generally—the concept of informal work had little meaning and was rarely applied to themselves, since they perceived their unregistered occupations as normal: similarly to Lazaro, who connected the English term with invisibility, other street vendors and domestic workers would associate both the English and Swahili terms with a broad range of issues. Throughout my conversations, I had to clarify my questions regarding the status of their work as 'informal'—*kazi isiyu rasmi*, 'unofficial' work—by concretizing which aspects I was referring to, for instance, the existence of a contract. Presumably because it presents such a 'blanket concept' (Saaritsa 2008, 317), the term, either in English or Swahili, did not turn up at all in most of my interviews with workers.

Lazaro's response highlighted the double-sidedness of the relationship between visibility in public space and legality for street vendors. On the one hand, being visible exposed street vendors to the surveillance of the authorities, with considerable risk of severe fines and physical abuse as well as criminal persecution; on the other, they depended on high visibility in prominent locations to advertise and sell their goods, and there was constant competition among traders for the most visible spots along busy roads and intersections, bus stands, and popular market areas. Visibility was both a necessity and a status symbol for traders; Lazaro, for example, took pride in

having occupied a prominent spot on a main road in Dar es Salaam for almost two years, paying high maintenance costs in fines and bribes to retain it. Popular locations were, however, also the most congested and, importantly, those from which the municipal administrations most urgently wanted the traders removed.

The responses by Lazaro and the municipal official, and the sharp contrast between their perspectives, showed how the informality of street trading and the use of public space by unlicensed vendors were not only matters of legal definitions but also embedded in normative presumptions and questions of legitimacy. From the position of the city authorities, street vending in undesignated areas was illegal and illegitimate. As expressed by the circular reasoning of the Kinondoni municipal solicitor, informal work was seen as synonymous with illegal activities and was associated with disorderliness. This view, and the legislation and urban policies that resulted, reflected not only longstanding prejudice but also modernist thinking whereby street trade was an anachronism that had no space in a modern city, described already in the previous chapter (see also e.g. Young 2017 as well as Chapter 6).

From the perspective of street vendors, conversely, the usage of public space was what enabled their work, and therefore was considered fully legitimate in their quest to earn a living. For many, following formal registration and licensing procedures was out of the question, not least because licensing schemes for their small-scale trade did not exist; informality was the condition which allowed them to earn an income. Rather than a clear-cut division, the lines between illegality, legality, formality, and informality were blurred in their encounters with the law. Like the young man escaping from the clearance raid, many vendors experienced the confiscation and destruction of their property, random and sometimes violent arrests, prison terms, and being forced to pay steep bribes and penalty fees as ‘injustice’. They variously referred to the authorities, particularly *mgambos* and the police but also the municipal and national governments, as ‘thieves’ and ‘criminals’. If, in the view of the authorities, street vending presented an openly visible breach of the law, in the view of the traders, the authorities were also displaying their blatant disregard for law and order. Clement recalled overt abuses of power:

[The auxiliary police] take what [the vendors] have: food, drink. They eat it themselves! I’ve seen it with my own eyes: they took the food from a *Mama Lishe*, a mama making food by the street. They took it, took it away to their car, and there, they eat it! The mama, she’s suffering that day, she’s got no food to feed to her children, but they eat. You see, some of these policemen, they get fat! ... And [the vendors’] capital is gone ... It’s the same as killing. When you take everything somebody has, the business, the daily income. Where can you get capital? It’s like taking a person’s life.¹¹

In contrast to the despotic and abusive conduct of the authorities, as well as to their perception of street vending as disorderly, street traders saw themselves and others as following established rules. These included, among others, a strict outlawing of mugging or stealing from community members, and high standards of acceptable behaviour in shared spaces. Unwritten, informal rules also regulated access to vending space, specifically in lucrative and highly visible areas, as I discuss in the next section.

Tiered visibilities

While restricting its presence, local government authorities (LGAs) had an interest in managing small-scale trade in formalized market settings, where fees and taxes could be extracted. Hence, municipal administrations repeatedly attempted to relocate vendors to designated trading areas. Yet, compared to the actual number of small-scale traders, officially designated market spaces proved inadequate in terms of size. Existing markets each provided space for a few hundred vendors but were incapable of accommodating the hundreds of thousands of traders in the city. Furthermore, vendors resisted their removal from the urban centres to newly designated market areas since such trading spaces were unattractive, being too far away from traffic hubs and lacking the footfall on which the traders depended. The concerns of street vendors and other small-scale traders concerning market spaces were not given sufficient consideration by the LGAs.¹² At the same time, official trading space in more attractive and lucrative areas, such as the Boma, Ilala, or Mwenge markets, was scarce and limited to those who had the necessary disposable capital for rents, fees, and bribes. Although many of them still worked in precarious conditions, vendors in these markets enjoyed at least minimal protection from clearance raids and evictions, and usually had networks and some communication channels to negotiate with the market management.¹³ The restrictive by-laws hence discriminated against those with less capital and lower incomes, who often saw no alternative to trading in non-designated areas.

In the context of continuous rural–urban migration as well as unemployment and underemployment, competition for visible trading space, designated or not, was harsh, and characterized by multiple divisions and hierarchies among street traders. The capital-mobility nexus, described above, found its expression in the visibility of vendors which simultaneously reflected intersecting social categories and norms of appropriate behaviour for men and women of different ages, as well as uneven exposure to law enforcement. It was telling that, although women are statistically over-represented in small-scale trade and in informal employment more generally (ILO 2018), in my observations, three out of four vendors along the busiest and most prominent roadsides in Dar es Salaam were male.¹⁴ Women vendors reported specific difficulties in accessing good trading spaces, such as experiences of verbal, physical, or sexual harassment and violence, as well as

multiple responsibilities in caring for their businesses and families, which restricted their ability to successfully occupy a fought-over spot.

Noticeably, four types of services and goods that are elementary to Dar es Salaam street life and proved to be exempt from evictions and penalties, were all provided by men. These permanently tolerated trades were both stationary and mobile and included the stationary newspaper stands and cobblers' 'offices', usually consisting of a wooden table or box which could be found near bus or taxi stands. Their owners often, though not always, paid fees to the municipality or ward. The men in these two lines of work were considered professionals: newspaper traders had to be literate in Swahili and English to know the contents of the daily newspapers; a shoe repairman was *fundi wa viatu*, skilled and trained in the craft of fixing shoes. As Janet Bujra (2000, 32) notes, a *fundi* (craftsman or artisan) is always male.¹⁵ The two other exempt services were the selling of *kahawa*, strong street coffee, and ice-cream. Unlike the newspaper traders and shoe shiners, the coffee and ice cream vendors were mostly unskilled youth, and both trades are considered entry-level jobs in the urban labour market. *Kahawa* and ice cream vendors were usually casually hired, by the owner of a coffee kitchen or large supermarkets.¹⁶

Although there were many exceptions to the rule, it was possible to identify tendencies for visibility and mobility to correlate with age and gender: more openly visible but mobile sale strategies were pursued by younger, predominantly male traders, whereas stalls with more permanent structures, as well as the mobile *Mama Lishe* street kitchens, were run by older traders and women. While the latter attracted more customers and had higher turnovers, they were also more exposed to the municipal authorities. These trends were further exemplified by the *marching guys*, the mobile traders or hawkers. As implied by the name, *machingas* carried their wares around with them when walking along the streets. Hawkers who walked along busy roads, approaching customers in cars, in overcrowded *daladala* minibuses, or at bus stops, were almost always men; female *machingas*, on the other hand, tended to stay more quietly in the background, carrying their wares somewhat concealed in a basket or backpack, approaching customers individually to show their wares on demand. Indeed, several female *machingas* told me that they avoided trading on the streets, and instead located their customers in office buildings, hotel lobbies, beauty parlours, or restaurants. The choice of sales strategy depended on age as well: on average, *machingas* appeared to be significantly younger than stationary traders. Young men displayed their wares openly in crowded public spaces, whereas older and female hawkers tended to have a less outgoing approach towards customers. The skill requirements for *machingas*, encouraging bold sales strategies in public spaces, were at odds with the social norms for female gender and mature age, and prescribed a less visible presence for women and older traders.

While these brief descriptions by no means claim to capture the diversity among street trade in Dar es Salaam, they illustrate how categories such as

gender and age affect vendors' sales strategies and visibility in public spaces, and hence their prospects for income and capital accumulation as well as their exposure to law enforcement. Viewed as rather meaningless to the vendors themselves, the term informality had varied implications for different groups among them. This challenges the view of street vending as a uniformly informal, illegal, and visible line of work, but does highlight the relativity and relationality of informality as a result of both selective law enforcement and the competition and hierarchies among traders.

'We must also give support': employment relations in domestic work

Similarly to street vending, domestic work provides employment to hundreds of thousands of Tanzanians. In its Situational Analysis conducted in 2013, the ILO Country Office counted 883,779 domestic workers in mainland Tanzania (203,622 in Zanzibar), making up about 5 per cent of the total working-age population. However, the ILO further calculated that the actual number was almost double that figure, cautioning that many domestic workers were not captured by the empirical survey as they were hidden in what the ILO called '*very informal* arrangements' (Kiaga and Ackson 2016, 1, emphasis added). This choice of words indicates varying shades of informality, hinting at its relative and relational nature in domestic work, which I explore in this and the next section.

While my interest in the informality of street vending had been triggered by witnessing a clearance raid, my quest to learn and understand more about the legal and social recognition of domestic work and its value in Tanzanian society, though emerging in a far safer and more welcoming environment, likewise owed to an experience of discomfort: the awkwardness of unexpectedly acquiring the services of a domestic worker. Melinda, a woman in her mid-thirties who had three children, was employed by the landlady of my Kariakoo apartment and came to clean on weekdays; she also handwashed the laundry and ran other errands, such as grocery shopping, as part of her work. Holding a position of power and delegating personal household tasks to somebody else felt unfamiliar and uncomfortable. It was not only because the relationship between me, a *mzungu* (foreign and affluent)¹⁷ tenant, and Melinda, an African domestic worker, rang with colonial undertones—the asymmetry was impossible to ignore, and I was profoundly upset by being so obviously part of a pecking order in which a less wealthy person had to clean up after a wealthier one.

This appeared not to bother Melinda, who was always friendly and polite but kept mostly to herself; when asked, she claimed to like her job as the work was good and well paid. She had been employed by the landlady for more than a year, they were on good terms, and Melinda was paid above the minimum wage. So, what was it that made the situation different from, say, accepting housekeeping services in a hotel, where I would not usually grapple with the role allocation of myself as the 'boss' and of the staff as 'servants'?

Was my relationship with her indeed more hierarchical, or did the privacy and intimacy of having Melinda work in my temporary home lay bare an intrinsic inequality between the one who pays (in my case, the rent) and the one who gets paid? Did I simply fail to notice unequal power relations elsewhere because they were obscured and normalized by the professional distance associated with contractual wage labour?

The experience of discomfort challenged normalized notions of public and private, professional and personal, as well as productive and reproductive, which underlie categorizations of formalized and regular (paid) work, and which complicate the status of domestic work as work like ‘any other’ or ‘no other’ not only legally (see previous chapter), but also with regard to the spatial organization of work and cultural norms. As a result, whether or how to categorize domestic work as an employment relationship rather than one of personal bonds may be puzzling to both employers and workers, limiting the effectiveness of labour regulation even when the law covers domestic work. In Tanzania, it is common for employers to intentionally hide their domestic workers from the public, and their knowledge of rights and obligations from the domestic workers, to keep the costs of their employment low and control over the worker high. However, employers may also be unaware of their role, since the term is associated with formal, contractual labour which is perceived to be quite different from the often close and intimate personal relationships with their domestic workers.

Domestic workers, on the other hand, may conceal their work relationship for any of three reasons: the employers of live-in domestic workers prohibit any contact with outsiders; workers are not aware of their status and their rights; or they are ashamed to be associated with work that is socially stigmatized.¹⁸ While the resulting legal and social grey zones create an environment for a variety of asymmetric and mostly hierarchical relationships between employer and employee, which can be located along a continuum ranging from exploitation to reciprocity (Kiaga and Ackson 2016), the personal bonds between employer and employee may also be genuine. The ambiguous relationship between paid and unpaid work as well as between the home and the workplace featured differently in the working lives recounted by domestic workers, including those by Melinda, Emanuel, Bisuna, and Neema, as well as in the view of Melinda’s and Neema’s employers.

In the case of Melinda, it was clear that cleaning my apartment and fulfilling my wishes was simply a job for her. Since I was one of her boss’s tenants, I was aware that she might find questions from me intrusive and avoided probing into her personal life or seeking opinions about her work. However, in loose conversations she spoke of her tasks as *kazi* (work) and of her remuneration as *mshahara* (wage). Melinda made a clear distinction between work and leisure time, adhering strictly to the agreed working hours, and maintaining a distance in her relationship with me and the other tenants in the workplace and her private life. Melinda’s employer and the landlady of

the apartment, Namiko, likewise emphasized the importance of professionalism in work relations. A businesswoman from Japan, she had lived and worked in Tanzania and other African countries for many years, and employed several other Tanzanians in her office. Namiko explained that when hiring Melinda, as well as the other employees, the contracts had been clarified and negotiated in detail. To her, good work relations entailed two components: one was fulfilling her role as the boss, which meant that she had the final say on all points at issue but also the responsibility to care for the workers' wellbeing. This could include providing support beyond her obligations as employer by paying for the treatment of a worker's sick family member, for instance. This went hand in hand with business rationale, the second component. Namiko stressed that taking her employees' concerns seriously and paying salaries and bonuses above average were not only matters of professional and social responsibility, but also investments in loyalty and reliability that led to a win-win situation, as satisfied employees did their work better. Namiko also knew that word spread quickly in Dar es Salaam, and good work relations thus meant a good business reputation. She trusted her employees and cared for them, but business acumen was a central element in her work relations.¹⁹

In comparison to Melinda, the separation between workplace and home was less clear for Emanuel, who worked as a live-in watchman for the landlord of a block of flats in Kisutu. A man in his mid-twenties, he had not finished secondary school, and came from his home region of Mbeya to Dar es Salaam, where he first guarded the house of a relative's family on the outskirts of the city. The family had been good to him, treated him 'like their own child' and gave him food and clothes. However, as they had four children, they could not afford to pay him in cash and the house was crowded. After two years, he left the family and started working as a guard for a private security company which offered services to small business and shops. Emanuel's wage, however, turned out to be barely sufficient to cover the daily expenses of life in the city, even though he worked six days a week and sometimes even an entire month without a break. To save money, he forwent accommodation and instead slept at or near the shop which he was to guard. Despite being in employment rather than in a family relationship, he again had no home other than his workplace.

Then, after another year, Emanuel was offered the job by his current employer and accepted. The pay was less than with the security company, but the conditions were better. Together with another watchman with whom he split the 24/7 work shifts, he was given food and a small room with washing facilities. The work sometimes also involved additional tasks which remained unpaid, such as carrying loads for the employer's wife or washing the car. To Emanuel, this was unfair and a nuisance, but he always kept quiet because the work offered unique advantages: he could allow people to sleep in the backspace or use the water hose in exchange for a bit of cash, and received extra rewards in cash or in kind for running errands for the tenants

of the house. The way Emanuel put it, in the two-and-a-half years he had worked there, the employer had come to appreciate and trust him; he was now 'like a relative'. The most important thing was that, due to his close relationship with the owner of the house and the steady job, he had been able to save up a considerable sum of money which he planned to invest in a business.²⁰

The link between work and personal loyalties was even closer for Bisuna, who was in her late twenties and had two small children. Her family was from the Morogoro area, and had sent her to stay with a related married couple in Dar es Salaam when she was still a teenager. The elderly woman had taken Bisuna in to help her and her husband with running the household and with taking care of their grandchildren. In return for childcare, both the elderly couple and Bisuna's parents received support in cash from the children's parents, who worked in Dar es Salaam. Bisuna herself received accommodation, food, clothing, and an allowance. After some years, the couple's grandchildren were old enough to stay at their parents' home without supervision, and Bisuna had found a man to marry and live with. The employers helped her to find work as a live-out cleaner and cook in another household closer to her new home. She quit that job when she became pregnant with her second child, mainly because, although her employer was flexible about her working hours, she did not pay enough for Bisuna to hire a nanny for her children and have money left over to feed them. Since her family could not live on her husband's income, she was now looking for part-time work. However, even though she was busy with casual job assignments as a cook, washer, or cleaner, she would visit the elderly couple who had first taken her in whenever possible. The couple were becoming frail and Bisuna saw it as a matter of respect and gratitude to support them. She explained that just as they had helped her, so she was now helping them.²¹

For Neema, a 21-year-old domestic worker from Singida, and her employer Grace, an unmarried bank assistant, employment, reproductive familial care, and reciprocity were closely woven together. Grace owned a house on the outskirts of Dar es Salaam in which she lived with a female tenant and Neema; in addition to Neema, she had also hired a watchman who lived in an outbuilding in the yard. Neema had worked on and off for Grace for a few years. Neema explained that the work was good; Grace was not a strict employer and paid her 120,000 Tanzanian shillings per month (about US \$60, one-and-a-half times the minimum wage for live-in workers) plus meals. She needed the money to support her parents and siblings, but she did not want to be a *housegirl* for the rest of her life or for any other employer than Grace, and hoped to find a paid apprenticeship to learn tailoring.²² Whenever I visited Grace's home, I noticed the relative absence of hierarchy between the women: Neema's tasks were to clean and cook while Grace and the tenant were at work downtown but meals were taken together at the table, always saving a generous portion for the watchman; the women also watched news and soap operas on TV together. Grace and the tenant

helped with clearing the table and washing the dishes, and on Sundays after church, each woman would wash her own clothes; Grace insisted that work had to be shared fairly and laundry was an intimate and personal task.

Being older and successful in her own job, Grace considered herself more of a parent than a boss. She had taken Neema in following the recommendation of the girl's relatives whose opinion she trusted. She thought it was good for Neema to stay in her house where she was safe, especially from men making false promises. Grace wanted to help her to make the right choices, explaining the overlap of professional and family ties in their relationship thus:

In Tanzania, it isn't the same as in Europe; we are more like a family. We are a poor country, so we have to care for each other. When you give money, it must be in order, there can be no corruption. You see what happens with the government with all the corruption. But it isn't all about money. When you go to work, things must be in order, but we must also give support.²³

Grace's depiction of her relationship with Neema highlighted the importance of personal bonds and care as a buffer to poverty by contrasting the combination of orderly payments of wages and support in the informal employment relationship between her and the domestic worker with the dysfunctionality of formal governance frameworks.

While the reciprocity in the relationship between Melinda and Namiko, Grace and Neema, as well as between Emanuel, Bisuna, and their employers was perhaps exceptional and not representative of the majority of domestic labour relations in Tanzania, some general points concerning labour relations in domestic work can be made. First, in this instance family and emotional bonds mattered; although Melinda and the workers in the group discussions testified to domestic work's being 'work like any other' which was done for monetary compensation, overall, a picture emerged in which professional and family relations strongly overlapped. Not only was the workplace the private home of the employer but, as in the case of live-in domestic workers, it was the home of the worker as well.

Moreover, while some domestic work positions were filled through the procurement of workers by registered or unregistered agents, workers were more commonly recruited on the basis of personal recommendation or kinship relations (see also Kiaga and Ackson 2016, 113–114.). Many of these relations involved a rural-to-urban 'care chain' (Hochschild 2000) in which care responsibilities were delegated down the income ladder. This was exemplified by Bisuna, who first earned money for her own parents by taking care of another couple's children, and later paid a nanny to watch her first-born child so she could continue working as a cleaner. The situation of Grace and Neema can be seen as a reversed version of this care chain, in which Neema sent a share of her wages to her parents and siblings, and Grace considered it

her responsibility not only to pay for Neema's services but also to tutor and protect the *housegirl*. Such chains are part of an 'invisible human ecology of care' and involve a complex set of emotions; although workers are motivated by 'better pay, they do not become money-making machines' (Hochschild 2000, 131, 133) and often develop emotional bonds with employers and their families. The same can be said of employers like Namiko and Grace, for whom the extraction of their domestic workers' labour allowed them to dedicate more time to their own professional careers and, in Namiko's case, for accumulating profit from her business, but who also cared for their maids beyond their duties as employers. Even in less reciprocal and more exploitative domestic labour relations than those described here, familial orientation and emotional ties are determining factors. Infusing emotions into employer-employee relations may often simultaneously entail a benevolent and an exploitative side, leading to a spectrum from rather hierarchical paternalist or maternalist to more reciprocal personalist relations (see also Mattila 2011, 49–51).

The point here is not to downplay exploitation and precarity in domestic labour relations or the importance of legal regulation of the sector, on which I say more in the following chapters. Rather, it is to illuminate the shortcomings of understanding labour informality as a clearly measurable consequence of legislation and of law enforcement capacities alone. Regardless of the aptness of Tanzanian labour law, with the exception of Melinda, the workers whose stories I recount here had difficulty in seeing their role solely as that of employees and showed their reluctance to turn towards formal governance institutions in case of a labour conflict. As labour law scholars have pointed out (Sankaran 2011; Ashiagbor 2019), with their clear-cut categories based on the Fordist experience, established conceptions and definitions of employment fail to account for the complexity of social relations in informalized jobs, which must often compensate for the absence of income security and services. In the context of Tanzania and other low- to middle-income countries, the invisibility of domestic work may hence not only reflect unequal employment relations and the hiddenness of the private home, but also wider socio-economic conditions and the insufficiency of formal governance frameworks.

Facets of (in)visibility

As has been demonstrated in other contexts, not all domestic workers are equally invisible to legal protection. Important differences exist between live-in and live-out domestic workers, migrants or locals, citizens and non-citizens, women and men, and between non-skilled and skilled as well as unmarried and married workers. Some scholars have hence suggested considering multiple individual and workplace factors which place domestic workers along a 'continuum of vulnerability' (see Mattila 2011). However, the hiddenness of the sector has mostly been attributed to the highly

gendered organisation of domestic labour, whereby invisibility is interlinked with the devaluation of reproductive and care work as ‘unproductive’ or ‘women’s’ work under gendered and racialized regimes of capital accumulation (Vosko 2010; Parreñas 2015). This applied to Tanzania as well where, according to the Situational Analysis by the ILO (Kiaga and Ackson 2016) more than 90 per cent of all household chores were performed by female domestic workers, with more than half of this work remaining unpaid, underpaid, or paid in kind. Gender norms were central to the blurring of employment and family relations described above, and further contributed to living arrangements: the vast majority (90 per cent) of domestic workers lived in the same household as their employers, particularly in urban areas; among live-in domestic workers, women made up almost two-thirds and men one-third of the proportion (2016, 99).

Although gender roles were shifting, stereotypical norms concerning ‘men’s work’ and ‘women’s work’ continued to prescribe a gendered division of labour between ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ tasks, according to which driving, gardening, and safeguarding, for example, remained specialized ‘male’ occupations. Women increasingly performed these tasks as well but were, overall, burdened with bigger workloads than male domestic workers (Kiaga and Ackson 2016, 100–101). During the interviews it became clear that male live-in domestic workers were taking part more actively in urban public life than female live-in workers, who rarely ventured outside their employers’ homes on their own. The hiddenness of domestic workers was also reinforced by their family status: the majority of domestic workers in live-in arrangements were single. Like Bisuna, once domestic workers found a partner or spouse and started their own family, especially if they were female, the employment relationship was usually ended or transformed into a live-out arrangement. In sum, younger, female, and unmarried domestic workers were less likely to leave the homes of their employers than other groups.

However, it is noteworthy that the gendered invisibility of paid—or, de facto, under- or unpaid—domestic work is a more recent phenomenon: in her study of domestic labour relations in Tanzania, Bujra (2000) describes how, during the periods of German and British colonial administration, when domestic labour was viewed as a respectable and well-paid form of work (see Chapter 2), it provided an attractive employment opportunity for men; performing domestic labour was not perceived as a threat to workers’ masculinity so long as it could be kept at a distance from the worker’s own home and male workers received a decent wage. This changed when decreasing employment opportunities amid rural poverty and rapid urban population growth drove the labour supply up and wages down, and the competition for low-skilled and by then low-paid jobs in domestic service was increasingly extended to migrant women from rural areas. Thus, while domestic work did not necessarily count as women’s work, once it had turned into an occupation for ‘getting by’ rather than a ‘ticket’ to a career and success, it became a

closer fit with the life trajectories expected of both single and married women than with the aspirations of men (Bujra 2000, 33–34; see also Pariser 2015).

The visibility of paid domestic labour changed not only with its increasing feminization and monetary devaluation, but also with the shifts in the class affiliation and ethnic composition of employers since the colonial era. Up until independence, the employers of *houseboys* were predominantly Europeans, Asians,²⁴ and Arabs; that is, upper-class members of the colonial and business elites. Yet the proportion of African employers grew with the emergence of an African-staffed state apparatus and an African middle class following independence. While the former ethnic minorities continue to represent upper- and upper-middle-class households in Tanzania, the class affiliation of African employers became more varied. The growing participation of women in the labour market, rural–urban migration, and the availability of cheap labour led to the expansion of domestic labour into low-income households.

The means and the motivation for hiring domestic workers differs between income strata. For members of ruling and upper-class households, the hiring of one or several domestic workers is viewed as a convenience and status symbol. For many Tanzanian middle-class families, a domestic worker eases the burden of housework labour that is commonly the task of the female head of household; the hiring of domestic help also permits petty accumulation as it enables women to take up gainful employment. For working-class families and those in informal employment, that is, the majority of Tanzanians, domestic workers are often a necessity to manage subsistence. Informal economy workers, especially women who are responsible for the household in addition to carrying out paid work, have long working hours and require help in caring for children and the elderly as well as in all other reproductive tasks. These differences in class, ethnicity, and income affect the recruitment process. According to the Situational Analysis by the ILO, the hiring of a contractual live-out domestic worker through a professional (either formal or informal) recruitment agency remains confined to higher income employers (Kiaga and Ackson 2016, 114), usually also indicating a more professional, rather than a personal, relationship between the employer and domestic worker. For low-income households, on the other hand, using community or kinship networks to hire a non-contractual, often live-in, domestic worker for low pay or board and lodging is often the only affordable option to delegate the necessary household tasks.

Access to more professional, better paid, and hence more visible employment in turn reflected domestic workers' education and skill levels as well as age. Working in the households of upper-middle-class, high-income, and expatriate employers required a different set of skills than that in lower-middle-class or working-class households, including language skills, particularly English; knowledge of the preparation of diverse diets; skilful cleaning and ironing of expensive clothes and fabrics; and competent use of an array of electronic household appliances. Working for a high-income employer showed that a domestic worker was knowledgeable, experienced, and

trustworthy. The interviewed domestic workers maintained that finding work in such a respectable environment was a much-desired opportunity to gain a high profile as a worker, not only in terms of good references, but also for acquiring skills and experience which could later be put to commercial use, for instance, when starting their own business. Some of the workers, both male and female, who had acquired work experience as well as vocational and language skills considered moving to other jobs which offered better pay and more independence or becoming self-employed. It was interesting to note that these workers, who were all under 40 years of age, saw domestic work as just one opportunity among others to earn an income and displayed an eagerness to acquire additional skills. By contrast, older workers saw no alternative to domestic work and described the relationship with their employers as one of close interdependence.²⁵ This indicates that, comparable to street vending, upward mobility is both enabled and limited by the intersections of gender, age, and professional experience, and reflected by the visibility of work; conversely, the hierarchies among employers, based on overlaps between class, ethnicity, and wealth, presented a measurement of a domestic worker's status on the labour market, an issue to which I return in the next chapter.

Conclusion

This chapter has offered a set of brief sketches of work in the informal city of Dar es Salaam, based on ethnographic notes and the work-life stories of individual street vendors and domestic workers. Three main findings emerged: first, informality of work was not a clear-cut but rather a relative and relational category, contingent not only on the legal frameworks regulating the two sectors and the material conditions of the respective workplaces, but also on the diverse labour relations and social positions of individual workers. The many facets of informality—in terms of coverage by regulation, opportunities for social mobility, as well as labour and income security—varied considerably among workers, depending on multiple social factors such as their gender, age, educational background and professional experience, as well as marital status.

Second, relative (in)formality was reflected in the relative (in)visibility of work. For street vendors, visibility was vital to their survival and related to upward mobility and status. The sometimes violent struggles surrounding visibility had at their core contestations around the legitimacy of public order as imposed by the state and municipal authorities which conflicted with the need to earn a living, as exemplified by the contrasting views by the municipal solicitor on the one hand and those of Clement and Lazaro on the other. For domestic workers, visibility was not only a matter of the seclusion of the workspace, but also of their social position and of their relations with employers. The stories of Melinda, Emanuel, Bisuna, and Neema showed the nuances in employment relationships in domestic labour which went beyond

the simple dichotomies of kinship or professional employment, complicating references to formal regulatory frameworks.

Third, the contrasts between formal regulatory frameworks and the actual, everyday labour relations and labour processes in the two sectors brought into relief the limitations of norms and mechanisms based on the narrow conception of standard employment. A historically and geographically limited model, the benchmark of standard employment, with its inherent dichotomous distinctions between productive and reproductive work, public and private workplaces, kinship and employment relations, and employment and self-employment, informed the formal-informal delineation in ways that sharply contradicted the experiences and needs of workers. In so doing, the formal-informal dualism left the structural conditions behind informalized labour, i.e. widespread rural and urban poverty and precarity amid large-scale unemployment and underemployment as well as almost non-existent opportunities for formal employment, out of the picture. It thereby also had the effects of normalizing structurally unequal access to legal protection, secure and lucrative spaces, and decent incomes, and depoliticized struggles around survival and accumulation. However, although this rendered legislation and law enforcement in many instances ineffective or even harmful, the letter and practice of the law nonetheless mattered to workers' struggles and collective organization, to which I now turn.

Notes

- 1 The chapter draws in part on Steiler (2021).
- 2 Conversation with Lawrence, a *mitumba* (second-hand clothes) trader, November 2016.
- 3 Conversation with Frederick, a *machinga*, November 2016.
- 4 Conversation with Clement, a cobbler and soft drink vendor, January 2015.
- 5 I return to Frederick's struggles in Chapter 5.
- 6 Conversation with Rashidi, a *machinga*, February 2015. Lately, the notion of the term *machinga* has shifted, no longer denoting hawking but owning a small business and thus has gained prominence in public discourse. See Chapter 6.
- 7 At the same time, unregistered and untaxed street trade also offers a lucrative business model for well-established owners of formalized shops. This trend has increased with the recent introduction of the *Wamachinga* IDs (see Chapter 6).
- 8 Interview with a municipal solicitor at Kinondoni Municipal Council, March 2015.
- 9 See note 8.
- 10 Conversation with Lazaro, a headwear vendor, February 2015.
- 11 Conversation with Clement; see note 4.
- 12 Interview with the Chairperson of the Community of Groups of Small Producers and Small Business (VIBINDO), December 2014; focus group discussion with board members of the Association of Businesspeople with Disabilities of the Region of Dar es Salaam (UWAWADAR), February 2015. See also the discussion on the *Machinga* Complex in Chapter 6.
- 13 Focus group discussion with board members of Migahawa, a food market vendor association, February 2015; conversations with Lawrence (see note 2) and Mama Sada, a fruit and vegetable vendor, December 2016.

- 14 These included Bibi Titi Mohamed Road, Bagamoyo Road, Uhuru Road and Morogoro Road, especially at the Ubungo intersection, as well as Mnazi Mmoja, Posta, and Kariakoo.
- 15 *Fundi* is a respectful title, usually referring to a man who has the knowledge and skill to manufacture or repair items.
- 16 Conversation with Bariki, Benjamin, Musa, Rodrick, and Yonah, coffee vendors, November 2016.
- 17 The term *mzungu* (pl. *wazungu*) can be translated as ‘wanderer’ and is generally used for foreigners, usually, however, persons with a light skin colour as well as speakers of English or German. A consequence of colonial and persisting hierarchies, *mzungu* also denotes affluence or a superior social position. The term can be used descriptively but also derisively or respectfully.
- 18 Interviews with the Director of the Gender, Children and Youth Development, Conservation, Hotel, Domestic and Allied Workers Union (CHODAWU), February 2015.
- 19 Conversations with Namiko, an employer, and Melinda, a domestic worker, December 2014.
- 20 Conversation with Emanuel, a domestic worker, March 2015.
- 21 Conversation with Bisuna, a domestic worker, March 2015.
- 22 Conversation with Neema, a domestic worker, December 2014.
- 23 Conversation with Grace, an employer, November 2014.
- 24 In East Africa, ‘Asian’ usually refers to ethnic Indians. In recent decades, the Chinese presence has grown but to date there appears to be no research on relations between Chinese employers and Tanzanian domestic workers.
- 25 Conversations and group discussions with domestic workers: Emanuel (see note 20); Neema (see note 22); Felecia, Jackline, Mama Amani, Mama Sarah, and Mercy, January 2015; Bisuna, Deborah, and Esther, March 2015.

4 Divisions of Labour

Class, Workers' Power, and Strategies of Struggle

The number of street traders and domestic workers in Tanzania is impressive, accounting for no fewer than two and a half million people, perhaps significantly more, and comprising a substantial part of the Tanzanian workforce; potentially, therefore, also a formidable political force. Yet, in both sectors, collective organization of workers either in trade unions or in other types of associations has been quite low. At the time of my research conducted between 2014 and 2016, the Conservation, Hotel, Domestic and Allied Workers Union (CHODAWU) counted 36,000 members, of whom 5,200 were domestic workers; the Tanzania Union of Industrial and Commercial Workers (TUICO) had 70,000 members, but only 1,500 small-scale traders among them. Until 2016, street vendors working without fixed locations, that is, those running stalls in non-designated market areas as well as *machingas*, were in practice largely excluded, although TUICO opened up its membership to mobile vendors after the policy change of President Magufuli in 2016. VIBINDO¹ Society, the umbrella organization for (mostly informal) microbusiness associations and the largest network of informal economy operators in the country, counted 65,000 individual members, of whom approximately one-third were engaged in small-scale trade, including the sub-sectors of manufacturing, vending, and services. While groups of street vendors and domestic workers had, in addition, been forming informal local associations, these usually had a small membership and a limited capacity, remained dispersed, and confined their activities to peer support and representation at the market or neighbourhood community level.²

These figures appear indicative of the obstacles to labour organization in a largely informalized economy, as does the general low union density in Tanzania, where just 3 per cent of all workers and 19 per cent of employees have union membership (Danish Trade Union Development Agency 2023). Of those holding union membership, the vast majority work in the formal economy, particularly in the public sector and industry. According to the Chairman of the Association of Tanzanian Employers (ATE), it is likely that a comparison of the workplaces of all registered union members with all formally registered enterprises would yield a more or less perfect match.³

DOI: 10.4324/9781003294122-4

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The difficulties but also possibilities for workers' collective organization in the informal economy, and their interlinkages with formal-informal boundary-making, are the main subject of this chapter. While the developments in the street trade and domestic work sectors in Tanzania are context-specific, they do provide some hints and responses to broader debates on questions of class, workers' power, and collective organization of an informalized workforce. In more general terms, then, the analysis in this chapter responds to the need to investigate in greater detail whether and to what extent people labouring in the informal economy present a distinct class, and the degree to which such a class might be able to transcend 'its many divisions and particular experiences of political, social and cultural repression' (Campling et al. 2016, 1758). Specifying the overall research question of this book to this aim, the chapter asks how conceptions and categorizations of 'informal' work affect workers' identity and solidarity, workers' power, and prospects for their collective organization. Framing the question in this way directs attention to the role of trade unions in organizing labour in the informal economy: a related question is whether, or to what extent, trade unions are 'representative of the "working poor"' and display 'an interest in organising the semi-formal, informal and unemployed sections of the working class' or whether they present 'a "labour aristocracy" of formal, core workers' (Pillay 2008, 54).

These concerns are timely: not only have more recent phenomena such as globalization, fragmentation of labour markets and international migration flows, neoliberalization, and the proliferation of digital and automation technologies contributed to precarization and informalization worldwide, they have also reconfigured the composition of the working class. As Nick Bernards (2018) argues, the apparent breakdown of institutions which historically shaped and supported the global labour movement—notably trade unions, social welfare systems, or tripartite governance structures—tends to overshadow the fact that the construction of the working class has always been a historical and essentially political process. Such processes of class-making involve gendered and racialized imaginaries as well as politically contested and shifting delineations between different forms of exploitation. While the political organization of the working class plays a key role, these processes take place simultaneously across multiple scales—at the global, international, state, and local level. The formation of a common class identity, solidarity, and, ultimately, collective struggle is thus enmeshed in political order and power relations, and neoliberalization as well as heightened informalization are but the most recent elements in such power shifts.

Informed by these reflections, in this chapter I consider class, workers' organization, and strategies of collective struggle as interlinked with processes of informalization. I do so by drawing on the distinction between structural and associational power by Erik Olin Wright, which has been fruitfully operationalized in earlier studies on informal economy workers (Rizzo 2013; Webster et al. 2017). With this approach I illustrate, first, how the formal-informal divide is embedded into class distinctions and

solidarity. Different meanings of informality thereby reflect workers' position in labour market hierarchies as well as the social position of their customers or employers, respectively. Second, conceptions and categorizations of (in)formal work are co-produced with efforts of collective organization. In turn, the inclusion or exclusion of specific types of workers under labour legislation greatly influence collective organization, and hence are central to processes of informalization. The chapter concludes with a discussion of how changing political discourses across different governance levels create openings for new alliances and shifts in the formal-informal delineation.

Structural power, class relations, and the formal-informal divide

Following Wright (2000), workers' power emanates from two potential sources. The first source is 'structural power', which is contingent upon the positioning of workers within the economy. Structural power consists of two subtypes: marketplace bargaining power and workplace bargaining power, referring to varying degrees of power which result from the location of workers within the economic system on the one hand or from the strategic location of a group of workers within a key industrial setting due to their role in the production process on the other. The position of street vendors and domestic workers, in terms of marketplace and workplace bargaining power, can be illustrated in an assortment of snapshots from Dar es Salaam.⁴

One quite typical account was provided by Ezekiel, an approximately 40-year-old fruit trader working in Kariakoo. Upon arriving in Dar es Salaam as a young man with only a primary school education, he had struggled for many years to set up his own business, which consisted of a sturdy bicycle with three large baskets attached to it. Eventually, he established himself in a steady network of supply and demand for mangoes, both whole and freshly cut, and other seasonal fruits which were his stock in trade. Running his business on a shoestring, Ezekiel had been able to accumulate sales profits, which he regularly invested in a *shamba* (small farm) he owned with his wife, who sold the farm produce at another market. Yet, despite his modest savings and good standing in the neighbourhood, he did not dare to take a Christmas vacation and, indeed, had not missed a day of work in years, as absence could mean losing his position in Kariakoo. The insecurities of his workplace and potential loss of his investments—due to drought, heavy rains, or crop pests, for instance—worried him deeply.

Unlike Ezekiel, Shafira, a *machinga* of about 20 years of age, was quite optimistic about her future. Six months earlier, she had started selling Chinese-manufactured, solar-powered phone chargers for a large company.⁵ She received no salary but was remunerated on commission; in addition, meeting the daily and weekly sales targets offered her the opportunity to move up the company's marketing strategy pyramid, with higher commission rates waiting at each level. Shafira considered herself a better saleswoman than the other

machingas working for the company and was confident that she would succeed despite the relentless competition. However, she admitted that it was tough; while she could make up for not meeting the target on one day, missing the target for two days in a single week could mean being demoted to a lower level of the pyramid, or dropping out of the race altogether.

Mercy, a domestic worker in her mid-thirties, had been able to gather experience with a variety of employers. Her first two jobs were arranged by an informal recruitment agency which had brought her from Tabora to be employed as a live-in domestic worker by middle-class families. She had liked her first workplace, a nice house with a kind employer, but after the first employer moved away, she had been sent to work for someone who was strict and did not pay her fairly. With no prospects of finding better work elsewhere, she had stayed with the same employer for six years, until she became engaged and moved in with her fiancée. Over the past nine years, Mercy had worked as a live-out cook and cleaner for several employers, most recently for a group of three young businessmen who shared an apartment in Kariakoo. She was happy with the work since she was allowed to take time off to attend to her family's needs whenever necessary. The boss, she said, appreciated that she was a good worker with excellent cooking skills; however, she was not pleased that she always had to wait a long time to be paid because her employer was frequently short of money.

The stories of Ezekiel, Shafira, and Mercy hint at the strict limits to the structural power of street traders and domestic workers: high levels of unemployment and underemployment lead to a steady supply of unskilled labour in and into the city, competition is harsh, and their informal labour is characterized by considerable precariousness. For street traders, whether self-employed like Ezekiel or in hidden employment like Shafira, job and income insecurity are common. Individual qualities such as trustworthiness, reliability, and kinship relations are helpful in maintaining good relations with employers as well as customers, yet the fear of being disposable characterized most of the accounts traders provided of their working lives. 'Too many traders', 'too much congestion', and 'too many people' were set phrases I heard over and over in conversations with *machingas* and other vendors about the situation in designated and non-designated trading areas.⁶

For domestic workers, the drawbacks of the steady supply of unskilled labour are mitigated by the close relations they have with their employers. Hiring a worker into their private sphere is a strong incentive for employers to build a high level of trust and long-term commitment, making domestic work relations less volatile than those on the street. In the interviews with employers and domestic workers, it transpired that being able to trust and rely on their domestic workers is vital for employers' own daily work and life routines and, having taught a domestic worker their preferences, they depend on the domestic worker's skills and loyalty. At the same time, as discussed in Chapter 3, the close kinship or other personal relationships often involved in domestic labour relations are a double-edged sword for domestic workers;

employers may assume a maternal or paternal role and personal responsibility, which may in effect deepen worker dependencies.⁷

While the economic relevance of the work and services they provide collectively as a sector is considerable, individual traders and domestic workers hold limited structural power, both vis-à-vis their employers and in the labour market. These findings reflect concerns in the literature about the strict limitations to workers' structural power in informalized economies with a large surplus labour force, specifically among unskilled labour. As others (Lindell 2010; Rizzo 2013; Webster et al. 2017) have noted, the limitations to workers' power have often led to pessimism, negative stereotyping, the dismissal of the relevance of class in discussions of informal economy workers, or the neglect of the informal economy in the field of labour studies. The global informal economy is seen to be characterized by fragmentation and volatility, and missing class consciousness (for a discussion, see Wright 2016).

Based on my observations from Dar es Salaam, I offer a more nuanced view, suggesting that structural power as well as questions of class antagonism and solidarity do not end at a boundary drawn between the formal and informal economy, but rather are enmeshed in its delineation. This argument requires us to revisit the notion of workers' power: Wright (2000) intends his definition of workers' power to apply to workers in an employment relationship, who can use their strategic location when bargaining with their employers—a condition with limited applicability to the informal economy and specifically the sectors of small-scale trade and domestic work, where work is performed either in own-account or hidden employment, or in private workplaces with personalized labour relations. However, Wright's conception is based on antagonistic relations between capital and labour, with the assumptions that employers belong to the dominant classes in a capitalist society and that workers can use their power to gain a higher status and privileges within the given class structure. Similarly, and largely irrespective of their actual employment relationship, informal economy workers' position and access to privileges and power depend on their relative importance to those in powerful social positions, be they employers, customers, or whole communities. In other words, for informal economy workers, structural power depends on the class position of those on the demand side of their labour, rather than deriving from their informal status as such. In turn, those buying informal economy workers' labour occupy varying class positions along the formal-informal continuum, placing them—to take up an earlier metaphor—in the 'formal' or the 'informal city'.

In Dar es Salaam alone, street traders provide inexpensive goods and services to hundreds of thousands of people every day. As explained in Chapter 3, there are considerable hierarchies among street vendors based on what and where they can sell. Yet the location of traders not only reflects their own professional advancement, but also the disparities in purchasing power and political leverage of their customers. Traders cater to all the residents of Dar es Salaam; their customers range from affluent middle-class customers, who

value the convenience of street traders' presence but who can also afford products and services from licensed providers, to poor, working-class customers for whom unlicensed street traders are often the only source of affordably priced necessities.

These differences surfaced when I discussed the importance of street trade with a businessman, a bank accountant, a lawyer, and a government official, all of whom commuted in their own cars from the suburbs to their offices in the Central Business District and largely viewed street trade as a convenience. They enjoyed spotting a good bargain when buying clothes, small electronics, or luxury items such as perfume from *machingas* who approached their offices or cars. Although each of them was sympathetic to street traders and considered street kitchens important to urban life and indispensable for the poor, they were, however, concerned about the low quality and hygiene of street food. For themselves, they preferred to buy meals and groceries from restaurants, shopping malls, or established food markets, although these sold their wares at significantly higher prices than the street traders. A quite different perspective emerged in my conversations with women and men working in informal employment in blue-collar sectors. On a number of occasions, people in low-income jobs, among them *bodaboda* (motorcycle taxi) and taxi drivers, a bus conductor, a shoe shiner, several young men hanging out on *kijiweni*,⁸ domestic workers, students, and quite a few *machingas*, explained how daily necessities such as drinking water, food, and second-hand clothes were unaffordable for them and their families unless they bought them from street traders. Street kitchens presented gathering places almost exclusively for members of the working or lower-middle class who worked in the informal economy.

The social position of their customers directly affected the legal status of the street traders, regulated in by-laws: small-scale traders such as the newspaper, coffee and ice cream vendors and shoe shiners selling goods and services to urban middle-class commuters were tolerated despite their lack of license or business registration and were rarely harassed by the municipal auxiliary police, even in the Central Business District. City officials feared that removing these convenient services, which were also regarded as traditional privileges by the middle-class urban workforce, would be highly unpopular among businesspeople and office workers, especially given the long waiting times at bus stops during rush hours.⁹ Conversely, the effects of clearance raids and traders' evictions on poorer customers tended to receive far less public attention. For example, in a series of articles following the large-scale, partly violent removal of street vendors during US President Barack Obama's visit to Tanzania in early July 2013, the English-language newspaper *The Citizen* commented on the hardships for the traders as well as the inconvenience to commuters of public transport interruptions, but made no mention of how the raids affected those who frequented the traders' unauthorized stalls (*The Citizen* 24 June 2013, 2 July 2013, 4 July 2013, 7 July 2013). In the same vein, in several interviews with government officials,

my respondents reacted with surprise and in a few instances with straightforward hostility when I asked about the importance of street traders to the city's poor.

It thus appeared that many of the shockwaves triggered by prohibiting traders in the city went unnoticed because their more drastic effects were felt by urban dwellers who could not make their voices heard in public decision-making. Traders' working-class customers, like the traders themselves, expressed feelings of powerlessness in trying to protest against the evictions by the authorities. Shared experiences of precarity and of exclusion from the 'formal city', frustration with government policies, and anger about perceived injustices were common themes in my conversations with groups of workers on *kijiweni* or in street kitchens. Notwithstanding competition and fragmentation, there existed a strong sense of solidarity among the workers, which came to bear not least in the situation of clearance raids by the municipal authorities: *bodaboda* drivers would send warning text messages to street vendors on spotting the vehicles of the auxiliary police force; taxi drivers blocked the roads to give the vendors a few more seconds to escape; security guards helped them to quickly hide their stacks of wares behind guardhouses or fences; and *Mama Lishes* gave leftover food for free to vendors whose goods had been confiscated.

These acts of solidarity and resistance were seldom articulated in terms of class struggle. As I discuss in the following sections below, the widespread association of 'worker' or 'working class' with formal employment, and strict limitations to workers' collective organization, hindered framing shared struggles as a matter of class relations. However, the mutual dependency and solidarity between street vendors and their customers corresponded with the observations of scholars who see labour precarity in the informal economy as tightly interwoven with other manifestations of social inequality, in Africa and elsewhere. Examples of this include the need for the urban poor to fall back on informal housing (Davis 2006; Obeng-Odoom 2011), informal and frequently unsafe food supplies (Battersby and Crush 2014; Resnick 2017); and off-the-books healthcare (Dickson 2011).

The domestic work sector presented a mirror image of this situation. As I described in the previous chapter, domestic workers found employment across the range of upper-, middle- and working-class households. The employment options available to them depended on their skills and previous experience, as well as on personal connections and kinship relations. Here, too, the social position of their employers affected the level of vulnerability experienced by the workers. High-income households tended to hire highly skilled, live-out domestic workers, whereas younger, less skilled workers with little work experience were commonly employed in live-in arrangements in low-income households. The employers' income and class status affected working conditions and pay: although exploitation and abuse of domestic workers were widespread across all social strata, domestic workers associated more affluent households with better working conditions and better pay.

Working for high-income employers often meant receiving higher wages, more respect for one's labour, and good references.¹⁰ Similarly, in its study of domestic work, the International Labour Organization (ILO) found that

employers who are able to pay domestic workers and pay them regularly live in permanent structures with good roofing materials, in secure settlement scheme[s] (e.g. low and medium density, surveyed), and have access to electricity, [a] fridge and clean water, among other measures of social status.

(Kiaga and Ackson 2016, 110)

In working-class and lower-income households, in contrast, the exploitation and vulnerability of domestic workers often reflected the socio-economic situation of the employer. The 'continuum of vulnerability' described in Chapter 3, along which domestic workers can be placed when taking into account intersecting factors such as gender, age, or marital status, applied to employers as well. Indeed, the vulnerability of the employer and the employee frequently overlapped, a fact that was frequently raised in my conversations with domestic workers who highlighted the extent to which the dependency between the employer and worker was mutual.¹¹ A domestic worker's poor living and working conditions, low pay, and lack of awareness of workers' rights often mirrored the employer's own economic and social hardships, in a series of 'spiral effects' of poor working conditions and underpayment (Kanyoka and Kiaga 2011, 18).

The point here is not to paint a euphemistic picture of egalitarian labour relations or to justify exploitation, least of all in cases where the employer plays out a position of power knowingly and intentionally; but rather to emphasize the correlation between the power position of domestic workers and the social position of their employers. My argument, however, goes one step beyond highlighting the link between the differences in structural power among street traders and domestic workers and the class differences among those who they serve. I further suggest that these differences concur with the boundaries between the formal and the informal economy. Despite the manifold nodes of exchange between the 'formal' and the 'informal city', and however malleable the lines between the two may be, people's lives in either type of city were shaped by class status and, at times, they were segregated from one another. The informality of *machingas* and other street traders was both boon and bane, offering them a distinct market, yet this came at the price of their (sometimes violent) exclusion from the privileges of formal recognition. To use Amin Kamete's (2018, 168) fitting expression, informality represented the 'lifeblood' sustaining African cities, making street trade an indispensable institution in Dar es Salaam and other cities in Tanzania; yet little of the vendors' life-sustaining relevance was known in the air-conditioned and neat spaces of the formal city where economic and political power was located. Similarly, it was more likely that the demand for loyal and trustworthy domestic workers could be converted

into workplace power when it was found in the ‘secure settlement schemes’ mentioned in the ILO report: comfortable residential areas that were home to the inhabitants of the formal city.

The variation in the positions of street traders and domestic workers indicates that the structural power and struggles of workers in the informal economy are not separate from the class structures of the formal economy but are connected and deeply contingent on them. The conceptual and ideational separation of ‘informal’ from ‘formal’ workers appears to be less an outcome of a pre-given, rigid material or legal basis than an outcome of, as well as a factor in, divisions between social classes as well as sub-divisions *within* the labouring class.

Associational power in an informal sector

The intersections of labour power with the formal-informal divide are also elementary to street traders’ and domestic workers’ associational power, the second source of workers’ power in Wright’s (2000) conception. Associational power, which describes various forms of power resulting from collective organization—be it in trade unions, political parties, works councils, or community organizations—is critical to strengthening the position of informal economy workers; at the same time, informalization is seen as presenting a principal challenge to traditional forms of organization, specifically trade unions. The literature lists the absence of clear labour relations between employers and workers, the lack or insufficiency of protective legal frameworks, labour market competition, and missing class consciousness and identity as key factors impeding collective organization in the informal economy (Webster et al. 2017). In addition, the willingness and ability of unions to reach out beyond their core membership of formal workers are scrutinized (Riisgaard 2022). The apparently vast challenges to informal economy organizing, and indeed the pervasiveness of informalization, call into question the focus on trade unions and underscore the need for alternative forms of organizing labour struggles, particularly in the global South (Atzeni 2021; for a discussion, see Rizzo 2013).

In the remainder of this chapter, I again seek to add some nuances to this narrative by offering an understanding of informalization as intertwined with the dynamic interplay of legal frameworks, collective organization, and conceptions and imaginaries that actors hold of the informal economy and of informal labour.¹² I suggest that previous literature assessing the potential for collective organization operates on a rather static understanding of the boundary between formal and informal work. Reflecting the entrenched formal-informal dualism, the challenge is thus variously conceived as organizing workers *within* the informal economy (e.g. Jason 2008; Rizzo 2013), *between* or *across* the formal-informal divide (Lindell 2008; Bonner and Spooner 2011), integrating informal work *into* formal frameworks or, conversely, expanding formal frameworks *into* the informal economy (Gallin

2001; Britwum 2018). This implies that difficulties for collective organization stem primarily from the informal nature of work in and by itself.

However, a brief historical review of Tanzanian labour struggles indicates the fluidity of this division. The colonial period saw the gradual emergence of semi-proletarian, casual, and permanent wage labour of varying skill levels. From the 1930s onwards, workers began to develop and subsequently rally around collective interests, building solidarity and strategies along the way (Shivji 1986). In the early days of anti-colonial labour struggles, solidarity between different groups of workers, including casual workers and those with permanent jobs, was very common. This changed significantly with the institutionalization of the labour movement in the 1950s, the increasing shifting of control over the trade unions into the hands of the state, and the organization of the state along socialist principles following independence. With the nationalization of the economy, the government became the main employer of Tanzanian workers, and remained so—at least officially—until the onset of the liberalization policies of the mid-1980s (Fischer 2013). Collective association and bargaining have thus rarely been a matter of formally recognized employee-employer relations or merely a workplace affair for the majority of Tanzanian workers, but rather of representations of workers' interests towards the colonial, post-independent, and socialist state.

This conception of the purpose of collective association resonated with the perspectives of the street vendors who I interviewed. For *machingas* as well as own-account street vendors, working both in undesignated and officially recognized market spaces, organization into small groups or informal associations offered *small-small* peer support in their daily struggles, and increased leverage in negotiations with the municipal authorities or market management. Similarly, vendors in hidden employment saw bad working conditions and low incomes less as the fault of their employers than of the overall problem of lacking opportunities for finding good work, hostile laws and by-laws, erratic law enforcement, and elite corruption, and hence the responsibility of the government. Shafira, the young *machinga* selling solar-powered chargers, for instance, did not consider the pyramid-selling scheme of the company she worked for exploitative, but as a chance to progress up the social ladder. King Said, a *machinga* who sold sunglasses on commission, was well aware that his employer, a shopkeeper running a boutique for fashion accessories in a nearby mall, received his labour power for free and was able to make additional profits thanks to King Said walking around in the hot sun. Nevertheless, he maintained that without his 'uncle', as he referred to the shopkeeper, he would have no work at all.¹³

These perceptions and sentiments often came with a keen awareness of social inequalities and hierarchies. While trust in the ruling party as well as the opposition parties was generally low—which changed with the overwhelming support for Magufuli, who many street traders saw as 'their' president—they were openly supportive of redistributive and anti-corruption policies that promised to benefit 'common people', that is, low-income

Tanzanians. However, the majority of them saw no point in collective organization for political purposes. In their view, membership of political parties or other forms of political organization was reserved for the privileged upper classes; they also believed that membership in trade unions was restricted for workers with formal employment contracts. This assessment was reinforced by the common categorization of street traders, regardless of their actual employment situation and income status, as small-scale entrepreneurs. Thus, *machingas* and other vendors often liked to refer to themselves as *wafanya-biashara* (businessmen or -women) rather than *wafanyakazi* (workers), a conception that seemed to rule out union membership.¹⁴

The confusion about how to categorize small-scale traders, and the implications of their status for trade union membership affected the union leadership as well. Interviews with representatives of TUICO and the trade union federation, the Trade Union Congress of Tanzania (TUCTA), were permeated with bewilderment and uncertainty over how to recruit and organize street vendors. In response to my question ‘Why do you think so few street traders are members of the trade union?’ some unionists explained that street trade was a relatively new phenomenon that had taken the unions by surprise. This explanation was unsatisfactory, given that market traders and *machingas* had been a prominent feature of Tanzanian cities for decades. Others pointed towards sector-specific conditions which complicated the unions’ efforts, such as the mobility and volatility of street vending. A recurring explanation hinged on the structural limitations of the Tanzanian unions: over the past three decades, they had been forced to confront the drastic shifts from obligatory to voluntary union membership and from a state-run to a market economy; they were further challenged by fluctuating and dwindling membership and limited financial and staff capacities, and had to straddle an uncomfortable position between the government’s continuing influence and control and the need to establish themselves as independent and distinct civil society actors, all of which restricted their activities.¹⁵

However, the perhaps biggest challenge to collective organization, in the view of trade union and ILO representatives, was informality. This applied not only to the sector of street vending but to worker representation and protection across Tanzania’s vast informal economy more broadly. Informality thereby presented a cluster of problems, as the following quote by an expert at the ILO Country Office indicated:

What’s the right to strike if you have no contract? You may have the right to collective bargaining, but if you’re self-employed, who do you complain to? If you have no business license, how do you claim your rights? The goal is to organize informal workers in groups, so that they can speak with one voice.¹⁶

While the commitment to reach out to informal economy workers was frequently emphasized during the interviews, this had, in practice, only slowly moved into the focus of official statements and the activities of the trade

unions. The needs of informal economy workers were not well understood by the unions. In an earlier study of union engagement with the informal economy, Gundula Fischer (2013) noted that despite the pervasiveness of informal labour, the goal of recruiting informal economy workers found its way into TUCTA's Role and Membership Profile only in 2004, without a strategy for doing so. In her interviews with trade unionists, Fischer also detected some misunderstandings and stereotypical thinking concerning the needs of workers in the informal economy, coupled with negative attitudes persisting from the socialist era when work outside of state regulation was denigrated. One union representative is cited saying,

What they need—those people in the informal sector—they need to know something about business, they need to know how they can get loans, how they can administrate these kinds of things. And that is not what the unions are experts in.

(Fischer 2013, 152)

TUICO's engagement with street vending was severely restricted by adverse legislation. The union was hesitant to funnel its sparse resources into more cost-intensive measures due to the legal insecurity and hostility in the sector. For instance, in 2010, one of TUICO's major efforts consisted of setting up a large tent for unlicensed traders at Kariakoo market that was intended to protect them from the weather, meanwhile making the presence of the union known in the area. The tent, which TUICO had purchased at the considerable cost of 12 million TZS (6,000 USD), was removed overnight by the Ilala Municipality soon afterwards. TUICO claims never to have received compensation for the loss of its property, and subsequently reduced its more ostentatious activities in the sector. Thereafter, the trade union focused on providing occupational training workshops for groups of market traders in different cities.¹⁷

When conducting my interviews a few years later, I found that the earlier reluctance had given way to a cautious enthusiasm. However, attempts to identify, recruit, and organize informal economy workers remained experimental and characterized by considerable insecurity and trial and error. TUICO concentrated on conducting surveys among market traders to learn about their needs, providing consultancy and training on occupational health and safety, and addressing the issue of income insecurity. The slow progress in organizing workers outside the unions' core constituency also led to frustration. One representative, who wished to remain anonymous, criticized the unions' lack of initiative. In his view, the leadership of TUCTA and its affiliates lacked flexibility, pragmatism, and the will to engage with the vast presence of informal employment in Tanzania. They remained tied to traditional structures and ideas of worker representation and therefore failed to see the benefits of building a large membership base in the informal economy. To him, the assumption that organizing in the informal economy

required more or different resources than established trade union activism in the formal economy served as an excuse to remain passive; nor did he endorse placing blame on adverse legislation. Indeed, he proposed that if the unions were more proactive in organizing and representing street vendors, the government in turn would be open to negotiating the by-laws concerning street trade, since organizing street traders also had the potential to bring order to the streets and increase revenue collection.

The representative's assessment in many regards reflected the criticism levelled at the establishment of a labour aristocracy by the more pessimist literature mentioned above and, unsurprisingly, contradicted the official line I heard in other interviews with TUICO, TUCTA, and ILO representatives. Regardless of its validity, the representative's statements raised two issues worth highlighting for the present argument in this chapter. First, the distinctive label of 'informal' labour had for many years paralysed the unions' strategies, with regard to street vendors as well as to other sectors. To some extent at least, the trade unions appeared to struggle with the same 'problem of mind-set' another representative considered widespread among street traders, that is, the limited conception 'that a worker is an employee'. Changing this stereotype was considered the 'biggest challenge' for TUICO.¹⁸

Second, the representative's criticism pointed towards the conundrum that informality, as a legal and political category, posed to the unions. A key benefit of union membership, the provision of legal advice and representation, could not be made available to street vendors: the union could represent workers only in terms of labour rights issues but, as street traders were not recognized as workers and their labour was indeed criminalized, the hands of the union were tied. Vendors working without formal registration and licenses simply lacked the legal basis for making claims, regardless of whether they were own-account workers or in hidden employment. Their exploitation by ruthless employers, and their precarious working and living conditions, did not fall within existing legislation concerning workers' rights. In contrast, other violations of street traders' rights—unlawful confiscation of their property or abuse by the authorities, for instance—were categorized as human rights violations. These, however, fell outside of the expertise and competence of trade unions.¹⁹

Thus, the informality of street vending presented a catch-22 situation: the trade union had no legal base for representing street vendors, while collective organization was seen as an important first step to address at least the most immediate effects of lacking legal recognition. TUICO tried to address this gap by expanding the legal expertise and mandate of the union into the informal economy:

We have a legal unit, but it [has not yet been] incorporated into the informal sector. We're only now starting to integrate legal work and the informal sector. This is one of the problems we need to deal with. We have members in the informal sector, so we need to stand for them.

Therefore, our people in the legal department need to understand the laws and by-laws to teach and train them.²⁰

This approach still conceptualized the informal economy as separate from the union's core activities, keeping the aim of reaching out into new territory within the restriction of a formal-informal dualism. The policy change under President Magufuli in late 2016 allowed the union to go beyond legal advocacy within the informal economy. It permitted TUICO to contest the legal-illegal, formal-informal boundaries by starting a social dialogue and recruitment of street vendors with the goal of representing their interests to the municipal and national governments. TUICO hoped that this would ultimately result in the vendors' and TUICO's views being heard in the making of national laws and municipal by-laws concerning the regulation of small-scale trade, thereby paving the way for the formalization of street vending on the traders' terms. However, without clear legislation defining street vendors as workers with rights, both in terms of labour rights and their rights to use public spaces, the union was faced with considerable insecurity given the heterogeneity of the sector:

There are those who come from rural areas with no capital and education, we need to support them, they need the right [to] free movement, to find a place to make money. Some of them grow and get some capital and pay tax, these should be treated differently from the others. We hope that they graduate [formalize] and then become our members. But there are not only those employed by shopkeepers, but also those employed by *machingas*! How can they be sure of their jobs tomorrow? Some of them are ready to register and pay taxes, but they want to be recognized ... This is a matter of legislation.²¹

Consequently, for the time being, TUICO's efforts remained in practice largely confined to mitigating the effects of vendors' exclusion, rather than challenging the lack of legal and social protection, and hence the 'informal' status of street vending, itself. Overall, it appeared that collective organization was conceptualized and imagined as intrinsically different from that in formal sectors with more standard employment relations.

Associational power and the power of law

The legal insecurity and the difficulties facing the collective organization of street traders can be contrasted with the developments in the domestic work sector. Although domestic workers became legally recognized only in 2004, throughout the history of domestic labour in Tanzania, the status of domestic workers as workers had long been acknowledged. Regardless of whether it involved predominantly male domestic workers serving in white, upper-class households during the colonial era, or was characterized by a predominantly

female workforce in middle- and lower-income households in more recent decades, domestic workers never faced the hostility of public officials in the same way that street vendors did (see Chapter 2). Furthermore, domestic workers were collectively organized relatively early on, initially in the Washermen and House Boys' Association and later in the Domestic and Hotel Workers Union, with the latter playing no small role in pre-independence labour struggles despite their scattered workplaces (see Shivji 1986, 162–165; Bujra 2000, 157–162).

However, both before and after its inclusion in labour legislation, workers in the domestic work sector remained largely inaccessible to trade unions. Comparable to the difficulties in reaching street vendors, the challenges for the unions were multiple: the specific nature of domestic work, its conflation with family and kinship relations, its seclusion in private homes, and the low public recognition of reproductive household and care work as paid work, all of which fed into longstanding perceptions of domestic work as incompatible with regulations for other kinds of labour. Similarly to the street trade sector, these issues were intertwined with conceptions of formality and informality. In 2006, an ILO report stated that

looking back over the past ten years, CHODAWU acknowledges that there are a number of challenges which remain in organizing workers in the domestic sector. The very fact that it is mostly located in the informal sector remains the greatest difficulty facing any trade union. In addition the perception of the general public tends to be that domestic work cannot be defined as 'work' in a formal sense.

(ILO 2006, 51)

Here, not only is informality seen as a problem in and by itself, the statement also shows that while it is not at all clear whether the division between 'formal' and 'informal' work is a legal or practical matter or merely a matter of public perception, it is nonetheless perceived as having a real effect on union efforts.

Ten years after the report was written, the need to overcome these dividing lines lay still at the heart of the efforts of CHODAWU, the ILO, and the local branch of the International Domestic Workers' Federation (IDWF). To the officials and union representatives who were interviewed, overcoming the informality of domestic work thereby meant fighting multiple overlapping battles: improving legislation, alongside the ratification of the Convention on Domestic Workers (C189); increasing awareness of rights and labour standards; raising the public profile and recognition of domestic work and of workers; strengthening law enforcement mechanisms and effectively protecting workers from abuse and exploitation; and organizing workers collectively.²²

Notwithstanding these multiple challenges, the legal recognition of domestic work was making inroads into the informality of the sector, thereby challenging and changing its meaning. For domestic workers who were

approaching the union for legal assistance, the clear stipulations in labour law gave considerable leverage to CHODAWU in its role as a mediator. When it came to the settlement of labour disputes, union representatives emphasized that the legal foundations placing domestic workers on the same footing as other workers were central to the union's efforts. In other sectors, the trade unions faced enormous difficulties in their attempts to register the informally employed and address their complaints, and rights violations had to be taken to a civil rather than a labour court. With domestic workers, however, the Deputy General Secretary of CHODAWU stressed that 'we do not only talk to [the employers] in simple words, but the employer is shown the text of the law'. Since the law stipulated the employers' obligations towards the worker and the burden of proof was placed on the employer, once a case was taken to the union, the clear language of the law usually compelled employers to comply before the dispute was taken before a labour court. On this legal foundation, labour courts would almost always rule in favour of the worker.²³

With the solid backing of labour legislation, CHODAWU and the IDWF were further able to focus on the collective organizing of workers and on increasing their bargaining power. As I discuss in more detail in the next chapter, over the years CHODAWU, the IDWF, and the ILO Country Office had staged several campaigns with the goal of raising awareness of domestic workers' enforceable labour rights. These campaigns promoted awareness among both employers and employees about regulations governing the minimum wage, working hours, maternity leave, decent accommodation for live-in workers, and so forth. They included local and countrywide campaigns to reach out to domestic workers and their employers, such as an essay competition, radio interviews, and the dissemination of information in newspapers and leaflets and on bumper stickers in both English and Swahili (see Chapter 5).

Although progress was slow, and limited resources for the campaigns as well as widespread disregard for the labour of domestic workers remained enormous future challenges, the efforts yielded modest but positive results. Union membership among domestic workers was growing slowly, rights violations were reported and taken for arbitration more often and, across the country, local networks and associations of domestic workers began to proliferate.²⁴ With increasing frequency, domestic workers claimed space and made their voices heard at events, public assemblies, or demonstrations, apprising the wider public of the significance of their labour, or calling attention to the needs of specifically vulnerable groups in the sector, such as child domestic workers (e.g. Tanzania Today 11 May 2017).²⁵

In the eyes of rights activists, however, the most important achievement of the campaigns was the gradual but far-reaching transformation in public perceptions of domestic work. Based on the foundations of existing laws, domestic workers themselves were becoming increasingly aware of their rights and were using this knowledge to bargain with their employers from a

strengthened position. Through associating and networking with others, they also saw themselves as less isolated and more as a part of the labour force:

In Tanzania, the unemployment is high, especially among women, so women used to take any job offered to them. But because of new awareness, they know that your right is A, B, C, D despite your poverty. The domestic worker will ask: how much are you going to pay me? The question will strike [astound] the employer, then the negotiation can start.²⁶

Changes could also be observed in the attitudes of employers and the wider public. While the social standing of domestic work as a profession had eroded as it was increasingly being performed by low-skilled and female workers (see Chapter 3), this drift appeared to be reversing. The mistreatment of domestic workers was being more openly discussed and was deemed unacceptable in public opinion. Several cases in Tanzania and abroad in which domestic workers won lawsuits against their upper-class employers had made the headlines in Tanzanian media, presenting success stories and increasing the visibility of CHODAWU and the IDWF. Considerable public attention had also been paid to a report by Human Rights Watch highlighting the plight of female Tanzanian domestic workers in the Middle East and raising the issue of workers' human and labour rights (Human Rights Watch 2017). In the media and in public commentary, the consensus was that such rights violations could not be tolerated; newspaper articles explicitly referred to and highlighted the importance of the Labour and Employment Relations Act as well as of C189, and informed the public about the benefits of trade union membership (Mwananchi 17 June 2013; *The Citizen* 17 October 2017).

In marked contrast to street trade, the growing recognition of domestic workers, alongside their increased collective organization in union structures as well as in associations, hence presented one of the recent success stories for the struggling Tanzanian trade unions. The juxtaposition of domestic work with the street vending sector also showed that law mattered: not only were labour laws and municipal by-laws intentionally conceptualized in a way that created areas of (in)formality, as Andreas Bieler and Jörg Nowak (2021, 1326) note about the role of law more generally; legal frameworks, even if all but impossible to enforce, also set the conditions for workers' association and collective organization, and hence for workers' agency in contesting and shaping processes of (in)formalization.

Shifting conceptions of informal work and new alliances

In line with previous research (Potts 2008; Bernards 2018), this book has so far argued that the concept of the 'informal sector' itself is an international construct, which has heavily impacted the activities of the Tanzanian

government and unions. These and other Tanzanian actors are influenced by cooperation with international partners, among them international and non-governmental organizations, development agencies, and Western trade unions, as is reflected not least in labour legislation which is largely modelled after the experience and norms of Western industrialized countries. As outlined in the introductory chapter, such globalizing processes rarely work in one-directional or uniform ways but remain contested, resulting in locally specific configurations (see Hart 2002). In the same way, changes in the legal boundaries of the informal economy as well as in public discourses on informal labour do not occur in isolation, but in the context of wider historical and political developments in the international arena. Internationally prevalent conceptions of informal labour and its governance have cross-fertilized with emerging alliances for street traders and domestic workers in Tanzania. The struggle of informal economy workers to collectively organize and improve their working and living conditions has taken place within a fluctuating political climate and shifting alliances.

From the late 1990s, informal activities began to enjoy greater acceptance in government policies, and were increasingly seen as offering the potential for employment creation and economic growth. In common with other African countries, the discourse of ruling elites on economic informality in Tanzania underwent a shift from a hostile to a more welcoming stance, although the latter remains conditional and tied to specific conceptions of entrepreneurship, productivity, growth, and formalization, as I discuss in more detail in the following two chapters. However, many of my interviewees pointed out that the dualism between a modern formal sector and a backwards and unproductive informal sector stubbornly continued to steer perceptions and decision-making by the elites.²⁷ This was reflected not only in legislation and law enforcement, but also in the unions' still hesitant and limited approach to informal economy workers. It also mirrored a deeply rooted—albeit ahistorical—conception of union membership as confined to employees in a formal employment relationship, and of the labour movement as synonymous with formal state and union structures. The neglect and exclusion of the majority of Tanzanian workers, separated by the formal-informal divide, was further fuelled by the institutional weakness of the formerly state-run trade unions and the sidelining of labour- and class-based struggles by a liberal and human rights-based agenda following liberalization (McQuinn 2011).

The policy shift under Magufuli, which gave a new boost to the collective organization of street vendors, coincided with an emerging international interest in street vending as a labour and workers' rights issue, driven among others by Women in the Informal Economy: Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO), a research and advocacy group which works closely with the ILO, and StreetNet International, a network of street vendor organizations of which TUICO became an affiliate. As street vending was officially welcomed for employment creation, it could also be framed in the context of decent

work and improved working conditions. In consultation with WIEGO, the ILO and StreetNet, TUICO extended its engagement in the sector by establishing branch offices at markets and collaborating with existing informal associations of market vendors.²⁸

These shifting conceptions of ‘formal’ and ‘informal’ continued to inform collective organization strategies. In 2016, WIEGO visited and documented the work of TUICO’s branch office at the recently reopened Mchikichini market in Dar es Salaam, which had burned down three years earlier. WIEGO’s report applauds the membership and integration of 65 traders with TUICO, as it enhances their negotiating power with the municipality. For WIEGO, Mchikichini market is indicative of a success in the making:

What’s interesting is that [TUICO] has nearly 100,000 members—the vast majority of whom are from formal sector entities, including supermarkets, the finance sector, services—including call centers—and in the industrial sector. The informal worker section stands alongside these workers with nearly 2,000 members. The bridging of the informal and formal sector in solidarity for workers’ rights shows the power and possibility of unionizing across divides.

(Carr 2016, n.p.)

This account, despite its optimism, emphasizes persistent divides alongside rapprochement. The same ambiguity appeared to characterize collective organization and the building of solidarity among Tanzanian workers: while advertised as focusing on collaboration, a day-long workshop for market trader representatives organized by TUICO in late 2016, which I was invited to attend, mainly consisted of presentations on the foundations of the trade union and its strategies by union officials, with the traders taking a listening role. Much of the content of the presentations covered the basics of trade union work, which did not differ greatly from established formats in Europe or elsewhere. The few comments and questions by the market vendors, on the other hand, were primarily concerned with concrete improvements at their workplaces. Nonetheless, participants on both sides considered the workshop a success, as it had provided a stage for networking and initial exchange. Conducting a study on trade union engagement with the street vending sector a few years later, Lone Riisgaard (2022) likewise noted how institutionally established hierarchies, attitudes, and expectations continued to hamper collective organization but were nonetheless in flux.

Shifting conceptions and attitudes towards informal labour also affected the relationship between TUICO and other associations. Before 2016, TUICO’s approach had conflicted with that of VIBINDO Society, the umbrella organization for mostly informal microbusiness associations and the largest network of informal economy operators in the country, which on several occasions had been successful in stalling (but not stopping) market

shutdowns and evictions. Contrary to TUICO, VIBINDO represented street vendors as owners of small-scale business, not as workers, focusing on market inclusion rather than labour rights. The two organizations, one with a primarily formal membership base, the other representing informal associations, disagreed not only over the categorization of street vendors but unsurprisingly also over whether economic informality or formal regulation presented the main problem for street vendors. These fundamentally different conceptions of informal street vending impeded cooperation between TUICO and VIBINDO, and instead led each organization to see the other one as competition.²⁹ Following changes in the political environment, TUICO and VIBINDO renewed their dialogue and attempts to coordinate their strategies.³⁰ In 2019, TUICO and VIBINDO signed a memorandum of understanding and agreed on a division of labour in representing vendors (Riisgaard 2022).

The renewed interest for collaboration also gave new impetus to street vendors' own associations. Stationary traders working at designated markets, who paid fees to local government authorities, had already formed small associations to represent their interests in negotiations at the market, ward or district level, but found themselves powerless when confronted with market shutdowns, relocations, or hostile by-laws decided at the municipal, regional, or national level.³¹ Magufuli's stance made it possible for vendor associations to become recognized and enter negotiations at higher government levels. Hawkers, who were previously criminalized and had no possibility of collective representation, were now able to organize at various levels. For instance, the Kariakoo Wamachinga Association (KAWASSO) expanded from its local base in Kariakoo, a busy market area in Dar es Salaam, to a national association comprising 7,000 members as of 2023, using a web-based interactive portal to register members from all over Tanzania (Steiler and Nyirenda 2021; George et al. 2023). In particular, Shilika la umoja wa machinga Tanzania (SHIUMA), a national hawker association, aimed to distinguish itself from both VIBINDO's focus on market traders and TUICO. SHIUMA followed Magufuli and VIBINDO in presenting street vendors as self-employed business owners rather than workers, but emphasized the shared interests of mobile hawkers as opposed to other small-scale traders (see SHIUMA 2019). Although the collective organization of street vendors has thus grown and diversified, there is still considerable contestation over the meaning and implications of informality for street vendors, especially as legislation remains unclear on the matter.

In the domestic work sector, changes in attitudes towards workers and in the conceptualization of informality likewise presented a dynamic interplay of international, national, and local alliances and efforts. The Labour and Employment Relations Act of 2004, which provided the legal grounds for collective association and labour rights campaigns in the sector, was the outcome of negotiations between the Tanzanian government and trade unions with international and non-governmental organizations, building on

earlier campaigns on child labour during the 1990s which had highlighted the issue of domestic work. This took place against the background of an emerging international movement, with campaigns run by domestic workers' associations, most notably in India and Latin America, calling attention to the plight and vulnerability of domestic workers around the world. The (re-) emergence of paid domestic and care work in industrialized countries, often performed by female migrant workers, caught the attention of Western stakeholders as well, and led to domestic work's being addressed as an issue of women's participation in globalizing labour markets and concomitant protection gaps (Tomei 2011). Campaigning led to the foundation of the International Domestic Workers Network (later the International Domestic Workers Federation) as well as to the adoption of the 'Decent Work for Domestic Workers' Convention at the International Labour Conference in 2011.

With the strong backing of the ILO Country Office, following the adoption of the Convention, the Tanzanian government, TUCTA, the ATE and civil society organizations launched a Tripartite Plus Plan of Action for decent work. CHODAWU received support in coordinating its actions with the ILO Country Office, the regional branch of the IDWF as well as international and local NGOs. In addition to workshops, training, and the recruitment of domestic workers as members of CHODAWU, several nationwide media campaigns raised awareness of labour rights and decent work for domestic workers, influencing perceptions of the wider public and that of domestic workers themselves (see also Chapter 5). Furthermore, and as mentioned above, multiple local and grassroots associations of domestic workers have emerged, which organize public assemblies or demonstrations, campaign for the ratification of the convention, and call attention to the significance of their work as well as to the needs of specifically vulnerable groups in the sector. Domestic workers' rights and working conditions are thereby often connected with related issues, for instance, gender equality, gender-based violence, or child poverty and children's rights.³² In perhaps one of the most visible signs of the success of such collective organization, a group of domestic workers was invited to meet members of the Parliamentary Committee of Social Welfare.³³

Conclusion

The analysis in this chapter indicates that questions of class, workers' power, and the collective organization of informal economy workers are not well addressed by viewing them as distinct from the formal economy. Rather, the experiences in street vending and domestic work, although context-specific to Tanzania, support the claim that divisions among the workforce both transcend and interlink with shifting categorizations of work and of labour relations as 'informal'. Although both domestic workers and street vendors had low structural power, not least due to the oversupply of unskilled labour,

their marketplace and workplace bargaining power also depended on their relative position in the urban labour market which, in turn, reflected the social class position of their employers and customers. Their associational power derived from the (formal) legal frameworks regulating the two sectors, the attitudes and strategies of both formal unions and informal associations towards workers, and was informed by prevailing conceptions of legality and of the employment relations in the two sectors. In each case, changing political and legal contexts—the inclusion of domestic work in the Labour and Employment Relations Act and the consecutive promotion of C189, and the policy turn under Magufuli—converged with wider trends in shifting discourses on informal work, enabling the emergence of new local and transnational alliances that could further challenge notions of informality. Class struggles, workers' power, and collective organization thus did not take shape separately from the (in)formalization of labour in the two sectors but were enmeshed in these processes. Conceptions of informal work also informed the promotion of workers' rights, the subject of the next chapter.

Notes

- 1 Jumuiya ya Vikundi vya Wenye Viwanda na Biashara Ndogondogo (Community of Groups of Small Producers and Small Business).
- 2 Interviews with the Deputy General Secretary of the Conservation, Hotel, Domestic and Allied Workers Union (CHODAWU), February 2015; the Gender and OHS Department of TUICO, January 2015; and the Chairperson of VIBINDO, December 2014.
- 3 Interview with the Executive Director of the ATE, February 2015.
- 4 Conversations with Ezekiel, a fruit vendor, November 2016; Shafira, a *machinga*, November 2016; and Mercy, a live-out domestic worker, January 2015.
- 5 Like many other casually hired *machingas* working for large, semi-formalized retailers, Shafira did not want to reveal any details about her employer.
- 6 Even when assuming that, in many instances, this was the result of a common mistranslation in which Swahili-speakers conflate 'too many' with 'very many', the wording nonetheless indicates the traders' awareness of being part of the surplus labour force.
- 7 Conversations with Namiko, Melinda's employer, December 2014; Grace, Neema's employer, November 2014 (both of whom were introduced in Chapter 3); focus group discussion with Felecia, Jackline, Mama Amani, Mama Sarah, and Mercy, domestic workers, January 2015.
- 8 The term refers to a corner of a street or building and is used to describe a sidewalk spot serving as an informal job fair where the jobless wait to be hired.
- 9 Interview with the Chairperson of VIBINDO, February 2015.
- 10 Focus group discussion with Bisuna, Deborah, and Esther, domestic workers, March 2015.
- 11 Focus group discussions with domestic workers, see notes 7 and 10.
- 12 The following sections draw on Steiler (2023).
- 13 Conversations with Shafira, see note 4; King Said, a *machinga*, March 2015.
- 14 The terms 'employee', 'worker', and 'labourer' are used synonymously in Swahili, *mfanyakazi* (lit. a person doing work). *Mfanyakazi*, however, does not usually refer to street traders, who are commonly considered *wafanyabiashara*, 'businessmen/women' (lit. people doing business) or *wafanyabiashara ndogo ndogo*, 'micro-

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- entrepreneurs' (lit. people doing business small-small). I say more about the categorizations of 'entrepreneurs' and 'workers' in Chapters 5 and 6.
- 15 Interviews with the Director of Economics and Research, TUCTA, April 2014; the Director of Occupational Health and Safety, Environment and HIV/Aids, May 2014; the Assistant General Secretary of TUICO, February 2015.
 - 16 Interview with the HIV/Aids National Project Coordinator for the ILO, May 2014.
 - 17 Interview with the Gender and OHS Department of TUICO, January 2015.
 - 18 Interview with the Assistant General Secretary of TUICO, February 2015.
 - 19 Interview with the Project Officer of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, February 2015.
 - 20 Interview with TUICO, see note 17.
 - 21 Interview with the Head of Commercial Sector at TUICO, December 2016.
 - 22 Interviews with the Director of Gender, Children and Youth Development at CHODAWU, February 2015; the Regional Coordinator for the IDWF, March 2015; the National Programme Officer, Domestic Workers, at the ILO, March 2015.
 - 23 Interview with the Deputy General Secretary of CHODAWU, February 2015.
 - 24 Interviews with CHODAWU and the IDWF; see note 22.
 - 25 Interview with the Director of Government, Corporate and Environmental Watch, Legal and Human Rights Centre, January 2015.
 - 26 Interview with the IDWF, see note 22.
 - 27 Interviews with the ILO, see note 16; FES, see note 19; an economist at the Ministry of Labour and Employment, February 2015.
 - 28 Interview with the Head of Services and Consultancy Sector at TUICO, December 2016.
 - 29 Interviews with VIBINDO, see note 2; TUICO, see note 18.
 - 30 Interviews with the Chairperson of VIBINDO, December 2016; TUICO, see note 21.
 - 31 Focus group discussions with board members of Migahawa, February 2015; and of Umoja wa Wajasiliamali Walemavu Mkoa wa Dar es Salaam (UWAWADAR—Association of Businesspeople with Disabilities of the Region of Dar es Salaam), February 2015.
 - 32 Interview with a Programme Officer at KIWOHEDE, March 2015.
 - 33 Interviews with CHODAWU and the IDWF, see note 22.

5 Setting Work to Rights

Legal Subjects, Rights, and Responsibilities

This chapter discusses how interventions that allocate rights as well as responsibilities to people in irregular labour relations are based on specific, often conflicting conceptions of the informal economy, and how such conceptions, in turn, shape legal and political reforms that remake the boundaries between formal and informal work. A defining characteristic of the informal economy, namely the lack of workers' legal and social protection, has prompted multiple actors at the international, national, transnational, and local level to devise a wide array of interventions to promote workers' rights. The promotion of rights is thereby seen to hold a double promise, offering to improve the working lives of the poor while simultaneously fostering economic and social development, with each goal being closely tied to formalization (Trebilcock 2005; Muchichwa 2017; Ashiagbor 2019). Although, as I illustrate in this chapter in more detail, actors may diverge considerably from each other in their respective conceptions of rights, development, and formalization, their rights-based agendas largely concur on a dualist and residual understanding that places the informal economy outside of formal frameworks. Catchphrases such as 'protecting the unprotected' (Gallin 2001; WIEGO 2003), 'Making the Law Work for Everyone' (UNDP 2008), or 'Making Decent Work a Reality' (ILO 2013b) indicate the bottom line common to these approaches: rights and laws are absent from the informal economy which therefore needs to be brought into the reach of formal regulation. As argued in the previous chapters in this volume, such dualist conceptions obscure the politics surrounding the formal-informal delineation and the mechanisms through which certain groups of workers and certain forms of work become excluded from formal frameworks. Rather than following the portrayal of the informal economy as a pre-given blank canvas onto which rights-based approaches are neutrally applied, in this chapter I aim to highlight the role of specific interventions in (re)casting informal economy workers as legal subjects and (in)formalizing work along the allocation of specific rights and responsibilities.

The two perhaps most prominent interventions on rights for workers in irregular and unprotected labour relations in the international arena are the Decent Work Agenda (DWA), advocated by the International Labour

DOI: 10.4324/9781003294122-5

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Organization (ILO), and the Legal Empowerment of the Poor (LEP) approach, promoted by the Peruvian economist Hernando de Soto and later taken up by the United Nations Development Programme's Commission for Legal Empowerment of the Poor (UNDP-CLEP). Both have been deployed in quite exemplary fashion in Tanzania. The former is a key component of the activities of the ILO Country Office and Tanzanian trade unions, specifically in the domestic work sector, where it is central to the commitment to improving workers' rights by the ILO and its partners. The latter came to be influential in the Property and Business Formalization Programme, known by its Swahili acronym MKURABITA (Mpango wa Kurasimisha Rasilimali na Biashara za Wanyonge). Although the aim of business formalization was difficult to reconcile with street vending prior to 2016 due to the criminalization thereof, and the introduction of street vendor ID cards in 2018 somewhat bypassed regular business licensing procedures, as the main instrument steering the formalization of businesses as well as of urban and rural property, MKURABITA has also been largely responsible for the integration of small-scale trade into the formal economy.

The LEP and the DWA each list a set of rights that address state regulation of informal economic activities and their integration into the formalized market economy. However, as Milja Kurki expounds, rights agendas are never merely technical undertakings, they are contested and politicized: '[human] rights agendas should be conceived as deeply ingrained in political and normative debates about what constitutes "the good life" and debates between different approaches to perceiving the "good life"' (2011, 1581–1582). Drawing on the arguments of Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis (1986), Kurki suggests directing attention towards the politico-economic and conflict-laden implications of rights: 'The economy, then, far from being apolitical, or a sphere of mere negative rights (to participate in the free economy), as many liberals have argued, is in fact the centre ground for clashes and fights over rights' (2011, 1580). A decisive matter in these contestations is the extent to which rights confirm or challenge the liberal separation of politics and economics, and shift the control over markets to political actors (2011, 1584).

Similarly, scholars in human and labour rights law challenge liberal notions of rights, according to which civil, political, economic, and social rights are non-conflictual and complementary, and point towards fundamental ideational differences and diverging political and social priorities at the roots of these rights (Leary 1996; Mantouvalou 2012). Labour rights, specifically, differ from other rights in their focus on workers, or, more broadly defined, the working class,¹ since labour rights determine rights holders on the basis of their socio-economic position in society and act in favour of group or collective interests, compared to the universal application and the focus on the individual and citizen in the conception of other human rights. Aiming to protect workers against the power of private and corporate capital, labour rights actively call for government intervention and regulation

(Kolben 2010). Other economic and social rights as well as business and commercial rights may conceptualize the state as duty-bearer more ambiguously, with prescriptions varying from its *laissez-faire* to more redistributive functions (Queralt 2019).

Following from these thoughts, the kind of rights and responsibilities which are promoted essentially reflect conceptions of how the informal economy works—quite literally—and should work. If we understand the informal economy as the outcome of processes in which some income-generating activities are becoming unregulated and unprotected, and formalization as the reverse, we see how rights discourses serve to include or exclude certain kinds of people, jobs, or even entire sectors. By putting different weight on different rights, or on their positive or negative interpretations, discourses on rights and responsibilities become central to determining the organization of the state and the market, and the social positioning of different groups. The following sections hence discuss how the DWA and the LEP, respectively, construct rights holders, what kinds of rights they propagate, and how these conceptions resonate with the actual working lives of street vendors and domestic workers.

Decent work for domestic workers

When the ILO officially turned to promoting Decent Work in the informal economy in 2002, it reiterated its longstanding commitment to ‘the working poor who were working very hard but who were not recognized, recorded, protected or regulated by the public authorities’ (ILO 2002, 1). Accounting for the diversity of enterprises and work relations in the informal economy, the ILO draws attention to the broad variety of workers in this category:

They include own-account workers in survival-type activities, such as street vendors, shoeshiners, garbage collectors and scrap- and rag-pickers; paid domestic workers employed by households; homeworkers and workers in sweatshops who are ‘disguised wage workers’ in production chains; and the self-employed in micro-enterprises operating on their own or with contributing family workers or sometimes apprentices/employees.

(2002, 2)

What informal economy workers in these diverse circumstances have in common, according to the ILO, is the lack of legal recognition and protection, with ensuing vulnerability and limited access to public infrastructure, services, and representation in the workplace. Their labour relations are characterized by a high level of various insecurities.² Although incomes may vary significantly and not everyone working in the informal economy is poor, poverty tends to be more common there than in the formal economy, especially among women. Decent Work deficits, the ILO emphasizes, affect both informal workers and entrepreneurs.

The principles and objectives of the DWA at the international level were adapted by the ILO Country Office to meet the needs of the Tanzanian context, as specified in the Decent Work Country Programmes (DWCPs) between 2006 and 2016. Adjustments made to the programmes resulted from the continuous dialogue of the Country Office with a broad range of international partners—branches of the United Nations and international trade unions, for instance—and consultation with Tanzanian stakeholders, particularly local trade unions, the government, and the Association of Tanzanian Employers (ATE).³ DWCPs shifted their focus over time, reflecting international development discourses and trends: the 2006–2010 DWCP directed much attention towards self-employed business owners and access to micro-credit, reminiscent of the aims put forward around the same time by MKURABITA (see section below), the UNDP and the World Bank. Yet the 2013–2016 DWCP departed from this approach, emphasizing instead the ILO’s comparative advantage and placing the four objectives of the DWA—employment creation, social protection, rights at work, and social dialogue, endorsed by the ILO at the international level—as a multidimensional strategy at the centre of its interventions (ILO 2013c).

In theory, the 2013–2016 DWCP challenged the formal-informal dualism by targeting explicitly the creation of decent work in both formal and informal labour relations and across all sectors. In practice, however, the ILO Country Office and its affiliates saw themselves forced to use resources strategically and most effectively in selected sectors and workplaces. Resonating with the ILO’s international attention to domestic work following the adoption of the Convention on Domestic Workers (C189) in 2011, the domestic work sector was given specific priority by the Country Office. As described in the previous chapters, this was not attributed solely to growing international interest but also built on previous efforts and achievements regarding domestic work in Tanzania, which had resulted not least in the legal recognition of domestic work as an employment relationship in the Labour and Employment Act of 2004.

Despite the ambitious goal of promoting decent work for all workers irrespective of the formal-informal divide as expressed in the ILO documents, the efforts of the ILO Country Office hence focused mainly on one sector which was politically uncontroversial and legally defined in terms of a clear employer-employee relationship. The ILO addressed decent work deficits in domestic work explicitly as a matter of employment (ILO 2013b). Yet, within these limitations, the ILO and trade unions conceptualized domestic workers’ de facto exclusion from labour and other protective laws and decent work deficits from a broad perspective, taking into account not only legal aspects but also gender and intersecting notions of paid and reproductive work. Informality was thereby understood as resulting from domestic workers being part of an ‘invisible workforce’: domestic workers were presumed to remain hidden and unheard not merely because of their workplace, but also because of the gendered connotations of ‘the home’ and the long-standing

undervaluing of the reproductive work of women. The ILO Country Office based this approach on extensive research on domestic work in Tanzania that builds on key insights into domestic work in the global context and analyses of gender issues and gender-based discrimination in the sector (Kiaga and Ackson 2016). Interviewed officials pointed out that awareness of gender equality and gender mainstreaming was central to the efforts of the ILO in making labour laws effective, as gender aggravated the vulnerabilities of workers in both the formal and the informal economy. The representatives of the Conservation, Hotel, Domestic and Allied Workers Union (CHODAWU) and the International Domestic Workers' Federation (IDWF) likewise highlighted the importance and intersectionality of gender, arguing that the overlapping of family or kinship relationships with employment relationships made it difficult to clearly identify the roles of employers and employees in domestic work and that women employees additionally had to cope with a disadvantaged position in the labour market. Others identified multiple overlapping vulnerabilities, as migrants, children, and young people, as well as victims of domestic violence, were seen as groups requiring heightened sensitivity.⁴

The campaign for Decent Work and for the ratification of the Domestic Workers' Convention hence aimed to tackle the double stereotypes affecting women as workers and domestic work as an employment relationship.⁵ The strategy was two-pronged, consisting both of lobbying for improved legislation and public awareness-raising: although domestic work already enjoyed a high level of legal protection in the Employment and Labour Relations Act, the Tripartite Plus Plan of Action aimed for better legal protection of domestic workers through the ratification of C189 and consideration of Recommendation 201, as well as improved implementation of existing laws. Parallel to the legal changes, domestic workers were to become better informed of their rights and obligations and employers of their responsibilities and obligations (ILO 2013d, 21–22); thus, the campaign material stressed the rights, responsibilities, and relative power positions of employers and employees.

For instance, the ILO collaborated with the local office of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) and CHODAWU in the distribution of bumper stickers insisting that domestic workers should enjoy the same rights as other workers and calling for the ratification of ILO Convention 189 (Figure 5.1). Another bumper sticker, in Swahili, stressed the importance of written work contracts for domestic workers (Figure 5.2). The bumper stickers indicated two central aspects in which the three local organizations wanted to challenge public perceptions of domestic work: first, in referring to 'domestic workers' or, in Swahili, *wafanyakazi wa majumbani*, the pejorative notions of domestic labour as the work of 'servants' or *housegirls/boys*, expressions with historical roots that were still commonly used, were rejected; instead, domestic workers were put on a par with other workers, with the same rights. This discursive shift made visible the hidden labour of domestic workers and their rights and



Figure 5.1 Bumper sticker distributed by the ILO, FES, and CHODAWU
Source: FES Tanzania Office.

value as workers, and followed up on what Helen Schwenken (2012) identifies as the promise and progressive potential of C189. *Wafanyakazi* is, moreover, a term which is commonly associated with a formal employment relationship, signifying a superior and ‘proper’ kind of employment.

Second, the campaign underscored domestic workers’ agency and voice. The bumper sticker promoting work contracts states, ‘Domestic workers, demand a written employment contract. It is your right!’ Next to it a cartoon depicts an employer saying to a domestic worker, ‘Now it will be your job to do all the housework’, to which the worker replies, ‘Alright, but can we put all the tasks in writing?’⁶ The purpose of the sticker was to encourage domestic workers to make rightful demands vis-à-vis their employers, seek support from trade unions and the labour court, and to organize themselves in associations and the union in order to act and bargain collectively. Representatives of the IDWF and the ILO Country Office emphasized that it was

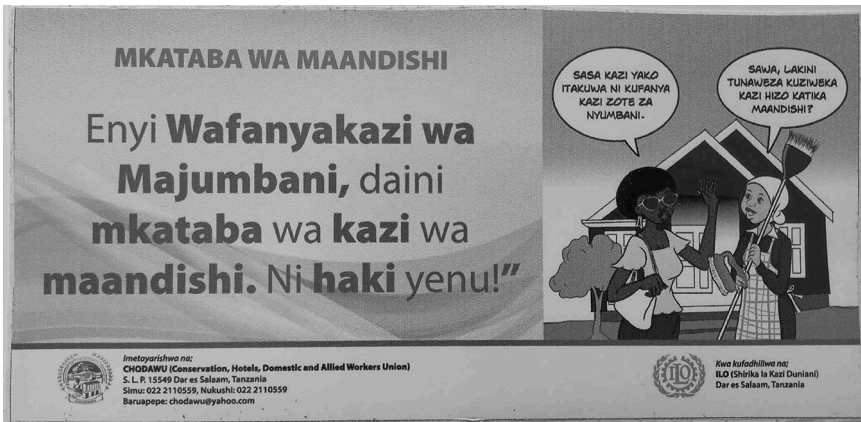


Figure 5.2 Bumper sticker encouraging domestic workers to demand a written contract
Source: FES Tanzania Office.

important to portray domestic workers not as helpless victims but as people capable of changing their situation, although the representatives were also aware that this kind of agency and self-determined behaviour could not easily be displayed by domestic workers who were in a vulnerable position and who were strongly dependent on the goodwill of their employers. Yet continued discrimination against domestic workers and violation of their rights notwithstanding, increased awareness of rights as well as the emergence and public presence of domestic workers' associations in recent years were seen as hinting at the nascent success of this approach.⁷

Workers' rights and public governance

The four pillars of the DWA build on and present a distilled set of labour and other economic and social rights. While the ILO promotes decent work for all labour relations, the DWA is considered to have specific importance for the informal economy, and in essence serves the goal of formalization. Rights at work are understood in the DWA as the minimum of Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work or Core Labour Standards (CLS), consisting of freedom of association, as well as of the prohibition of child labour, forced labour, and discrimination. While critics have denounced the CLS for displaying a minimalist, gender-blind, and negative conception of rights at work or, worse, a hegemonic tool to co-opt labour struggles and resistance (Alston 2004; Elias 2007), their integration into the DWA has more optimistically been portrayed as an enabling instrument to counter neoliberal labour market restructuring by bringing about legal protection and strengthening workers' position. In light of global unemployment, jobless growth, and increased informalization following the 2008 economic crisis, the ILO has portrayed the CLS and their underlying Conventions as an effective response because they 'contain the basic enabling rights instrumental to progressively breaking away from the informal economy and poverty'. Applying labour standards within active labour market policies, appropriate law enforcement, oversight from the public authorities, and tripartite dialogue at the national level is seen to offer 'the basic groundwork for a progressive exit from the informal economy' (Gravel et al. 2011, 7).

Building on the DWA, the ILO Country Office in Tanzania specified its goals for the domestic work sector based on its Situational Analysis of existing legal frameworks and working conditions, on the one hand, and the aims of C189 and Recommendation 201, on the other. During interviews, experts and officials explained the need to adapt the principles and goals of the DWA to the realities on the ground. This 'evidence-based policy making' (ILO 2016, 55) had three implications for the promotion of rights. First, the promotion of the DWA, and of labour rights more broadly, was limited in the face of the enormous proportion of informalized work in Tanzania. Mirroring the catch-22 difficulties in organizing street vendors to counter informality described in the previous chapter, the ILO and its partners were confronted with a dilemma: although the ILO 2002 Resolution and the 2013–2016 DWCP explicitly examined the

applicability of the DWA to the informal economy, in practice decent work deficits were far more aggravated and difficult to address in informalized sectors and workplaces than in the formal economy.

Once again, the ILO and trade unions saw themselves restricted by the boundaries of labour rights and standards which, by definition, applied only to formalized employment in officially recognized workplaces. Without the legal basis of formally recognized employment relationships, work deficits in the informal economy were to be categorized as violations of related economic and social human rights that fell outside the competence of labour institutions. This contradicted the stated goal, and necessity, of addressing decent work deficits in both the formal and informal economy to achieve long-term change.⁸ The domestic work sector, owing to the clear legal recognition of domestic work as an employment relationship, meanwhile presented a rewarding area of operation, where labour rights and standards could be successfully promoted despite its ambiguous position between *de jure* formalized but *de facto* informalized work.⁹

Second, ILO officials emphasized that labour rights and standards were interdependent on and complementary with each other as well as the wider objectives of the DWA. For instance, increasing access to social protection for people in the informal economy was seen to require a comprehensive approach that combined the development of affordable social protection schemes with social dialogue involving employers of both formal and informal enterprises, improved working conditions, labour market security, higher pay, and raised awareness of the benefits of social protection. Tripartism and the involvement of governmental and non-governmental stakeholders for coordination and consultation were central to achieving long-lasting outcomes.¹⁰

Third, the promotion and implementation of labour rights and standards were seen as having both process-oriented and outcome-oriented dimensions. In the view of representatives of the ILO and trade unions, limited resources and the magnitude of the challenges ahead demanded the strategic prioritization of areas of intervention, and a choice being made between short-term and long-term goals, which were, however, to be aligned with those of the DWA. The promotion of concrete rights and standards, such as the regulation of work hours or occupational safety and health, was seen in relation to more long-term strategies to create productive and secure employment. The principles and objectives of the DWA were thereby included in the government's 2008 National Employment Policy (URT 2008). Negotiating for legislative changes and piecemeal improvements in the enforcement of labour laws was thus part of a process whereby different stakeholders practised tripartism and social dialogue.¹¹ In the domestic work sector, the campaign for the ratification of C189 aimed to raise awareness of decent work and labour rights among employers, workers, and the wider public, with legislative change as a desirable by-product of the campaign (ILO 2013d).

In sum, promotion and implementation of labour rights under the DWA were conceptualized as a strategy to successively tackle the formal-informal

divide with the involvement of workers, employers, and the government. Rights at work were integrated into a wider approach which included other social rights, among them social protection. Domestic workers, as well as workers in other sectors, were identified as workers with rights, with reference to the duties of both employers and the government. Employers and the government were seen to be accountable to meet their obligations as they were spelled out by the Employment and Labour Relations Act, the National Employment Policy, the Tripartite Plus Plan of Action, and C189, which had been endorsed by parliament though not yet ratified.

This conception, however, while intended to take into account the realities on the ground, nonetheless remained strongly oriented towards effective formalization as the ultimate goal of rights promotion. Thus conceived, the DWA betrayed its conceptual roots in the exceptional experience of Western industrialized countries and their formal governance frameworks. In face of the limited outreach of formal labour institutions and of state governance in Tanzania, as well as fragmented workplaces in the domestic work sector, the focus on tripartism is problematic; moreover, as stated earlier, informality and formalization of their work in and by themselves appeared of little relevance and concern for workers and their employers. The DWA diverged somewhat from the goals of the mushrooming domestic workers' associations, which primarily demanded increased protection, visibility, and recognition of their work, but not formalization as such (see, for instance, Wotesawa 2023). Following what Donatella Alessandrini et al. (2022) call the elusive 'dream of formality', the approach to decent work also, in effect, reinforced the formal-informal dualism.

Legal empowerment for entrepreneurs

Whether suited to the realities of Tanzanian workers or not, the DWA contrasted significantly with another approach towards the informal economy which gained traction in consecutive governments' attempts to address the problem of unregulated economic activities. This approach, the LEP, became most pronounced in land titling and small-scale trade, the latter presenting the urban face of large-scale informality. In the early 2000s, facing rapidly growing numbers of street traders and the inadequacy of laws prohibiting street trade, the government under President Benjamin Mkapa engaged in a long-term reform process, with the goal of embedding and eventually integrating the informal into the formal economy. To this end, and with substantial financial support from the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD), the government contracted the Institute for Liberty and Democracy (ILD), a Peruvian-based think tank chaired by Hernando de Soto, to draft a reform plan. The ILD, after considerable research efforts which resulted in a four-volume report covering a total of 1,700 pages, developed a reform plan, which largely followed the tenet of de Soto's (1989) earlier work. The ILD reaffirmed the formal-informal dualism: in its

concluding recommendations, the existence of an ‘extra-legal economy’ alongside legal economic structures and institutions was seen to hamper Tanzanian development towards an inclusive, modern market economy, and to perpetuate poverty. Accordingly, the poor needed to be given easier access to the law to convert their assets into capital in the formal economy (ILD 2005a).

The reform plan became institutionalized as MKURABITA, a planning unit that fell under the remit of the President’s Office. As the programme’s name suggests, the main goal of MKURABITA was the formalization of property, predominantly land, and of business assets, that is, the integration of informally operated business into the formal market economy. The rationale behind this goal was the ILD’s observation that, while poor Tanzanians held extra-legal assets worth approximately US \$29 billion, these could not be productively and effectively utilized, as entering formal market institutions entailed immediate and long-term costs which were prohibitive to the poor (ILD 2005a, 4–5). MKURABITA was to make use of this wealth through its objectives of enabling the integration of already existing informal rules and arrangements into the formal legal system, thereby unifying, modernizing, and standardizing national property and business laws. According to the ILD and MKURABITA, facilitating formalization promised better governance of Tanzanians’ economic activities, stimulating growth and expanding the tax base while simultaneously opening up access to legal protection for the poor, in a manner built on established local customs (MKURABITA 2016).

In marked contrast with the DWA, at the heart of the MKURABITA reforms lay the conceptualization of informal economy workers, such as small-scale traders, as micro-entrepreneurs. Under the leading slogan ‘empowering the disadvantaged towards expanded market economy’, MKURABITA’s target groups were described as ‘individuals and groups in the informal sector, whose entry into the formal market economy will enhance their opportunities in using their assets to access capital and thus improve national economic growth and reduce individual household poverty’ (MKURABITA 2016). The individuals and groups were specified as ‘owners of resources and business in the non-legal sector’ (MKURABITA 2019).¹² Following the language of the ILD, MKURABITA documents consistently spoke of ‘the poor’ as ‘entrepreneurs’ and ‘owners’ of assets, businesses, or property. For the ILD, ‘business and property are not separate issues; they are interlinked’ (MKURABITA 2006, 40): the ILD saw the informal economy in Tanzania as an overlap of informal business and informally held property, contrasting 98 per cent of ‘extralegal entrepreneurs’ and 89 per cent of ‘extralegal properties’ with only 2 per cent of ‘legal entrepreneurs’ and 11 per cent of ‘legal properties’ (ILD 2005a, 3).

It is interesting to note that this amalgamation of the poor with entrepreneurship and property conflicted with the final report of the CLEP, co-chaired by de Soto and US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, which emphasizes that the four billion people globally who are excluded from the law—a number

that remains unverified—are not a monolithic group, but need to be distinguished by their ownership of assets. As stated by the CLEP Report, '[t]hose in extreme poverty are typically asset-poor' whereas '[t]hose living in moderate poverty have some assets and income' (UNDP 2008, 19). The CLEP report indeed converges with the ILO's observations on decent work in the informal economy in differentiating between workers, businesspeople, and owners of property. Despite the strong personnel, institutional, and ideational overlaps between the work of the CLEP (CLEP 2006) and of the ILD in Tanzania, these distinctions did not find their way into MKURABITA's ethos. Rather, its design strongly reflected the tone of de Soto's (1989) earlier work and the *Doing Business* reports published by the World Bank (2006, 2017), which in turn informed the business training programmes operated by the National Economic Empowerment Council (NEEC) of Tanzania.

The habitual labelling of street vendors as owners of small businesses was also clearly observable in my interviews with officials of MKURABITA and the NEEC.¹³ It was, moreover, a central element of the tolerant and encouraging stance adopted by the Magufuli administration towards street traders, including *machingas*. Magufuli repeatedly maintained that entrepreneurship was a virtue of street traders, concurrently making it clear that usage of the streets and public spaces was acceptable for vendors earning their own daily bread but not for those undermining the authorities by selling the merchandise of larger shops and retailers, that is, hawkers or vendors in casual or disguised employment (Global TV 6 December 2016). In the same vein, trading spaces and the vendor IDs were later given to them in their capacity as holders of informal micro-enterprises, not as workers (IPP Media 28 March 2018; see also Chapter 6 in this volume).

Street Vendors Incorporated

The representation of the poor as owners of businesses and of assets, and the focus on their inclusion in the market as a means to combat poverty and unemployment, not only concurred with a widespread emphasis on self-employment and small-scale entrepreneurship; it was also closely interlinked with the conception of the informal economy as separate from the formal economy and with neoliberal strategies aiming for its integration. This discourse reaffirmed dualist preconceptions placing the informal economy outside of established capitalist market institutions, compared employment to entrepreneurship, and confined the notion of wage employment to the realm of the formal economy. The ILD (2005b, 1) argued along these lines:

The socio-economic reforms which were initiated and implemented since 1986 and deepened during the decade of 1995–2005, have generated some positive results at the Macro-level ... However, the benefits from the reforms did not translate into significant reduction of poverty among the majority of the people of Tanzania ... largely because they operate

extralegally outside the formal economy where they face a legally prohibitive environment that makes it difficult for them to realize their full potential for economic empowerment and self-improvement.

In this reading, Tanzanians' exclusion from the economic upswing brought about by structural adjustment and market liberalization results from their informal or 'extra-legal' income generation, a causal relation that reversed the reasoning of the ILO, according to which informality follows from legal and economic exclusion. For the ILD, the reason 'why the majority of Tanzanian property owners *choose* to remain extralegal' (2005b, v, emphasis added) was the cost of converting existing assets, property, and business activities to the 'legal economy'. Venerating the image of the forward-looking and profit-making entrepreneur, the ILD, again in contrast to the ILO, neither considered structural factors such as gender, education, or wider labour market dynamics, nor did its conception distinguish between survival and accumulation in the informal economy.

While this resonated with the popular discourse by the government as well as with the self-perception of most traders, who referred to themselves as *wamachingas* or *wafanyabiashara ndogo ndogo*, it represented a prevalent but somewhat idealized image of informal income generation. Many vendors, particularly younger ones like Lawrence and Shafira (see Chapters 3 and 4), shared the hope of accumulating profits and enlarging their businesses, and a few, for instance Ezekiel who sold fruit at Kariakoo (see Chapter 4), had indeed succeeded in saving and reinvesting horizontally into business expansion or vertically into another source of income such as a *shamba*. Yet overall, these successes remained exceptional, or a dream which had yet to materialize. The following trajectories, shared by Mama Sada and Frederick, reflected the hardships of many others and spoke of the shortcomings of an entrepreneurship-centric governance of the informal economy.

When I spoke to her in 2016,¹⁴ Mama Sada had been selling fruit and vegetables at Mwenge market for five years, after the removal of her stand from Bagamoyo Road in Tegeta due to road construction. She explained that she had come from a poor family in Kigoma, with just primary education, working as a domestic worker until she accumulated enough capital to start her own business. At Mwenge market, she had to pay a daily fee for the stall and night storage, but since the market was not approved by the municipality, she also had to pay fines to the auxiliary police or else have her foodstuffs confiscated. It was only because she was experienced and well known among the vegetable suppliers that she could usually purchase fresh vegetables for the next day on credit.

A single mother, Mama Sada worked 14 hours a day, six days a week. She could not afford to hire a helper as she had to cover her daughter's school fees.¹⁵ She recalled how several years earlier, her mother had become very ill and required expensive treatment and medication, which she had only been able to afford with the help of friends. Responding to my question about

what she would ask of the government if she could make a wish, she said she hoped to be allowed to stay at Mwenge where business was good, and to be given a loan so she could replace her broken table and have a roof installed. This way she would be able to take better care of her mother and daughter, and perhaps one day own a proper shop.

Mama Sada certainly saw herself as a businesswoman, but what she described was a struggle to make a living rather than a profit. This vital distinction applied all the more to casually employed *machingas* and street traders selling goods on behalf of a larger supplier or wholesaler. Indeed, given the income fluctuations and insecurity reported by street traders, speaking of profits was in many cases a euphemism. For many traders, what they earned in a day did not necessarily come in the form of cash they could spend, save, or reinvest. A decent profit on some days often had to compensate for losses on other days, or be used to repay debts and loans, and to purchase or commission items. After an unsuccessful day, the balance could be zero or even negative, as traders had to cover the costs of lost, confiscated, or unsold perishable goods from their own pockets.

Mama Sada's story shared traits with those of many other traders and aired struggles that have been recognized for decades. In Keith Hart's (1973, 67) original account of what he coined the 'informal sector', written half a century ago, he summarized his observations:

Petty capitalism, often as a supplement to wage-employment, offers itself as a means of salvation. If only the right chance came, the urban workers could break out of the nexus of high living costs and low wages which is their lot. This hope is comparable with the promise of wealth which a large win on the football pools holds out for the British worker overburdened by hire-purchase payments. As it is, the monthly equation of income and expenditure is usually negative, and few manage to escape from the spiral of ever-increasing debt. But the lives of the majority are sustained by hopes of this kind and, as a result, most are ready to involve themselves, both on a casual and regular basis, in petty enterprises of all types ranging in scale from the most trivial activities to major businesses.

Irrespective of Hart's early scepticism, the ideal of entrepreneurialism, flourishing in official discourses on the informal economy in Tanzania, was backed by the LEP conception maintained by the ILD and MKURABITA as well as by the Doing Business approach of the World Bank (2017). As this discourse promoted profit and accumulation as the norm, the blame of failure fell on those who did not succeed in building up a business. This became clear in several conversations with traders who, after many months or even years, found themselves as penniless and destitute as they were when they first took up this line of work. Traders who had lost their former jobs or livelihoods and were struggling due to government action, such as the large-

scale evictions of 2006, accidents or other tragedies, could point to these events to explain their circumstances. Yet others carried the responsibility for their lack of business success on their own shoulders. My encounters with a microcredit broker and his client, on the one hand, and a *machinga* on the other, presented a poignant example of that.

James, who had formerly worked for a microfinance bank and was now head of his own VICOBA (Village Community Bank),¹⁶ had agreed to meet with me to discuss the purposes of his microfinance institution (MFI). Despite being called a VICOBA, James' MFI did not operate on membership contributions but, more similarly to a regular bank, on investors' funds and interest payments. The MFI was semi-formal in that it was registered and licensed by the government, but the loans handed out to clients were granted in an informal manner.

James was accompanied by Kareem, a chef.¹⁷ Kareem had studied hotel management but, unable to find employment in the field, worked as a *Baba Lishe*, running a street kitchen in Kariakoo where *machingas* came to eat. The street kitchen operated for three years, during which time Kareem had an adequate income, but he was then what he called 'disturbed' by the municipal auxiliary police and his equipment was confiscated. He had attempted to start another business but failed to make any money. Getting involved with James and his VICOBA had allowed him to take out a loan, and he now worked as a self-employed caterer and cooking instructor for hotels and offices who hired his services. With the loan from the VICOBA, Kareem had bought, among other things, a computer with which he could manage his orders from home. His plan was eventually to get a license and have an officially registered business.

James explained that for street traders and *machingas*, obtaining a loan from the VICOBA was significantly easier than from a microfinance bank, but was nonetheless tied to strict criteria: borrowers had to be organized in a group of ten people, who had to know each other personally and to be able to vouch for one another. They had to provide proof of an official address and be self-employed, since casually employed traders tended to disappear whenever they changed their workplace. Furthermore, they had to provide statements from spouses or family members and proof of their marital status and to agree that domestic items, such as televisions, could be used as collateral. Finally, a national ID or birth certificate was needed for the loan, which would be repaid in weekly instalments and, once the business started to take off, with interest. These criteria also largely conformed with the practices of MKURABITA and the NEEC, which saw self-organization and mutual control in peer groups as a key first step for the poor to gain access to support and credit and, ultimately, for their integration into the formal economy.¹⁸

Kareem's story provided a positive counter-example to more critical accounts of microfinance and supported the conception of micro-entrepreneurship and a favourable business environment as pathways out of poverty and informality. For Kareem and the other 8,000 members of James' MFI,

the business model offered the opportunity to generate a stable income and even wealth. Yet, the very next day, the limitations of this conception were revealed in a conversation with Frederick, the *machinga* selling wall maps and posters introduced in Chapter 3. Frederick had attended primary school and the first year of secondary school, but had to quit and work on his parents' farm in Morogoro when they could no longer afford his education. He had left the farm in 2003 to find work in Dar es Salaam, first selling small plastic items such as dustbins and coat hangers, then finding a niche selling wall maps. The profit margin from these sales was very low even when he started and had decreased further in recent years due to increasing competition. In his late thirties, he was suffering from severe health problems stemming from his exposure to bad weather and pollution at his workplace on the busy Ali Hassan Mwinyi Road and, from what I observed, poor nutrition.¹⁹

Frederick insinuated that not being able to feed and take care of a family was very shameful, while explaining that he would like to make changes in his life, but did not know how to do things differently. He listed a number of problems that prevented him from doing better: the poverty of his family had kept him from getting a good education and the lack of education kept him from finding good work; harsh working conditions and competition kept his income low; and his lack of capital kept him from making larger profits. Concluding each explanation with the words 'that is the problem', he illustrated his struggles by describing his work routine, which involved commuting six days a week from his home in Kimara to Palm Beach. The number of maps he could buy and sell per day always depended on the previous day's surplus, from which he had to deduct the bus fare and lunch money as well as expenses for rent, medicine, and the remittances he sent to his elderly parents.

When I asked him if he had heard of any organizations or institutions which could offer support to him, Frederick pointed out several further problems. He believed that the government, bank clerks, and Tanzanian researchers were not interested in listening to small traders like him. He had heard of SACCOs and VICOBA, but even those were inaccessible. Together with nine other traders from Palm Beach he had formed a small group called Pamoja (Together). They had a chairman and held regular meetings in which they discussed current issues concerning their workplace, even taking minutes. The members of the group also helped each other out with small loans during times of need, but that help was limited to the sum of a bus fare or a meal. Despite their efforts to self-organize, MFIs had repeatedly turned them down. Following the advice of one microfinance consultant, they had drafted a *katiba*, a charter needed for the official registration of the group, but they could not afford to pay the fee to obtain the necessary approval and signature from the ward administrative representing the registrar of the Ministry of Home Affairs. Frederick spotlighted a fundamental paradox:

You have to open your business first, then you can go to a VICOBA. If you don't have a business, how can you pay back the loan you have

received from a VICOBA? First, you need to make money from business, then you can join a VICOBA.²⁰

Frederick's observation reflected the results of research in Tanzania which identified the accessibility of sustainable lending to the poorest by MFIs to a 'chicken and egg situation' (Fraser and Kazi 2004, 40). Furthermore, in Frederick's experience, even though they were viewed as easily accessible loans, microfinance lending was nonetheless competitive and restricted to debtors who could be categorized as enterprising and reliable. The focus on entrepreneurship, assets, and self-responsibilization as essential to formalization also informed the promotion of rights in the understanding of legal empowerment under the MKURABITA reforms, to which I turn in the next section.

Property rights and neoliberal responsabilization

In theory, the LEP shares with the DWA a commitment to at least a minimal set of labour rights, which are to be embedded into the macro-structural reforms of domestic and global labour markets that seek the fulfilment of related economic and social human rights. The final report of the CLEP entitled *Making the Law Work for Everyone* conceptualizes the LEP comprehensively, reflecting the approach taken by the ILO at the international level and by the Country Office in Tanzania. The report presents the LEP agenda as four interrelated pillars, each containing a bundle of rights: access to justice and the law as a fundamental framework enabling the poor to enjoy their rights; property rights; labour rights; and business rights. Arguing that labour and human capital are 'the greatest asset of the poor', the CLEP explicitly references the DWA:

The typical and tired pattern of low productivity, low earnings, and high risks must be replaced by the fulfilment of the *Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work* and the *Decent Work Agenda*, and the strategy to provide protection and opportunity to workers in the informal economy. (UNDP 2008, 7; emphasis in the original)

The pillar of labour rights lists the following rights and measures: the promotion of freedom of association to strengthen the identity, voice, and representation of the working poor; the improvement of labour regulation and the functioning of labour market institutions; a minimum package of labour rights for workers and enterprises in the informal economy that goes beyond the CLS; increased access to employment opportunities; the expansion of social protection for poor workers; guaranteed access to medical care, health insurance, and pensions; and attention to gender equality and the elimination of discrimination.

In practice, however, the two agendas were interpreted and implemented along quite dissimilar paths in Tanzania. Irrespective of the commitment to

the DWA in the final report by the CLEP, the pillar of labour rights as well as related economic and social rights were virtually absent from the reports and recommendations by both the ILD and the MKURABITA reform process. As the name of the programme indicated, MKURABITA's focus was on legal frameworks for the registration and formalization of property and business, particularly on '[i]ntegrated, secure, fungible and transferable property rights' and '[o]rganizational forms to increase productivity through the creation of "distinct legal entities"' (MKURABITA 2006, 16).

In 2009, MKURABITA officially distanced itself both from the ILD and the recommendations of the CLEP, describing in a policy note the contribution of the programme in the context of the LEP and of the UNDP, but clarifying its own priorities in implementing the CLEP recommendations in Tanzania (URT 2009). The split between MKURABITA, the ILD, and the CLEP laid bare ideational and political disagreements at the international level. Tanzanian officials explained the discontinuation of collaboration between the national government and the Peruvian think tank as a result of misunderstandings and disputes over the scope of the project, as well as the involvement and costs of the ILD in the process.²¹ However, more fundamentally, the inclusion of labour rights in the final report by the CLEP went far beyond de Soto's original focus on property rights. Its conceptualization of labour rights as a fourth pillar reflected an attempt to bridge the discrepancy between a narrow conception of legal empowerment and the DWA; in so doing, it also displayed opposition by civil society organizations and donors to the appointment of de Soto as co-chair of the CLEP given the neoliberal approach that he and the ILD had adopted (Banik 2009, 119). The Norwegian development agency NORAD, which had been a principal donor during the initial phases of the MKURABITA reforms and of the CLEP, expressed its criticism of the ILD in Tanzania on ideational and procedural grounds (NORAD 2007), a stance which might have contributed to the decision by the Tanzanian government to continue the MKURABITA reforms without the ILD.

Nonetheless, the legal, economic, and social empowerment objectives of MKURABITA remained confined to those prescribed by the ILD in disregard of the recommendations by the CLEP. The MKURABITA policy note listed the objectives as

[l]egally protected property and business Rights, which is achieved through the issuance of the titles and its registration as well as creating the necessary infrastructure, personnel capabilities and management systems for sustainable use of the asset for economic benefits.

(URT 2009, 11)

Labour rights were briefly mentioned, but their scope was explicitly restricted under the MKURABITA reforms to the '[d]evelopment and operationalization of a flexible labour right regime that responds to actual demands of the small enterprises' (2009, 11).

Three aspects stand out in this conception of rights promotion: first, income generation was conceptualized primarily as a matter of assets, property, and access to the market, rather than of labour or work. The legal recognition and protection of property and business rights were isolated from labour and related economic and social rights. This approach not only limited the target group of rights holders who were to benefit from the reform to owners of assets and self-employed entrepreneurs, it also had an impact on the coordination of the policy reform process, as MKURABITA had little or no contact with institutions and stakeholders working on labour and social matters, such as the Ministry of Labour and Employment, the ILO, or civil society organizations. Rather, MKURABITA coordinated its policies with the Ministry of Commerce and Trade, with the NEEC and, indirectly through the ministry, with the Business Registration and Licensing Agency (BRELA)'s simplified procedures of business registration and formalization.²²

Second, and of pivotal relevance to the sector of small-scale trade, in isolating property and business rights from labour and work, the MKURABITA reforms left unaddressed the question of whether street traders had a right to work in public spaces. Researchers have noted the shortcomings of MKURABITA in addressing the spatial informality of small-scale trade. In particular, the requirement to have a fixed address made it impossible for most vendors to register their business (Lyons and Msoka 2010). Yet, unless they operated as a registered business, street traders' right to work was not unambiguously guaranteed by Tanzanian laws and, indeed, frequently in conflict with planning, land, and business laws. MKURABITA ignored the strong presence of street traders, particularly *machingas*, who have no fixed legal address. This omission departed from the original recommendations of the ILD, which explicitly called for the legalization and uncomplicated registration of street trade. Without a clearly stipulated right to work, street vendors, both self-employed and particularly those in hidden employment, remained exposed to legal insecurity, potential evictions, and violation of other rights, such as the unlawful confiscation of their property by the municipal auxiliary police and *mgambos*.

The MKURABITA and Doing Business reforms did prove ineffective in regulating the small-scale trade sector. Although, in theory, street traders were eligible for business registration and for the NEEC microfinance and skills training programmes, in practice only a few vendors were able to make use of these opportunities.²³ The reforms failed street vendors in two ways: the focus on property and business rights ignored the fact that unlicensed trade offered an attractive employment to poor vendors, such as Mama Sada or Frederick, precisely because it requires only minimal levels of assets, property, or working capital (see also Kamete 2018); meanwhile, dodging the question of the right to work maintained legal insecurity, particularly for those in hidden employment but also for the self-employed who had acquired

some capital but, for one reason or another, could not obtain legal ownership of their business.

Third, the promotion of '[f]ormal, fungible property rights that not only allow assets to be identified but also allow ordinary people to move them in the expanded market to capture as much economic value as possible' (URT 2009, 5) conceptualized rights in a strictly instrumentalist manner. Contrary to the way in which the DWA was pursued by the ILO Country Office, the negotiation and coordination of rights was not considered part of the legal and social reform process; thus, the enabling and procedural function of rights, which, for instance, in the view of the ILO was central to the right of freedom of association, was missing from this conception. Access to the law, particularly to business and property rights, was instead seen as a way to ensure the increased productivity and growth of small and medium-sized enterprises, thereby contributing to economic development.

Legal reform and access to rights were consequently devised in a largely top-down manner, and civil society groups were not or only insufficiently involved in the reform design and implementation. The lack of Tanzanian ownership in the reform design phase was censured during the early stages in NORAD's mid-term review, which also criticized the fact that the ILD carried out much of its consulting work in Peru rather than in Tanzania and cautioned that a 'system "delivered from on high" will simply not work in Tanzania' (NORAD 2007, paras 63–64). NORAD disapprovingly concluded:

The Progress Report [by the ILD] makes almost no reference to the Tanzanian policy environment ... Nor does it employ the very large body of Tanzanian research already carried out on formalization issues, property, small business development etc. This reinforces the perception that the Reform Design process has failed to take account of Tanzanian reality and is basing itself on external models. The tendency to use expressions alien to Tanzanian/Zanzibari law such as 'property', 'title' or 'eminent domain' might lead the reader to a similar conclusion.

(2007, para. 81)

The mismatch between the MKURABITA reforms and the situation in Tanzania did not, however, result solely from a lack of Tanzanian ownership, but also from specific, rigid conceptions concerning the informal economy and informal economy workers. During the interviews with MKURABITA and NEEC officials it became clear that the target beneficiaries of the reforms were individual entrepreneurs and businesspeople who were, however, presumed to lack collective interests and organization. Their organization into small groups in which they could obtain microfinance and skills training was seen as a means to facilitate registration and better administrative control, but not their input and involvement as stakeholders. On the contrary, a turn of expression that repeatedly surfaced in the interviews was the perceived need for a 'change of mind-set', as well as entrepreneurial

education among Tanzanians, particularly the young, to assist in their becoming active and orderly through self-employment, rather than expecting support from state institutions. Property and business rights, combined with practice-oriented skills training, were to assist in putting people onto the pathway out of dependence and poverty.²⁴

The focus on property and business rights fed into a specifically neoliberal conception of formalization as interlinked with self-development and market-led economic development. Dressed as a bottom-up approach, the agenda of self-responsibilization and marketization shone through the goal of formalizing assets. According to MKURABITA,

The Program further seeks to promote the use of formalized assets to access economic opportunities in the formal market. Its development objective is to empower the targeted beneficiaries for self-development through which they can participate in enhancing inclusive development in the country. Formalized assets gain legal recognition and protection which provides them with the means to unleash the full potential (capital) in them.

(URT 2009, 4, emphasis omitted)

Ironically, this market-oriented conception of formalization dovetailed with the understanding of economic development which informed the structural adjustment programmes imposed by international financial institutions in the 1980s, while simultaneously seeking to redress one of their main effects: large-scale informalization. Although always contested, the emphasis on 'local' bottom-up development, together with the conception of the role of the state mainly as the facilitator of swift market transactions, continues to linger behind the ideals of self-employment and entrepreneurship in discourses on governance of the economy (see also Harrison 2010), and has prominently informed the Doing Business reforms by the World Bank that promote business formalization across the Global South. This conception provided also the central motivation and rhetoric behind Magufuli's sponsorship of street vending. The decriminalization of street vending and the issuing of street vendor IDs ultimately took up the original recommendation of the ILD Diagnosis, which called for the immediate legalization of street trade. Magufuli thereby drew on the same ideational footing as the ILD, according to which the flexibility, resilience, and profit-orientation of individual, hard-working entrepreneurs were to bring about national economic and social development. I will return to the intricate relationship between (in)formalization, (neo)liberalization, and state governance in the next chapter.

Conclusion

The juxtaposition of the sectors of street trade and domestic work in this chapter has offered relevant insights into how the DWA and the LEP framed legal subjects, rights, and responsibilities in and for the informal economy.

Both sought the expansion of legal protection and access to rights, with the explicitly stated goal of integrating social groups and income-generating activities which previously had been excluded from formal regulatory frameworks. However, the two agendas differed fundamentally in their understandings of the causes and consequences of informal work. As the DWA and the LEP were put into practice in Tanzania, they almost archetypically displayed the opposing perspectives onto the informal economy as a realm originating from economic and social exclusion on the one hand, and as a realm teeming with choice and economic opportunity on the other. The different conceptions and imaginaries of the informal economy manifested themselves, first, in competing conceptions of the people working in the informal economy as casually employed and insufficiently protected workers, in contrast with self-employed entrepreneurs and owners of business and property; and second, in the promotion of two diverging sets of rights and duties. In the approach taken by the ILO Country Office, rights promotion addressed the duties of public actors, predominantly the state, and had a process-oriented and an outcome-oriented dimension. In contrast, the rights agenda of the ILD and MKURABITA drew on the liberal separation of the public and private spheres and placed responsibility on private actors, foremost the individual entrepreneur. Rights were understood instrumentally to be aimed at facilitating efficient markets and economic development.

The discussion confirms that rights agendas are not neutrally applied to the informal economy; rather, they are part and parcel of conceptions of work as 'informal' that have underlying political and normative motives. Contestations over rights and responsibilities in the informal economy reflect conflicting discourses about what kind of subjectivities, economic activities, and forms of regulation are sought after in capitalist labour markets. Furthermore, the ideational and institutional overlaps, as well as the discrepancies between different actors, among them the ILO, the ILD, the UNDP, the Tanzanian government, donor agencies such as NORAD, and the specific interpretations and practices of the agendas by local bodies, hint at the contingent and malleable shape that conceptions of informality may take in the political contestation at various levels of governance.

These findings, importantly, challenge the dualism and residualism underlying both agendas alike: the presumption that labour (or assets) in the informal economy exist outside of the formal economy and established governance institutions. While one of the agendas appears more fitting to the needs of informal economy workers in Tanzania—and, arguably, elsewhere—than the other, they both take informality as given, confirming the formal-informal boundary while reshaping it. Despite their claims to ultimately aim at formalization, they simultaneously contribute to ongoing processes of informalization, offering advantages and disadvantages to different groups. While some, like Kareem, benefit from the reform schemes, the shortcomings of the agendas are felt by informal economy workers who do not fit in with their premises and remain marginalized, like Frederick and Mama Sada.

Notes

- 1 Labour rights are in most instances conceived narrowly as the rights of employees in an employment relationship, but this definition can be widened to include workers more generally (Davidov et al. 2015).
- 2 The ILO lists here the dearth of seven essential securities: labour market security; employment security; job security; work security; skill reproduction security; income security; and representation security (ILO 2002, 3–4).
- 3 Interviews with the National Programme Coordinator, Labour Law, and the National Programme Officer, Domestic Workers, at the ILO, March 2015.
- 4 Interviews with the National Programme Coordinator, Labour Law, at the ILO, May 2014, and the National Programme Officer, Governance, December 2016; the Director of Gender, Children and Youth Development at CHODAWU, February 2015; the Regional Coordinator at the IDWF, March 2015.
- 5 Interviews with the UNDP Coordinator at the ILO, May 2014, and the National Programme Officer, Domestic Workers, March 2015.
- 6 Author's translation.
- 7 Interviews with the Regional Coordinator at the IDWF, March 2015, and the National Programme Officer, Domestic Workers, at the ILO, March 2015.
- 8 Interviews with the Gender and OHS Department at TUICO, January 2015, and the Project Officer for the FES, February 2015.
- 9 Interviews with the Deputy General Secretary and the Director of Gender, Children and Youth Development, at CHODAWU, February 2015, and the National Programme Officer, Governance, at the ILO, December 2016. See also Chapter 3.
- 10 Interviews with the UNDP Coordinator at the ILO, May 2014, and the National Programme Coordinator, Labour Law, March 2015.
- 11 Interviews with the UNDP Coordinator at the ILO, May 2014, and an economist at the Ministry of Labour and Employment, February 2015.
- 12 Author's translation, Swahili: *wanaomiliki rasilimali na biashara katika sekta isiyokidhi matakwa ya sheria*. 'Non-legal sector' is an approximation of the Swahili *sekta isiyokidhi matakwa ya sheria*, which translates more literally into 'sector which does not meet the requirements of the law', and leaves distinctions between legal and illegal blurry. The wording by the ILD is highly uncommon in Tanzania, where the term *sekta isiyorasmi* (unofficial sector) is used to describe the informal economy.
- 13 Interviews with the Programme Coordinator for MKURABITA, January 2015, the Legal Specialist at MKURABITA, March 2015; the Legal Officer, and the Manager of Research and Planning at the NEEC, March 2015.
- 14 Conversation with Mama Sada, a fruit and vegetable seller, December 2016.
- 15 While officially primary and secondary education is free in Tanzania, in practice, at the time of research, many public schools charged fees to cover the cost of facility maintenance, teachers' salaries, or children's meals.
- 16 Similar to Savings and Credit Cooperative Societies (SACCOS), VICOBA's are usually semi-formal member-based MFIs. VICOBA's generally provide loans to microenterprises, as well as skill and business management training to their members.
- 17 Conversation with James, a VICOBA manager, and Kareem, a self-employed caterer, November 2016.
- 18 Interviews with the Legal Specialist at MKURABITA, March 2015, and the Legal Officer at the NEEC, March 2015.
- 19 Conversation with Fredrick, a *machinga*, November 2016.
- 20 See note 19.
- 21 Interview with the Programme Coordinator at MKURABITA, January 2015.

- 22 Interviews with the Legal Officer at the NEEC, March 2015; the Chief Accountant at BRELA, March 2015; the Legal Specialist at MKURABITA, March 2015.
- 23 Interviews with the Chief Accountant at BRELA, March 2015; the Manager of Research and Planning at the NEEC, March 2015.
- 24 Interviews with the Programme Coordinator at MKURABITA, January 2015, and the Legal Specialist, March 2015; the Legal Officer, and the Manager of Research and Planning at the NEEC, March 2015.

6 The Art of ‘Eating with the Blind’

The Neoliberal State and Informalized Labour

The previous chapters looked at how the boundary between the formal and the informal economy is shaped alongside class-making, collective organization, the formation of legal subjects, and rights promotion. This chapter is concerned with how this boundary corresponds with the configuration of the role of the state and its relations with informalized labour. As in earlier chapters, the focus is on the close interplay of conceptions and imaginaries of economic (in)formality and actual processes of (in)formalization—legal, regulatory, spatial, and social. Such an approach naturally departs from the prevailing dualist presumptions that the informal economy is outside the reach of formal regulation. Instead, its emergence and persistence are seen as integral to the governance of the capitalist economy by the state. Informality in this view (see also Banks et al. 2019; Bernardis 2019) does not indicate the absence of the state but rather presents a key site for testing and contesting its institutions, legitimacy, and effectiveness, not least in the context of the postcolonial state in Africa and elsewhere in the Global South.

The arguments I present in this chapter began to emerge with a metaphor shared by Clement, the *fundi wa viatu* (cobbler) and street vendor introduced in Chapter 3. During one of the regular afternoon tea breaks at what he humorously called his ‘office’—a wooden box and an umbrella—the men gathering from the neighbourhood agitatedly discussed the Tegeta Escrow scandal, a major corruption scheme involving top-ranking government officials that was shaking Tanzanian politics in 2014. The scandal was making big waves, as the extent of corruption and theft had been more brazen than usual, with a number of high-ranking officials pocketing several hundred billion Tanzanian shillings’ worth of public money from a Bank of Tanzania account. Not only had government officials, in cahoots with business elites, offshored enormous sums by disguising illegal transfers as energy contracts; rumour had it that some ministers and their deputies had been caught on camera collecting the money from their private bank accounts and carrying the cash away in suitcases. To make matters worse, the government of President Jakaya Kikwete and Prime Minister Mizengo Pinda, the latter himself accused of involvement in the scam, appeared unconvincing in their commitment to resolving the case; instead, they were rather clumsily attempting

DOI: 10.4324/9781003294122-6

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to contain the damage. The livestreaming of an emotional parliamentary session in which the public accounts committee presented its findings was disrupted by frequent power outages—an aggravated affront, given that the stolen funds had been intended for the development of energy infrastructure. Infuriated Tanzanians called for accountability and resignations with such determination that the end of the decades-long rule of the Chama Cha Mapinduzi (Party of the Revolution) seemed a real possibility for the coming elections.

Clement, who translated and commented on parts of the discussion, concluded that this time the government had forgotten ‘how to eat with the blind’: when eating with a blind man, you can steal food from his plate. If you do it quietly and cautiously, he will not notice; if you get greedy and take too much, he will loudly call you a thief, and you are in trouble. The people of Tanzania, Clement said, are like the blind man; they will not stir so long as there is some food left on their plate.¹

The metaphor of eating with the blind captures aptly the conceptual politics and governance of the informal economy, if it is not taken to imply that Tanzanians are unaware of the prevailing inequalities and injustices in the country, but rather as a hint at the fragile constructions of legitimate order. I use the metaphor here to highlight how conceptions of the informal economy, and policy interventions based on them, connect to discourses which enable and legitimize accumulation and survival of different groups as well as their integration into, or exclusion from, the formal economy. While the terms ‘informal economy’ and ‘informal labour’ always present essentially contested concepts, as I have illustrated throughout this book, their normative and political power comes to bear perhaps most significantly in the varying prescriptions they imply for ‘appropriate’ or ‘good’ economic governance: just as categorizations of informality along the continuum between legality and criminality rest on rule-setting by the state, the legitimacy of the state and its rules rests at least to some extent on the explicit or quiet acceptance by those thus categorized. This intricate and reciprocal relationship between persisting informality and the legitimacy of state power (see Danielsson 2019), along with the uneven distribution of economic and political gains, is all the more relevant in the context of a vast informal and a diminishing formal economy such as Tanzania. Governance of the informal economy is hence not only a regulatory but also a value-laden and moral project. To rephrase it using Clement’s metaphor, if the boundary drawn between the formal and the informal and the distribution of advantages and disadvantages to each side are not perceived as fair, formal governance institutions are ‘in trouble’; they must restore their legitimacy or face resistance.

Any discussion of the values and morals deployed in the politics and governance of the informal economy in post-liberalization Tanzania and elsewhere in sub-Saharan Africa would be incomplete without a consideration of the role of neoliberalism. The analysis in the previous chapter ended with a remark on the ironical conjuncture of attempts to redress economic

informality with similarly devised neoliberal strategies which had led to its expansion in the first place. The contradictory but also incomplete nature of neoliberally informed interventions will be explored in more detail in this chapter, which resonates with and contributes to literature identifying a somewhat loosely structured, fluctuating, and inconsistent ‘neoliberal project’ acting as a force behind the changes in the Tanzanian and African political economy (e.g. Harrison 2010; Rizzo 2017).

However, given the overuse of the term ‘neoliberalism’, some qualification is in order. James Ferguson notes that much of the current critique of neoliberalism, while justified, is based on the norm of the Keynesian welfare state and the class compromise between capital and labour, categories which fail to account for most forms of statehood and capital-labour relations in the Global South. Structural adjustment and the withdrawal of the state from welfare in Africa, in his view, are often not ‘very “neo” at all’ (Ferguson 2009, 173); rather, they follow the classic liberal separation of state and market.² For Ferguson, conversely, neoliberalism is an art of governance, a class-based project drawing on the shared themes of ‘a technical reliance on market mechanisms coupled with an ideological valorisation of “private enterprise” and a suspicion of the state’ (2009, 173). Amending this view, Ian Bruff cautions against understanding neoliberalism in simplistic dualist terms of ‘market liberalization vs. social protection’, as state governments are not necessarily protective of their citizens (Bruff 2019). Bruff points towards the norm-transforming and legitimizing purpose of neoliberalism, arguing that ‘in theory and in practice, [it] is ultimately less interested in markets than in states and households’, as ‘the remaking of households in a manner that denies social justice is as important to neoliberalism as is the remaking of states along antidemocratic lines’ (2019, 263).

Building on these thoughts as well as on the observations discussed in the previous chapters, I understand neoliberalism broadly as a political project which aims at reconfiguring power relations between public and private actors, privatizing access to economic resources and gains, releasing the state from social duties while simultaneously limiting public control over market actors, and quelling questions of redistributive politics and collective rights. I illustrate how neoliberal tenets along these lines have become enacted and contested through the use of four examples: the building of the Machinga Complex, a shopping mall for ‘informal’ small-scale traders; the attempt by the Magufuli government to tax street vending; competing prescriptions for formalization by the International Labour Organization (ILO) and by the Institute for Liberty and Democracy (ILD) and the World Bank; and finally the conception of the informal economy as a moral economy.

Top-floor *machingas*: the marketization of small-small

Studying how different relations between formal and informal practices affect urban planning, Colin McFarlane (2012, 89) suggests that, especially in the

Global South, the formal-informal relationship presents ‘both a seemingly modest descriptor and a powerful distinction that has an active effect on urban imagination and practice, and that even plays a fundamental role in constituting the urban’. Encounters between urban dwellers and city administrations over claims to space present a terrain for negotiating and contesting the state amid governance processes that are often accompanied by corruption and other forms of advantage-seeking (Anjaria 2011). The ongoing tug-of-war between street vendors and law enforcement in Dar es Salaam, as well as the initiation of prestigious projects by the local government to tackle informality, are testimony of this. Between 2008 and 2010, following the promises of the Kikwete government to relocate street vendors to a suitable business space, the Dar es Salaam City Council (DCC), with a loan from the National Social Security Fund (NSSF), built the Machinga Complex at the intersection of Lindi Street and Kigogo Road in Ilala District, in the vicinity of the Ilala, Boma, Karume, and Mchikichini markets. The vast, five-storey complex was built according to a Chinese design and planned to accommodate 4,500 trading spaces, among them 4,206 stalls, eight storage rooms, 33 food vending spaces and 68 kiosks. As implied by the name, the Machinga Complex was to provide trading space for hawkers as well as other small-scale traders, with the intention of building similar market complexes in the cities of Mwanza, Arusha, and Mbeya (Urban Africa 15 June 2015). The complex was conceived as a DCC/NSSF investment and business idea, presenting a win-win situation: street vendors would move from unauthorized areas to the provided space and pay rent and fees, which would not only earn revenue for the city but also, in the long run, create profits for the NSSF from which national-level social security benefits could be financed. It further served as proof to the public that the municipal government was keeping its promise to reconcile the interests of small-scale traders with conflicting demands for regulation and order in the streets. In the view of the municipal council, the existence of a designated market building, specifically designed for *machingas*, showed that the persistence of unauthorized street trade could be attributed to the stubbornness of the traders rather than to the failure of the municipality to provide space.³

However, street vendors from across Dar refused to move to the Machinga Complex and it attracted only few tenants, earning the building the nickname ‘Tanzania’s White Elephant’. It not only failed to create the rental revenue planned by the DCC but resulted in vast financial losses: by 2015, the complex had reportedly accumulated a debt of 34 billion Tanzanian shillings (approximately US \$17 million); by 2018, this sum had risen to 57 billion Tanzanian shillings (US \$28.5 million) (The Citizen 8 May 2018). When I visited the Machinga Complex in 2015 and 2016, the reasons for its unpopularity among both vendors and customers became obvious. The building, despite being visible from afar, could only be reached by public transport after a walk of several hundred metres from Uhuru Street along hot and dusty Kigogo Road. In order to reach the upper floors and the

eastern wing vendors and customers had to climb several flights of stairs and walk through long, narrow and dimly lit hallways reminiscent of a storage unit rather than a market hall. The only actual *machinga* I met in the Machinga Complex was Tatu, a hawker in his early twenties, who had been hired by a food vendor at Karume market to sell soda and samosas. He explained that business was quiet as high rents kept small-scale traders away from the building. Three times a day he walked over from the intersection at Uhuru Street to sell food and beverages to the shopkeepers on the lower floors, who specialized in the sale of relatively expensive items such as new suitcases and travel bags, tailored suits, and computers, but there were few other customers.⁴

Other vendors located in the area agreed that the rents at the Machinga Complex were prohibitive. The monthly rent for the stalls had originally been set at 60,000 Tanzanian shillings (US \$30), an amount that was two to three times more than the sum that stationary traders had to pay for a space at the nearby Ilala and Boma markets, and was unaffordable for *machingas* with small stocks which they sold on a day-to-day basis.⁵ The rents were, however, viewed as a bargain for larger, sometimes formally registered businesses and wholesalers, who used the stalls as side branches or storage spaces. There had also been rumours that while the stalls were inaccessible to small-scale traders, many of them had become acquired and occupied in a fraudulent manner by well-to-do businesspeople, which led to anger and protest among street vendor associations. In response, the DCC lowered the rent to 10,000 Tanzanian shillings (US \$5) per month and devised a recovery plan according to which the lower three floors would be reserved for small-scale traders and the fourth and fifth floors for medium and large-sized enterprises (Africa Details 2012).

However, this scheme did not come to fruition. Individual vendors and representatives of two traders' associations with whom I discussed the Machinga Complex argued that the recovery plan was quite out of touch with reality. It failed to consider that the lowest floors were the most desirable and valuable trading spaces: regardless of any officially set rent, amid tough competition, access to the lower floors was only available to traders with good networks and sufficient capital to pay the bribes demanded to acquire spaces there. In addition to the problems with the unattractive location, high rents, and bribes, the traders considered the design of the complex unsuitable for attracting customers due to the narrow construction of the stalls which were separated from one another by a wire mesh which, in their words, made the stalls look like 'chicken cages'. Despite the reduction in the rent, most vendors therefore chose to continue trading in other places, even at the risk of being fined.⁶ An openly visible and costly failure of urban planning, the so-called White Elephant was subject to much public criticism, leaving commentators with 'the impression that [the project] was undertaken without ample fore-planning' (The Citizen 8 November 2016).

Yet while the thoroughness of planning that went into its construction is difficult to assess, the Machinga Complex can also be seen to symbolize the

rift between perceptions of the elites and the poor on urban market space, embedded into conceptions of informal and formal labour and its appropriate organization. The contradictions engrained in the Machinga Complex were keenly noted by one Tanzanian blogger: ‘Machinga is the name given to people who sale [*sic*] small things in the streets of Dar er Salaam. But when in the Complex selling big things what do we call them?’ (Munishinews 14 November 2014).

The discrepancies between small and big, mobile and stationary, outside on the street and inside the building, were notably exhibited by the name, location, and architecture of the Machinga Complex. They presented the contrasts between hawking as a survivalist occupation and the modern supermarket or shopping mall. The essence of mobile street trade, in Dar es Salaam and other cities across Africa, is to sell *ndogo ndogo*, small-small: *machingas* depend on selling goods which are affordable and eye-catching. Customers buy from hawkers and other street vendors rather than visiting wall-to-wall shops because of the possibility to haggle and to buy according to one’s needs and means: a spoonful of peanuts, a single cigarette rather than a whole packet, a second-hand dress at a good bargain or a pair of very cheaply priced sandals.⁷ The street vendors stressed the need to be in a convenient, accessible, and visible location, as customers would probably be unwilling to pay the bus fare merely to browse for small, inexpensive items such as toothbrushes or battery chargers, which, however, were the bread and butter for small-scale traders. As Ulrik Jennische (2024) observes about similar formal-informal dynamics in Ghana, governments seek to reconcile the discrepancies between economies of small-small with the objectives of growth, development, and large investments, deemed necessary by the integration of African countries into the global political economy, with the help of neoliberally informed strategies. In the case of the Machinga Complex, too, the gap between informal street vending and a regular market was to be bridged by entrepreneurial logic. In the words of its manager,

The wisdom behind the [recovery plan] is that the approach would attract the true market competition situation and eventually eliminate the wrongly created disrepute that the location was meant for petty traders and low income earners as customers. Other services like pharmacy, banks, hotel and others will be provided for the business park to attain its status ... The complex should be regarded as a golden opportunity for petty traders who are expected to expand to become well-off entrepreneurs.

(Africa Details 2012)

The friction between the informality of street trade as a practice to be eradicated on the one hand, and as an opportunity for individual upward mobility and urban economic development on the other, presented conflicting class interests. These were visible in the architecture of the Machinga

Complex itself, standing in sharp contrast to yet another key feature of street trade: quite simply, the fact that it takes place at street level. Street vendors pointed out that few residents and commuters in Dar es Salaam would be willing to climb the stairs to the upper floors of the complex as part of a long working day, even less so without elevators, escalators, or air conditioning. The multiple storeys of the complex exemplified class distinctions in the postcolonial city, where the urban poor, working- and lower-middle-class Tanzanians worked and lived in one or two-storey buildings in the city or the suburbs, while access to high-rises with elevators and air conditioning was reserved for the upper-middle and upper classes. Despite the increasing popularity of high-rises and shopping malls among a growing middle-class, the ‘informal city’ of Dar es Salaam, and hence the vast majority of its residents and commuting workforce, remained located on the ground level.

The complex stayed empty until 2021, when it became an alternative facility for licensed, mainly agricultural traders, who had lost their businesses in a devastating fire at the iconic Kariakoo market building, and at the time of writing remained underused. Standing idle for more than a decade amid a dearth of urban trading space, it reflects a specific imaginary of formalization based on elite interests as well as Euro- and capital-centric conceptions of regulation and urban development (see Lindell et al. 2016). In light of the vast number of street vendors—already more than 400,000 according to conservative estimates at the time the Machinga Complex was built—the investment of an initial 13 billion Tanzanian shillings (US \$6.5 million) to accommodate 5,000 traders indicates that the approach was never intended as a solution for all informal traders in Dar es Salaam. The consultation and planning process had not been inclusive, as trade unions, civil society organizations, and informal street trader associations were not involved, but decisions were made on a top-down basis; it thereby appeared that the conceptions and imaginaries of the urban informal economy held by decision-makers differed vastly from the experiences of traders.⁸

Taxation in and against neoliberal restructuring: (il)licit transactions

In addition to struggles over the usage of public space, the collection of fees and taxes presents a battleground in the constant power struggle between formal state authority and those depending on informal labour. In the urban context, these conflicts often reach their violent climax in crackdowns and clashes between law enforcement and street vendors which, in essence, are fought to determine the legitimacy and lawfulness of distribution and accumulation processes. Hence, the policy turnaround of President Magufuli presented a radical change which was welcomed by the majority of Tanzanians. As the former Minister of Works, Magufuli left no doubt that his move was motivated by economic goals as much as by the need to resolve ongoing unrest and violence. Similarly to the so-called *Nguvu Kazi* licenses in the 1990s (see Chapter 2), access to urban space and the introduction of

street vendor ID cards sought to accommodate the informal urban economy within regulatory frameworks at the municipal and national level, stimulate economic development, and simultaneously enhance revenues and government control.

Magufuli's new policy included in the fiscal budget for 2017/2018 the taxation of street vendors and other small business owners with capital of less than 4 million Tanzanian shillings (approximately US \$2,000). Street vendors could now register their businesses in an unbureaucratic manner with the Tanzania Revenue Authority (TRA) and, for a one-off fee of 20,000 Tanzanian shillings (approximately US \$10), obtain identification cards which became known as *Wamachinga* or street vendor IDs. By early 2018, an initial 20,000 registrations and IDs had been processed. Once again making big headlines, Magufuli publicly reprimanded the TRA later in the same year for not following his orders swiftly enough and, in a televised move, personally delivered a further 670,000 IDs at a meeting attended by regional commissioners. In response, Magufuli was praised by street traders and their associations for giving them the opportunity to obtain registration and pay a fee to the TRA (IPP Media 13 July 2017; Mwananchi 6 May 2018)—a major shift from the longstanding, deep-rooted suspicion and hostility towards tax collection dating back to colonial oppression (see Fjeldstad and Therkildsen 2008).

During interviews and conversations, informal economy workers, particularly market and street vendors, displayed a reluctance to pay fees and taxes, sometimes refusing to do so altogether. In justification, they indicated the poor infrastructure and services they were receiving, the widespread misuse of public funds, and corruption. Those with a steadier business and a fixed trading space complained about the multiple fees and levies they already had to pay to local authorities and market managers in addition to being frequently obliged to shell out bribes and penalty fees. The disbursement of bribes and unofficial fees to local government authorities provided proof of the many interlinkages between the formal and informal city, contradicting the conception of informalized labour as existing outside of, or separate from, the formal economy. State institutions were thereby knowingly aware and tolerant of unregistered and unregulated economic transactions, if not directly or indirectly encouraging them. Confirming the argument that a lack of formal regulation does not signify an absence but rather a specific form of regulation (see also Bieler and Nowak 2021), the money changing hands from unlicensed street vendors to local officials was indeed central to the functioning of the state, as municipal markets and law enforcement, for instance, could not be maintained without these unofficial payments.

Such transactions are elementary to economic governance across Africa, where revenue collection in the informal economy tends to be minimal, albeit that 'corrupt payments to officials constitute a significant public levy on informal actors, as well as augmenting low public sector salaries' (Meagher 2018, 5). As other scholars have noted (see e.g. Hart 2008; Harrison 2010),

the neoliberal policies of the past decades have expanded both the space and the need for unofficial transfers in African countries, within the continuously growing informal parts of the economy as well as between the informal economy and state officials. John and Jean Comaroff pointedly observe:

With market fundamentalism has come a gradual erasure of received lines between the informal and the illegal, regulation and irregularity, order and organized lawlessness. It is not merely that criminal economies are often the most perfect expressions of the unfettered principle of supply and demand ... Vastly lucrative returns also inhere in actively sustaining zones of ambiguity between the presence and absence of the law.

(2006, 5, references omitted)

The resulting volatility of the formal-informal delineation not only undermined trust in public institutions but was personally and physically felt by those making a living at its boundary. This surfaced in my conversations with Venance, a member of the municipal auxiliary police, who recalled various incidents in which both street vendors and auxiliary police were severely injured or even, in one instance, killed. Venance confirmed the omnipresence of bribes in the controlling of the urban economy by local government authorities, with the amount of bribes growing larger as they progressed up the chain of command. However, he maintained that the official salaries of low-ranking officers were insufficient to feed a family in a city like Dar es Salaam. He explained that while the auxiliary police and the *mgambos wa manisipaa* received money from both the vendors and the municipal administration, they also had to take the blame and—literally—the beatings from above and below. At one of our meetings, he showed up with a black eye: a shopkeeper, venting his anger at the government, had hit him with a table lamp while he had been acting as bodyguard to the municipal taxman. Venance struggled personally with his experiences of violence, in that he was torn between loyalty towards his employer and his own position of power, whereby he benefited from everyday corruption on the one hand, and his sympathy with the street vendors and his aversion towards corrupt officials in the municipal and national government, who he accused of not considering the needs of the poor, on the other.⁹

Against this background, Magufuli's move to decriminalize and quasi-formalize street trade unsurprisingly increased the legitimacy of the state in the eyes of many Tanzanians. Coupled with his ostentatious criticism of incompetent and ineffective institutions, it dovetailed with Magufuli's popular and loudly proclaimed stance against corruption, which resonated with the widely held perceptions of formal state structures as oppressive and as catering to elite interests. When I spoke with Venance in December 2016, he was happy and hopeful that the violent confrontations would come to an end, that a solution benefiting both the vendors and the municipality could be found,

and that such a solution would ultimately replace the culture of corruption. Reflecting this optimism, the introduction of street vendor ID cards successfully cast revenue collection as a win-win situation, signalling common interests and interdependence between the state, vendors, and the wider public. The policy further offered to bridge the formal-informal divide by integrating informal street trade into fiscal regulation on terms that reflected the vendors' perceived needs and gave them a voice. Thus, it appeared to follow up on the double promise of informal economy taxation, offering higher revenues on the one hand, and increased legitimacy and public accountability on the other (see Joshi et al. 2014).

However, as it was firmly rooted in the presumption of the urban informal economy as an entrepreneurial space, and arguably oriented more strongly towards the interests of the government rather than small-scale traders' needs, the policy suffered from a number of shortcomings. In generalizing street vendors as small business owners with capital of less than 4 million Tanzanian shillings, the policies failed to account for the heterogeneity in the sector. The one-off fee of 20,000 Tanzanian shillings was low for some but unaffordable for others. Given the large numbers of street traders, the total number of ID cards did not meet demand, especially in the city of Dar es Salaam. As each region had been allotted the same number of ID cards with the goal of decongesting the largest cities, the ID cards in Dar es Salaam sold out immediately, especially in Ilala Municipality, the centre of street trade; in other regions, conversely, regional commissioners found insufficient demand for them. Since it was not clarified whether vendors who could not obtain IDs would be allowed to stay in urban areas, the limited distribution of IDs soon led to conflicts between vendors with IDs and those without. Those who had already paid the one-off fee demanded to be given priority in the allocation of business premises. For the municipal administrations, the presidential policy intensified the problem of finding suitable trading spots for the numerous traders within the limits of urban infrastructure and public order, while for the vendors, the benefits of owning an ID were undercut by increased competition and lower incomes, which threatened the survival of some of them (Steiler and Nyirenda 2021). In spite of the national policy of tolerance, the Dar es Salaam regional and municipal authorities threatened to evict those without registration and IDs from the city, creating confusion between the president's word and local law enforcement (Habari 1 June 2019). Following Magufuli's death in office in 2021, the national and local governments again backtracked on the tolerant and encouraging stance on street vending, but did not provide a plan for alternative livelihood opportunities.

The attempt to tax informal street trade had another unintended effect: the informalization of previously formal economic transactions. The vast number of informal traders, especially the hawkers, had long been perceived as presenting unfair competition to owners of registered businesses who complained that they were already burdened with high levels tax. Conflicts

between shopkeepers and the government had intensified during the past decade, especially in Dar es Salaam, in response to rent spikes in the inner city and the introduction of new electronic fiscal devices in 2014, the cost of which was imposed on business owners. As one strategy to compensating rising costs and to increasing profits, shopkeepers turned to hiring *machingas* to sell their merchandise: what profit was lost due to having to lower prices to the 'street level' could be saved in value-added tax, since merchandise sold by casually hired *machingas* passed under the cash register. Similarly to the position of officers like Venance, this placed shopkeepers' interests uncomfortably at the junction of the formal and informal economy: on the one hand, they were lobbying for stricter law enforcement and the eviction of street traders since they undermined prices; on the other, the vendors provided cheap casual labour to distribute the merchandise far beyond the shop's premises and under the counter.¹⁰

Embedded in the politicized struggle over the demarcation between the formal and the informal was the contestation over the notion of the *machinga*. As discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, the image of the *machingas* as penniless but mobile hawkers selling small, inexpensive items, or their labour, in order to secure their survival, had for decades evoked the stereotype of unproductive urban loiterers in the eyes of municipal officials. Portrayed as fortune-seeking entrepreneurs and micro-capitalists, they embodied the perception of the informal economy as a self-help scheme and bootstrap operation and, as with the Machinga Complex, as a modern-day urban shopping experience. Following the introduction of the ID cards, being a *machinga* turned into a much-desired business opportunity straddling the formal-informal divide and benefiting from both sides: shopkeepers were closing their stores and downsizing their businesses in order to qualify for the cheap and convenient IDs, hiding the actual size and capital of their ventures, while the illicit resale of the IDs became a business in itself (Steiler and Nyirenda 2021).

In sum, while the decriminalization of street vending reduced the occurrence of violent conflicts, the experiment of taxing street trade, which did at least temporarily increase the legitimacy of the state, fell short of achieving the desired results. Instead, it provided a prime example of how regulatory reforms based on specific conceptions of the informal economy create their own reality, albeit in unintended and distorted ways. Magufuli's move was informed by three assumptions which Kate Meagher (2018) identified for similar undertakings in African economies: a limited and ahistorical understanding of state-society relations rooted in Eurocentric conceptions of state governance and of the social contract; a 'fiscal essentialism' based on the faulty assumption of the informal economy as untaxed by definition, ignoring the multiple transfers of resources from the informal to the formal economy; and a simplified perception of the informal economy as a homogenous and, in this case, entrepreneurial sphere. Falling prey to its underlying formal-informal dualism, the quasi-formalization of some street vendors was

accompanied by the informalization of others, among them formalized traders who used the IDs and the cheap mobile labour of *machingas* to bypass regulations as well as vendors whose livelihoods were further jeopardized as a result of the policy.

Although Magufuli's policy temporarily eased tensions between informal economy workers and the state, which also had important positive effects for the collective organization of street vendors (see Chapter 4), the introduction of the ID cards neither increased inclusivity and the opportunity to bolster the livelihoods of the majority of small-scale traders, nor did it unequivocally reduce corruption or improve the governance of urban street trade. Rather, it reorganized the boundary between the formal and the informal, along with the distribution of advantages and disadvantages this entailed. While these uneven dynamics had their roots in more longstanding problems, such as widespread unemployment, poverty, an underfunded and ineffective tax apparatus, and suspicion of the state, they can partly be attributed to the neoliberal underpinnings behind the conception of the policy. As with the promotion of business rights (Chapter 5) and the Machinga Complex, the recognition and integration of informal economy workers into formal governance frameworks was based on the presumption of informal entrepreneurship as a driver of bottom-up growth. This precluded consideration of the wider, structural conditions of large-scale informality, and limited the benefits of the ID cards to a selected group. The legitimacy of the state in the eyes of informal economy workers grew briefly, primarily due to the popularity of Magufuli and his policy, but this was a tenuous gain, as I discuss below.

Prescriptions for formalization

At the level of national governance, the conceptual politics surrounding the informal economy, and their implications for the relations between the state and informalized labour, further found their expression in diverging strategies for formalization. Since the early 2000s, consecutive Tanzanian governments have manoeuvred between and within two competing prescriptions for formalization, one following the ILO, the other the approach propagated by the World Bank and the ILD. In the same vein as the rights agendas surveyed in the previous chapter, these exemplified archetypically the logics of the structuralist and the neoliberal perspectives of the informal economy, which were respectively applied to the sectors of domestic work and street trade.

Regarding the former, in the conception by the ILO, informal work was considered a 'multifaceted and diverse phenomenon'. The transition to the formal economy hence required a multidimensional and comprehensive policy approach (ILO 2013a, 4). On the basis of the Decent Work Agenda (DWA), the ILO argued for addressing economic informality through seven integrated objectives that included macroeconomic, regulatory, educational,

and social policies. These comprised growth strategies and quality employment generation; a regulatory environment, including enforcement of international labour standards and core rights; labour organization, representation and social dialogue; equality in regard to gender, HIV status, ethnicity, race, caste, age, and disability; expansion of entrepreneurship, skills, finance, management and access to markets; the extension of social protection, consisting of social protection floors and social security systems; and local (rural and urban) development strategies (ILO 2013a, 12–13).

This comprehensive approach was taken up in the implementation strategies by the ILO Country Office. Reflecting the DWA, formalization had both procedure- and goal-oriented dimensions, through which improved conditions and protection of informal work would gradually lead to formalization, embedded in more far-reaching transformations of macroeconomic conditions and the labour market in Tanzania. The ambitious objectives listed above were to be achieved in a long-term process through joint tripartite efforts and in many interdependent steps: sensitizing and educating the public on legal frameworks, providing professional and skill set training to workers and young people, building structures for social dialogue, struggling for gender equality and non-discrimination specifically of people with HIV/Aids, and establishing a fair and inclusive system of social protection. While representatives of the ILO Country Office, trade unions, the Association of Tanzanian Employers, and civil society organizations emphasized the need for a comprehensive approach to address informality effectively, they saw the downside in the enormity of the task. It involved the contribution of considerable time, financing, and political will by all the actors and stakeholders involved, rendering the process slow despite some positive results.¹¹

Applied to the sector of domestic work, the ILO and the government understood the aim of formalization to balance power relations between employers and domestic workers, clarify rights and duties for both parties, and achieving wider social recognition of domestic workers as ‘real workers’ (see Chapter 5). In line with the Domestic Workers Convention (C189) and Recommendation 204, the first step was to establish fully inclusive labour and social protection laws, accompanied by the raising of public consciousness on the subject of domestic workers’ rights. In a next step, employment relations could be formalized through written work contracts, which would be translated and explained to the worker and kept as formal records. Finally, administrative procedures were to be simplified to facilitate the registration of work contracts and inclusion of domestic workers in the social security system (see ILO 2013b). As outlined in the Tripartite Plus Plan for Action, the government was considered a key driver in this process, which is why the ratification of C189 by parliament was seen as elementary to guarantee accountability of the government both nationally and internationally (ILO 2013d).

Although the Tanzanian government repeatedly stated its support for the formalization and labour market strategies of the ILO, in practice its

commitment remained elusive.¹² At the same time, the governments led by Kikwete and Magufuli engaged in a set of formalization strategies with different priorities, as advised by the ILD and the World Bank. Formalization of informal economic activities in this conception was linked to economic growth. Both were to be facilitated by simplifying the procedures and reducing the cost of starting, registering, and running a business, while business ownership and self-employment were to be encouraged by actively fostering entrepreneurship (World Bank 2017). In alignment with reforms within the Property and Business Formalization Programme (MKURABITA) and Doing Business frameworks, the goal of creating formalized business was ingrained in the National Entrepreneurship Strategy by the National Economic Empowerment Council (NEEC). The Strategy centred on the five pillars of optimizing the legal framework, improving entrepreneurship education and skills, expediting exchange and innovation in technology, enhancing access to finance, and establishing entrepreneurship knowledge and networks among all stakeholders (NEEC 2017).

While the expansion of entrepreneurship, skills, finance, management, and access to markets was also an element of the more comprehensive ILO strategy, the approach taken by the NEEC was restricted to these aspects and, in contrast to that by the ILO, isolated them from wider macro-economic and social contexts. Accordingly, the responsibilities of public institutions, target groups, and the overall task were defined more narrowly. Legal reform was to be accompanied by entrepreneurship training and access to finance, facilitated partly by government agencies and partly by private actors, among them 'semi-formal' or 'non-formal' stakeholders and groups. Contrary to the ratification of C189 and the DWA, the government followed an ambitious schedule for the implementation of the Entrepreneurship Strategy, with clear indicators for measuring success within the legislative period. For instance, reformed legislation concerning entrepreneurship, microbusiness, and small and medium-sized enterprises was to be passed by 2019, and the proportion of unregistered businesses was expected to drop from 89 per cent to below 70 per cent by 2021 (NEEC 2017, 11).

Echoing the tone of the DWA, the Entrepreneurship Strategy was understood to be comprehensive and inclusive:

[I]t is holistic in the sense that it integrates five key areas for the realisation of entrepreneurship development ... it seeks outcomes for all relevant segments of society, including the marginalized (youth, women, those with a disability), innovative and high-tech and high growth start-ups, etc.

(NEEC 2018, n.p.)

The strategy claimed to be broad in scope, aiming at easier access to the market and to land (to be used as collateral in customary law), the establishment of cooperatives, legal changes, skill set development, and the creation of an environment conducive to good business. However, a closer look showed that it was

more narrowly conceived, as the legislative reforms, policy strategies and programmes designed by the NEEC or MKURABITA and implemented by agencies such as the Business Registration and Licensing Agency exclusively aimed at improved business facilitation and formalization. They were, moreover, tailored to Tanzanians who were already, or at least potentially, entrepreneurs. The focus of the entrepreneurship training programmes explicitly addressed young people who should have ‘the character and attitude of an entrepreneur’ and ‘[b]e able to write a bankable business plan and pitch’ (NEEC 2018). Asked about how the formalization strategies were intended to serve different groups, a NEEC legal officer explained:

We recognize that most of the people doing informal business do so as a way of survival, not because they’re interested in being entrepreneurs. Those who want to be entrepreneurs have previously been discouraged by the complicated rules and costs [of formalization]. For these people, it’s now easier. With regard to street vendors, it’s more difficult. One approach is the Machinga Complex [which] had its challenges ... What all the cities now do is to try to set aside areas for [street vendors] where they can do their market business. Right now, we are preparing a guideline to work on with the local governments; we believe it will be easier for the local governments to work with the street vendors to find solutions for these problems ... we don’t give out the funds ourselves. They’re applied for via SACCOs [Savings and Credit Cooperative Organizations] and then distributed to its members, which are registered and identified groups. This way it’s easier to reach them than when we try to give funds to individuals.¹³

Two aspects about the conception of this strategy are noteworthy. First, although the government recognized that for many Tanzanians self-employment and entrepreneurship are not a free choice but are viewed as a last resort, legislative and administrative reforms were designed to assist formalization for those who chose the path of entrepreneurship and had the assets and capabilities to do so. Second, the strategy aimed at harnessing bottom-up growth by strengthening the role and position of local governments and by fostering governance at the community level. This approach resonated closely with recent wider trends of neoliberal economic governance observed across sub-Saharan Africa (see Bernardis 2018), where state duties, particularly those concerning economic regulation and redistribution mechanisms, are delegated to lower governance levels with an emphasis on the role of ‘local’ communities.

In tackling economic informality, the Tanzanian government has hence followed a two-pronged approach, following strategies which are marked by the discrepancy between what Amin Kamete (2018, 184) calls ‘a welfarist [and] a technicist regulatory legalistic form of integration’. The divergence between the two strategies, I propose, rests on different conceptions of the relationship between the formal and the informal economy. In the strategy

pursued by the ILO, the informal economy is a matter of governance, referring to regulatory frameworks and labour market conditions. State governance is therefore central to the problem of informality as well as to its solution; regulation by the state should ensure legal and social protection for informalized labour and contribute to levelling structural inequalities. By contrast, the strategy focusing on business formalization prescribes a limited role for the state in facilitating transactions in competitive markets and highlights the (self)responsibility of market actors and private enterprise. At the bottom line, the two strategies are divided over whether to prioritize survival or accumulation as the essence of the informal economy, as well as over the sequencing of formalization and economic development.

Despite appearing diametrically opposed, the two strategies do, however, share some traits both in their theory and in their practice: in theory, both adhere to and reaffirm the formal-informal dualism, casting informal labour as an aberration from the norm and the goal of formalized, standard labour relations. They converge on connecting formalization with economic and social development insofar as the informal economy is seen as an impediment to the latter. The two strategies thereby tap into the mainstream conception of the informal economy as outside of, or at least subordinate to, formally regulated relations of capitalist production, a view which ignores the elementary role of value extraction from the informal economy. Although the conception of the ILO in the long term envisions the absorption of all informal economy workers into the formal economy, in the short to medium term both strategies normalize and justify their exclusion from formal and redistributive frameworks in particular.

In practice, this has translated into legislative and regulatory reforms which prioritized specific groups of workers: the National Entrepreneurship Strategy, as implied by its name and promoting institution, sought the economic empowerment of entrepreneurial citizens, while the ILO Country Office and trade unions channelled their spare resources to sectors with workers in more clearly identifiable employment relationships, such as transportation, construction, or domestic work. Workers in more unconventional employment relations, such as *machingas* and other small-scale traders, complicated formalization efforts based on established regulatory frameworks. Both formalization strategies appeared a poor fit for many informal economy workers, who often straddled the categories of casually employed, voluntarily and involuntarily self-employed, or other forms of survivalist income-generation. Left unaffected and informalized by those interventions, the workers had to grapple on their own with the frameworks shaping their work lives. The next section returns to their views.

‘You tell me, who is a thief?’ The limits to moral economy

I began this book by challenging the formal-informal boundary, recalling how it could change according to the laws and the political moods of the day, and how

it had mattered so little to the informal economy workers I had met in Dar es Salaam. Indeed, the insignificance street vendors and domestic workers attributed to the categorization of their work as 'informal', in stark contrast to its emphasis by the interviewed officials and experts, had inspired and informed my research. In this final analytical section, I return to workers' views on informality with the aim of addressing the dynamic between formal governance institutions and informal practices in constituting legitimate social order. Taking up Clement's metaphor of governance as the art of 'eating with the blind', I illustrate how workers perceived the state and their relationship with it, and how this, in turn, affected their experiences of (in)formality.

Diverging perceptions of the significance of (in)formality, not only as a category but also as a set of practices, played out in a set of partly overlapping, partly conflicting conceptions of state governance: among officials and experts disagreement existed between those who called for a stronger role of the state in economic governance and development, and those who advocated a bottom-up, self-help approach. Unsurprisingly, the former position was held by representatives of the ILO, trade unions, and some civil society organizations; the latter by representatives of the NEEC and MKURABITA. While the former argued for the responsibility and duty of the state to intervene on behalf of the poor through the provision of adequate laws and services, the latter maintained that, in the face of underfunded and already overburdened state institutions, Tanzanians needed a 'change of mindset': this expression, which repeatedly surfaced in interviews and conversations, denoted that Tanzanians should move from expecting paid employment and other forms of public support to becoming individually self-reliant and self-employed.¹⁴

The workers, who did not frame their labour and livelihoods in terms of formality or informality, deviated from these clear-cut views, yet neither fully agreed nor disagreed with them. Rather, their expectations of the state presented what could be described as a pragmatic, day-to-day, and hands-on attitude, containing elements from both sides. For instance, when asked about their work, many domestic workers and street vendors pointed to aspects of precarity, such as insufficient incomes, uncertainty, and poor working conditions. Mirroring the perspectives held by the ILO and trade unions, they saw these challenges as a consequence of lacking or limited opportunities for education, skills training, access to finance and capital, and alternative employment. Furthermore, they often criticized the present-day Tanzanian state for failing to provide development, comparing it not only to Europe, the United States, or the People's Republic of China, but also to the former socialist state. At the same time, they rarely expressed the hope that the state or government would come to their rescue, thus neither actively placing demands on the state nor displaying a passive, expectant mindset.

Indeed, most of my conversations with domestic workers, street vendors, as well as motorcycle and cab taxi drivers, tailors, and other service workers such as waiters or hairdressers, testified to a high level of self-reliance and

self-help among informal economy workers and their communities. Younger workers, such as Lawrence, Shafira, or Bisuna, expected that they would defy the odds and become successful through hard work.¹⁵ Older workers, like Clement, Frederick, or Mama Sada, who had experienced hardships and had to shoulder the responsibility of caring for their families, were more aware of the constraints placed on their efforts by unfavourable social structures.¹⁶ While few hoped to become rich, the minimum goal of survival and the maximum goal of accumulating wealth were to be achieved one step at a time: *ndogo ndogo*, small-small, and *polepole*, slowly. Overall, their demands on the state were modest: street vendors mostly asked to be left alone and for an end to the harassment by the authorities so that they could operate their businesses undisturbed; domestic workers asked for recognition of the value of their work; and workers in both groups wished for easier access to small loans and microfinance, skills training, and the opportunity to work in a way which would enable them to live well.¹⁷

The optimism of younger workers and the acquiescence of the older ones, notwithstanding the privations they endured, appeared to confirm Clement's claim that Tanzanians would not stir while there was some food left on their plate. This apparent acceptance of structural limitations by people in the Tanzanian informal economy has, following the thinking of James Scott (1985), at times become interpreted as quiet, everyday resistance based on the collective struggle for the right to a subsistence (Tripp 1989). Surveying the survivalist activities which began to mushroom in Tanzania in the 1980s and 1990s, Aili Mari Tripp suggests that the emerging informal economy provides a buffer to compensate for the inability of the state to care for its citizens amidst economic crisis:

In fact, the resiliency of society and its ability to reproduce itself with considerable autonomy from the state is one of the reasons the entire fabric of society did not fall apart during years of unprecedented hardship, to the amazement of many Tanzanians. One airline pilot I spoke with observed: 'Any other country would have had riots if they had gone through what we have gone through in the past years.'

(1997, 4)

The resourcefulness of Tanzanians, according to this view, did not only make up for the lack of public and social services, it also created new and alternative forms of making a living and organizing social life and, hence, a pathway to development that was far more people-based and bottom-up than the former state policies. In this sense, the informal economy did not undermine the state, as the government feared it might when it resorted to repressing such activities; rather, ensuring survival by informal means took the pressure off demands on the state and helped to preserve its legitimacy (Tripp 1997, 11). At the same time, informal community rules, based on mutuality and reciprocity, came to present a counterweight to unjust, corrupt, and oppressive state structures (Tripp 1989, 1997).

Such a conception of the informal economy as a ‘moral economy’, while holding some explanatory power, at least for the socialist and post-socialist years, does, however, deserve to be re-evaluated in light of more recent dynamics: not least because, as Matteo Rizzo (2017) and others (Hilgers 2012; Bernards 2018) have pointed out, neoliberal reforms of the past decades, irrespective of their inconsistencies and contradictions, have had measurable effects on the economies of Tanzania and other countries in sub-Saharan Africa, thereby changing the context for informalized labour substantially.

Following years of structural adjustment, further integration into global markets, economic crises, jobless growth, and rapid urban expansion, during the time of my research the informal city of Dar es Salaam bore little resemblance to a moral economy. Certainly, elements of a moral economy were vital to the survival of many informal economy workers. Street vendors and others often had to rely on solidarity, friendship, and help from the community. Small loans, being offered a bed for the night, a free meal, a neighbourhood community collection for medical care, or back-up in conflict situations were considered life-saving in hard times; at other times, pooling resources among family and friends could boost a business venture. All over the city, groups of street vendors had established a network of communication lines with *bodaboda* drivers who warned them if the municipal auxiliary police were on their way to stage an eviction raid. Charging different prices to different customers, depending on their (perceived) purchasing power, was considered a moral duty among street vendors; some *Mama Lishes* offered food at a reduced price or gave leftovers for free to those in need. Similarly, domestic workers supported each other by sharing advice on where to find employment or where to seek help when dealing with an abusive employer. As elaborated in Chapter 3, they sometimes established strong personal bonds with their employers, based on gratitude and mutual help.

Solidarity and mutual help, however, also had strict limits. Those arriving in Dar es Salaam without friends or kin struggled to find a place and an economic niche for themselves. Many of my interlocutors, even those embedded in community networks, had experienced bullying, fraud, the theft of their belongings, or various forms of violence, often more than once. Young people and women were even more at risk and had to struggle harder. Unlike moral economies in pre-capitalist rural societies based on subsistence ethics, in the ‘informal city’ communities and groups were fragmented; in an unregulated space as vast, multitudinous, and condensed as Dar es Salaam, the right to subsistence was denied to many. The gruesome spectacle of a young man being beaten to death by a mob for attempted theft was all too frequent. *Kijiweni*—the street corner where on most days more than two dozen young male day labourers would wait from early morning to evening for a job—and the overcrowding of Kariakoo by *machingas*, trying to sell stacks of the same low-cost items with vanishingly small profit margins, signalled the pre-eminence of surplus labour and too little work to get by.

The indubitably existing elements of a moral economy, then, could not be mistaken for autonomy from the formal economy or the circuits of capitalism, as friendship and mutual favours were not enough to pay for life in the city. 'At the end of the day', to use an expression which was common among English-speaking Tanzanians, one had to have money: *pesa* (cash) was needed to pay for basic needs like food and water, medicine, bus fares, rent, clothes, and school uniforms for the children. Cash was, moreover, needed to be able to afford highly desirable luxuries such as smart phones, visits to fashionable bars and nightclubs, designer clothes and shoes, perhaps even a motorcycle—all of which were considered part of the 'good life'. The economy of solidarity and favours, hence, was not separated from the 'formal city' but was deeply intertwined with it and with its class structures, as depicted in Chapters 3 and 4, and as observed early on by Keith Hart (1973).

Rather than being opposites, elements of a moral economy and of neoliberalism simultaneously contradicted and complemented each other in the 'informal city'. My interviews and observations revealed that elements of a moral economy did not emerge in the form of active or passive resistance to distant and oppressive state structures, but rather as adjustments to the persisting hardships of poverty and precarity as well as to neoliberal doctrines and reforms. In instances when its more obvious pitfalls had to be cushioned by informal self-help schemes, the valorization of the entrepreneurial spirit and of the self-made businessman or -woman was called into question by some informal economy workers—mostly those who were elderly and those who had failed to beat the odds—but nonetheless was accepted by many. This not only testified to the pervasiveness of neoliberal norms in contemporary Tanzania where, similarly to other countries in sub-Saharan Africa as well as perhaps the informalized global economy more broadly, '30 years of socialisation to neoliberal policies, having forced the individual to become an 'enterprising self' in order to adapt to a market ordered by competition, have had their effect' (Hilgers 2012, 91). As they both compensated for the absence or incapacity of formal governance frameworks in providing for those earning their livelihoods in the informal economy, norms and practices of entrepreneurialism and of mutual support also reflected what was considered the appropriate role of the state. In this sense, similar to Deborah Pott's (2008) argument about portraying the informal economy in a neoliberal fashion as filled with opportunities for accumulation and economic growth, likening it to a moral economy of solidarity and support appears 'too convenient' as it invites being 'used by the state and policy-makers to enable the government to evade its responsibilities to the urban poor, such as striving to create more formal sector jobs' (2008, 155).

However, although commitments to both individual and collective self-help might have contributed to the acquiescence Clement attested to Tanzanians, this did not make them 'blind'. While many street vendors only demanded freedom from municipal authority harassment as, in their view, they were doing no harm but honest work, they also keenly noted economic and social inequalities between rich and poor Tanzanians and saw state

structures and the government implicated in corruption. Indeed, they challenged the authority and legitimacy of the state in denying them the space to make a living, especially those who had experienced hardships due to clearance raids. For instance, Mudi, a *machinga* selling handcrafted leather belts and handbags in the central business district, had his wares confiscated in a raid by municipal law enforcement troops. Being unable to pay the fine, he had managed to escape arrest but had to leave behind his expensive merchandise, which was subsequently pocketed by the *mgambos*. Having just lost his source of income, he saw law enforcement as despotic and arbitrary:

So you know, the City Council people come and arrest us because we're breaking the law, but they take our money, our stuff for themselves, so you tell me, who is a thief? They are paid to chase us and they steal from us but we have to run away or we go to jail.

After the raid in which they all had suffered harsh losses, Mudi and the fellow *machingas* in his collective, who collaborated in handcrafting and selling fashion accessories to tourists and businesspeople, argued that during the socialist era everybody in Tanzania had been poor, including the party leaders; today, a minority was benefiting from the period of economic growth and the country's wealth of natural resources.¹⁸ In the same way, domestic workers took note of the sharp differences between wealthy and poor employers. While the latter could be forgiven for paying low wages, the former were considered greedy, unfair and, in exploiting domestic workers, criminal.¹⁹

Yet while domestic workers and small-scale traders generally had low expectations and made few demands of the government and formal state institutions, they usually provided very concrete responses to the question 'what could the government do to improve your situation?' Many market and street vendors called for better infrastructure and access to attractive trading spaces and storage facilities, as well as to microfinance and loans. Some of the traders, especially those who were struggling to make ends meet or who were suffering from health problems, wished for employment opportunities in fields other than street vending; similarly, many of the domestic workers aspired to find other, more highly esteemed and better paid work. A number of street vendors and domestic workers, among them Mudi, Frederick, Neema, and Bisuna, regretted their low levels of education and wanted to be given a possibility to finish secondary school, attend vocational training, or go to college. Domestic workers requested of both the government and their employers to be remunerated fairly, to work and live in good conditions and, importantly, to receive respect for their labour.²⁰

Conclusion

This chapter has traced how specific conceptions and imaginaries of the informal economy have influenced interventions aiming at its spatial

reorganization, fiscal regulation, and formalization, as well as its portrayal as a moral economy vis-à-vis the state. In each of these instances, conceptions of economic informality connected to discourses which enabled and legitimized accumulation and survival of different groups as well as their integration into, or exclusion from, the formal economy. Translated into policy interventions, the informal economy and informalized labour presented an arena for testing and contesting norms and institutions of state governance. These interventions appeared ideologically and politically informed rather than tailored to the needs of informal economy workers and achieved few, sometimes the reverse, of their proclaimed intentions. Yet, perhaps more importantly than having actual material effects, they served to reconfigure the formal-informal boundary by ascribing legitimate roles to the state, represented by the national and municipal governments, in governing the distribution of economic gains.

While the competing neoliberal, structural, and post-modern perspectives of the informal economy clearly shone through the respective interventions, workers' lives were far more complex and their views more nuanced. Notwithstanding their seeming acquiescence and resort to self-help schemes—both, it is worth emphasizing, part of survivalist strategies rather than intrinsic features of economic informality—they had a keen eye for the excesses and injustices engrained in the struggles surrounding the accumulation of wealth by some and the dispossession of others. To them, the sources of their hardships lay neither with formal institutions nor the informality of their work as such, but with the usage of these categories by those in powerful positions for getting away with theft, taking unfair advantage of others, and denying them the means for earning a livelihood. Although many informal economy workers made concrete demands of the government—access to suitable trading spaces, better infrastructure and services, opportunities for employment and education—they often also shared the norms of entrepreneurialism and self-responsibility as viable pathways to survival and petty accumulation. Regardless of whether this is seen to reveal the limits or the success of decade-long neoliberal normalization, the vendors' and domestic workers' views challenged the conception of an informal, moral economy outside of, and an alternative to, formalized structures of accumulation, and instead pinpointed the legitimizing role of discourses on state governance to delineate the former from the latter.

Notes

- 1 Conversation with Clement, a cobbler and beverage vendor, January 2015.
- 2 Drawing on Mathieu Hilgers (2012), Jonathan Anjaria and Ursula Rao (2014, 413) make a similar point in their observations about the positioning of the state amid neoliberal reforms, arguing that 'one cannot roll back a non-existent welfare state'.
- 3 Interviews with a municipal solicitor at Kinondoni Municipal Council, March 2015, and the Senior Operations Officer, Informal Sector, at the NSSF, December 2016.

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- 4 Conversation with Tatu, a *machinga*, January 2015.
- 5 Conversations with board members of the market vendor association Migahawa, February 2015, and Lawrence, a second-hand clothes vendor, November 2016.
- 6 Conversations with vendors, see notes 4 and 5, and focus group discussion with board members of UWAWADAR, February 2015.
- 7 I am grateful to Colman Msoka for directing my attention to *nusu na robo* (a half and a quarter), the practice of buying small, non-standardized amounts of goods which is only possible in informal trade, and which makes street vending invaluable specifically to the urban poor.
- 8 Interviews with the Assistant General Secretary of TUICO, the Chairperson of VIBINDO, and board members of Migahawa, all February 2015.
- 9 Conversations with Venance, a member of the auxiliary police, March 2015 and December 2016.
- 10 Interview with a Project Officer at the FES, February 2015, and conversation with Elias, a shopkeeper trading in fabrics in Kariakoo, December 2016.
- 11 Interviews with the UNDAP Coordinator at the ILO, May 2014, the National Programme Coordinator, Labour Law, March 2015; the Executive Director of the ATE, February 2015; the Chairperson of the Tanzania Informal Economy Networks on AIDS Initiative (TIENAI), March 2015; the Director of Occupational Health and Safety, Environment and HIV/Aids at TUCTA, January 2015; and the Head of the Commercial Sector, TUICO, December 2016.
- 12 At the time of writing, ratification of C189 was pending.
- 13 Interview with a Legal Officer at the NEEC, March 2015.
- 14 Interviews with the Programme Coordinator at MKURABITA, January 2015; the Manager, Research and Planning, at the NEEC, March 2015; see also *The Citizen* (28 April 2017).
- 15 Conversations with Lawrence, a second-hand clothes vendor, and Shafira, a *machinga*, November 2016, and Bisuna, a domestic worker, March 2015. See also Chapters 3 and 4.
- 16 Conversations with Clement, see note 1, Frederick, a *machinga*, November 2016, and Mama Sada, December 2016. See also Chapters 3 and 5.
- 17 See notes 15 and 16; interviews with the Chairperson of VIBINDO, December 2014 and February 2015; focus group discussions with Migahawa, February 2015, and domestic workers, January and March 2015.
- 18 Conversation with Mudi, Constantine, Rajab, and Jimmy, *machingas*, April 2014.
- 19 Conversation with Emanuel, a domestic worker, March 2015, group discussions with domestic workers, January and March 2015.
- 20 Conversations with Mudi, see note 18; Frederick, see note 16 and Chapter 5; Neema and Bisuna, domestic workers, December 2014 and March 2015, see also Chapter 3; group discussions, see note 19.

7 Concluding Thoughts

I began this book by recounting how in two concrete instances, namely the inclusion of domestic work into labour law and the decriminalization of street trade by President Magufuli, the meaning of informality for workers in the two sectors in Tanzania changed significantly in a very brief timespan. These inconsistencies—the irregularity of what counts as irregularity, so to say—and their implications for the lives of so many workers in Dar es Salaam prompted me to scrutinize the construction of informality more thoroughly. Instead of taking the presence of an informal and a formal economy as given, it needed to be asked how labour became conceptualized and represented as ‘informal’ in the first place, and the effect this had on workers and on societal organization more broadly.

While some of my observations pick up on earlier studies conducted in other contexts, the contradictions and contestation ingrained in conceptions of economic informality have emerged forcefully in my notes on Tanzania. Analysing the two dissimilar sectors of small-scale trade and domestic work, both of which qualify as informal—one according to the letter of the law, the other through its practical implementation—has brought into relief the limitations of understanding the informal economy as clearly demarcated and coherent. In juxtaposing the different meanings of informality in the two sectors, this book has gone beyond merely taking a deeper look into the informal economy as a black box or ‘common-sense’ category—it presents a cautious attempt to challenge its foundations. This analytical approach has offered a sharper illumination of the role of political imaginaries in discursively constructing a global phenomenon which presents the majority of work worldwide. In this light, the book contributes to an emerging body of critical reflection and engagement with the performative power of the formal-informal dualism, and its interconnections with the everyday lives of workers in irregular, predominantly precarious employment.

The main arguments of the book

In the course of a journey which took me through the formal and informal city of Dar es Salaam, from the offices of government officials and trade

DOI: 10.4324/9781003294122-7

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union representatives to markets, backstreets, and urban homes, four main interrelated arguments emerged.

First, based on the analysis in the preceding chapters, I propose to study informalized labour across and beyond the boundaries of the informal economy, however delineated, and instead to shift the focus towards the processes of informalization. These processes present a dynamic interplay of shifting governance rationales and techniques, such as doctrines of economic development and policy interventions, on the one hand and the everyday labour relations, labour processes, and interactions of informal economy workers on the other.¹ In studying the politics surrounding the regulation of street vending and domestic work in Tanzania, the informal economy could be shown not to exist objectively 'out there'; rather, economic informality was demarcated by multiple, complex, and sometimes contradictory processes and factors. The boundary between the formal and the informal was subject to constant shifts, which were affected by and resonated with changing discourses and practices in the collective organization of workers (see Chapter 4), the promotion of rights and formalization procedures (Chapter 5), and the relations between the state and workers in informalized jobs, exemplified not least in the governance of urban spaces by municipal authorities and their recurring clashes with unlicensed street vendors (Chapter 6). Studying informal labour in isolation from formal institutions and from wider structural conditions and accumulation processes in the capitalist economy, at both the national as well as the international and global level of governance, then, risks missing an important part of the picture. Resonating with earlier contributions (Bernards 2018; Danielsson 2019), it can be concluded from such observations that the informal economy presents an intriguing 'site of critical analysis' (Banks et al. 2019) to inquire into these complex processes, rather than a static analytical and political category or a clearly demarcated realm in the life-world.

Second, processes of (in)formalization are not only a matter of economics and statistics, with a certain number of jobs being created in the formal economy and a certain number of people drifting into informal income generation following labour market disequilibria. They are also more than an outcome of institutional failures or ill-suited governance schemes. They are, in no small part, a product of conceptual politics, where conceptions and imaginaries of economic informality shape the content of interventions as well as the practices, identities, and lived experiences of workers. Throughout the preceding chapters, I illustrated how in Tanzania, conceptions of economic and labour informality were by no means merely descriptive or neutral categories. Instead, a political and social concept as defined by Reinhart Koselleck (1982, 1995), among decision- and policymakers as well as workers earning their living in the informal city, the notions of 'informal economy' or 'informal labour' were always ambivalent in their meaning, normative, and continuously contested in their essence. While used to describe objectively observable material factors and conditions, conceptions of the informal

economy were also implicated in the social construction of the world of work they depicted.² Chapters 2 and 3 discussed how changing perceptions of the labour of street vendors and domestic workers have contributed to the creation of legal frameworks and regulatory practices which continue to affect workers. These conceptual politics surrounding informality found their continuation in the design of strategies by labour organizations, among them the International Labour Organization (ILO) Country Office and trade unions, to recruit and organize workers; they found expression in legislation which enabled or disabled collective organization, as shown in Chapter 4. The framing of informal labour as either entrepreneurship or employment resulted in quite opposing conceptions of rights as well as the economic and social inclusion of workers in the Decent Work Agenda and the Legal Empowerment of the Poor approach, juxtaposed in Chapter 5. Finally, using the examples of the almost sensational failure of the Machinga Complex and the *Wamachinga* ID card scheme, both of which drew on the neoliberal image of the urban informal economy as an entrepreneurial space, Chapter 6 illustrated how thus conceived formalization strategies ended up achieving quite the opposite of their stated goals.

To use the term deployed by the Cultural Political Economy school of thought (Sum and Jessop 2014), the developments in Tanzania exemplify how imaginaries of the informal economy have over the past decades developed a life of their own. In Tanzania and elsewhere, and changing in its definition, application, and normative evaluation across time, geographical context, sector, and political moods of the day, the concept and imaginary of the informal economy has played a considerable role in (de-)regulating and (de-)legitimizing various forms of work. Without intending to downplay the material and economic factors driving informalization, I propose that attention needs to be paid to the mobilizing discursive efforts which accompany these processes. Crucially, such processes of conceptual contestation can have real effects—legal, institutional, and social—as they reconfigure legal and institutional frameworks, class identities, workers’ organization and struggle, and the relations between state governance and informalized labour.

Third, in Chapters 2 and 3, informality emerged as intersectional, relative, and relational, contradicting a view of informality as a clearly demarcated and measurable uniform category. What counted as informal was presented as an amalgamation of complex intersections between historical trajectories dating back to colonial times, legislation and law enforcement, spatial organization of work in the two sectors, and the multiple social categories of gender, ethnicity, class, age and marital status, as well as skill and education level. Informality had different meanings not only for the sectors of street trade and domestic work, but varied greatly for individual and groups of workers within the two sectors. Consequently, some workers and their labour were more informal in terms of invisibility and precarity than others.

These nuances were, if at all, inadequately captured by formal institutions which were based on the historical and geographical exception of the

standard employment relationship (SER) as the norm and benchmark for economic governance. The formal-informal dualism engrained in the legal regulation of the two sectors, which excluded and penalized street vending while treating domestic work as work 'like any other', could be shown to reflect dichotomous distinctions between productive and reproductive labour, public and private workplaces, employment and kinship relations, and employment and self-employment. These distinctions are essential to labour markets and social policies organized around the SER but resonated poorly with the actual labour relations and conditions of most Tanzanian workers. Instead, feeding into the formal-informal dualism, they had the effect of normalizing and justifying the ongoing exclusion and deprivation of those depending on informalized labour, and further depoliticized struggles around survival and accumulation. Nonetheless, as highlighted in Chapter 4, the formal recognition of workers and their labour mattered, particularly for the securing of livelihoods and for the prospects of collective struggle. Even when existing labour laws and public policies fell short of accounting for the realities of informalized labour, the legal inclusion of domestic workers and the period of tolerance towards street vendors under President Magufuli offered opportunities for collective organization and improvements in working conditions.

Fourth, although conceptions of the informal economy are inherently dualist and residualist, there are real differences between competing perspectives which matter in terms of their effects on informal economy workers. Other critical commentaries (Alessandrini et al. 2022) have underscored how conceptions of informality, alongside prescriptions to formalization, perpetuate the 'dream of formality' as ideational and institutional elements of the current international economic order. Indeed, as I have argued in the analytical chapters, policy agendas informed by neoliberal as well as by structuralist perspectives on the informal economy ultimately conform with, confirm, and, as Anna Danielsson (2016) puts it, 'perform' the formal-informal dualism. In doing so, they contribute to further informalization, although perhaps in quite unintended ways.

However, the discussion in the previous chapters also showed that some understandings of informal labour and their ensuing strategies for policy and governance are better than others. The observed interlinkages between the formal and informal city, the experiences of street vendors and domestic workers, the role of legislation in fostering or impeding workers' organization, and the constant struggles connected with the reorganization of the state and of labour around the formal-informal divide all spoke in favour of the structuralist perspective which sees the informal economy as embedded in capitalist dynamics and distribution battles. By contrast, neoliberal readings of the informal economy as a sphere brimming with entrepreneurial opportunity, as well as its conception as a moral economy (see Chapter 6) appeared to be missing the point, at least for a large share of street traders and domestic workers.

In Chapters 4–6, I elaborated on how academic research as well as policymaking of such a persuasion tend to conflate survival with accumulation, casual and self-employment with business ownership, meagre incomes and precarity with profits, and self-help schemes with a moral economy. Such accounts in the research literature, coming close to repeating the language of the political agendas which they purport to be investigating with a critical eye, play their own part in the conceptual politics of informality (see also Rizzo 2017). As discussed in detail in the analytical chapters, it is not least in consequence of such conceptualizing that some current policy agendas conceive of the informal economy as a realm of individual micro-entrepreneurs who are to work themselves and the entire national economy out of poverty in a fashion similar to that of Baron Münchhausen, who famously claimed to have pulled himself as well as his horse out of a mire by his own hair.

In Tanzania, following the demise of post-independence socialism and shifts in international discourses, modernist conceptions of the informal or ‘second economy’ as a stumbling block to development became gradually replaced by more favourable perspectives, although, as it emerged, modernist stereotypes stubbornly lingered, continuing to inform state governance and engagement of other formal actors such as trade unions towards informal labour. Reflecting the discourse by international financial institutions, predominantly the World Bank, the neoliberal perspective gained ground. It became the main view on the governance of street vending. Even though street traders had always been exposed to alternating cycles of tolerance and repression, the abiding tide of rural–urban migrating jobseekers who filled the streets of Dar es Salaam opened the door to the notion of the *machinga* as an opportunity-seeking owner of a micro-business, increasingly replacing state repression with laissez-faire policies and, moreover, an encouraging stance on entrepreneurship. This discourse was accompanied by the state’s retreat from social responsibilities and the de-politicizing of the labour market and wider economic policies by emphasizing self-reliance and competitiveness. Local communities, the private household, and the informal economy as a whole, on the other hand, began to be represented as the buffer for social inequality and exclusion. This conception, however, left behind the poorest and arguably most disadvantaged among the street traders, and further prevented vendors from accessing the security and benefits of the formal economy.

The neoliberal representation of the informal economy was paralleled and to some extent countered by a discourse based on the structuralist perspective which influenced policies in the domestic work sector. This approach envisioned a strong role for the state in the legal and social protection of domestic workers and, in the long term, the comprehensive reform of the labour market and social security systems. While the downside of this ambitious approach was its slow implementation, it did promise to include all domestic workers as well as workers in other sectors. The legal inclusion of domestic workers as workers with rights had observable positive effects. The

goal of formal and secure employment for all Tanzanians, however, appeared unrealistic given the continuing low levels of decent employment opportunities amid accelerating market competition both locally and globally. It further stumbled over rigid conceptions of standard employment as the basis for regulation, in practice leaving the vast majority of domestic workers informalized.

Thus, the different uses of ‘informal work’ or ‘informal economy’ as political and normative concepts have impacted the way in which millions of people live and work. This is not confined to Tanzania, or the Global South; discourses surrounding irregular forms of income generation are also at the heart of the transformations of labour markets and social security systems in the formerly well formalized economies of the Global North, with strong interlinkages between these transformations (Breman and van der Linden 2014). However, the findings presented in this book invite a rethinking of these developments, as it has demonstrated that processes of (in)formalization are not unstoppable or unalterable—there are alternatives that begin with the ways we understand the informalization of labour.

Furthering the findings

Notwithstanding all attempts to do justice to the excellent research and reflection others have undertaken before me, the often brilliant thoughts and insights shared by commentators on earlier chapter drafts, and last but not least the knowledge and viewpoints of my Tanzanian interlocutors, this book contains some gaps which I was unfortunately unable to fill in this work cycle. With the double hope that they can be addressed in future research and that they do not distort the overall contribution, I wish to reflect on them briefly.

Limitations in terms of language skills and time unfortunately did not allow me to delve as deeply into the formal and informal city of Dar es Salaam and the everyday working lives of Tanzanians as I might have liked. Although, over time, thanks to the patience and efforts of my Tanzanian hosts, my understanding of what was happening and what my interlocutors were trying to tell me expanded, it is impossible to grasp how much I must have missed. Important nuances and details as well as ‘big messages’ probably got lost in translation during the months spent in Dar es Salaam, as well as during the mapping and conceptualizing phases of writing the chapters of this book. Sharing my findings and the final manuscript with a Tanzanian audience, in other words ideally the very people whose views I attempt to represent, and hearing their comments, has been all but impossible. A problem partly of geographical distance, partly of lacking a common language, and partly of restrictions in maintaining communication channels over a long period of time, especially with Tanzanians who must spend much of their time and resources in their struggle for survival, the process of drafting the manuscript took place far away from the lives I encountered in Dar es Salaam. Hopefully not beyond recognition, this book remains a depiction of

the impact the concept and imaginary of the informal economy—an invention by Europeans studying Africa—had on the residents of an African city, written by a European researcher for a predominantly Western academic audience.

Given the breadth of the informal economy and its centrality and interconnectedness with many other relevant themes of current economic, social, and urban developments in the Global South and well beyond, I was not able to explore all its links. Narrowing down the scale and scope of a given thematic interest is a necessary and simultaneously unfortunate part of research work. I had to leave aside two aspects which, in hindsight, turned out to be of utmost relevance for the discussion on how the concept of the informal economy works: first, the rural-urban ties between the informal and formal city and the land that feeds its inhabitants. Talk about ties to rural family members living on the land of the ancestors surfaced in my conversations with Tanzanians as often as the mention of rural poverty and the dream of one day having a *shamba* (farm) on their own piece of land. Rural-urban trade, migration, and money flows added significantly to the functioning of the urban informal economy and vice versa offered lifelines for rural populations. Including this vast field and the extensive literature on the topic would have made this research effort unmanageable, but offers a rewarding avenue for future research. This is all the more so as, beyond providing interesting empirical material, questions of distribution, ownership, and use of land, and the role of migration cycles between the rural and urban, are of central conceptual and theoretical importance to discussions of the capitalist political economy as well as to imagining its alternatives. Second, as Jan Breman (2023, 34) has critiqued, analyses of the informal economy have continuously singled out one factor of production—labour—but almost entirely overlooked the role of informality for the other factor—capital—and its relations with the state, thereby inadvertently asserting ‘that capital belongs to the domain of formality’. Considering the manifold nodes of exchange I noted between the formal and informal city (see Chapters 2 and 3) as well as the cross-cutting of class and labour relations (Chapters 3 and 4), licensing and registration procedures, large-scale urban development infrastructures such as the Machinga Complex, and corruption of state officials (Chapter 6) with formal-informal boundary-making, ‘following capital’ would have floodlit an indubitably key element in the processes and politics of informalization.

This takes me to another area of research which remained unexplored during this endeavour: the established categories of capital, labour, and the state, always specific to just one part of the world, meet their limits in helping us to make sense of current global developments. When I first set out to study labour relations in the Tanzanian informal economy, I had hoped to come across different and unconventional ways of working and living that would fundamentally challenge the world of work as we know it and provide fresh concepts. Such alternatives did not emerge in my research, partly in

consequence of and partly as the reason for framing the research question the way I did. On the contrary, the informal economy of Dar es Salaam appeared all too well absorbed into globalized capitalist relations of production and profit. In this light, the praise of the informal economy as outside of and *the* alternative to established categories of capitalist organization by some voices in the discourse transpired as one of the greatest conceptual follies of all.

That said, as William Bridges pointedly remarked, ‘To our counterparts at the end of the 21st century today’s struggles over jobs will seem like a fight over deckchairs on the Titanic’ (cited in Beck 2000, 2). Thus appears the whole division over formal and informal labour once we take a step back and acknowledge that both are very much integral to capitalist modes of production which are in urgent need of revamping. Exploring socially sound and environmentally sustainable alternatives to working and living the way we currently do is an increasingly pressing matter in the face of mass unemployment, precarity, environmental degradation, escalating economic and social inequality, and the profound global transformations of labour brought about by the digitalization of work. To the extent that the concept of the informal economy is involved in the reorganization of global capitalism, I have gladly offered a critique; however, future debates are encouraged to turn towards proposals of better ways of making a living.

Goodbye—and good riddance? Working with and overcoming a problematic concept

At this point, the reader is likely to have several objections to this book. In this final section, I address two of them. The first is, why dedicate a tremendous amount of effort to discussing a concept whose usefulness has long and repeatedly been called into question? This is my response: because much of the critique of the concept and its use appears to have gone unheard, or has not reached the relevant audience. I have shown how the concept is continuously used to draw lines and evoke interventions that are not only erroneous, but in many ways harmful.

This does not only apply to the life worlds of policymaking and unregulated work from which I drew my empirical material. As noted critically by Jeffrey Harrod (2007), among others, the presumed existence of the informal economy in isolation from the formal economy has created entire branches of academic research, a whole knowledge industry aiming to reconstruct and refine a concept that was an academic invention to begin with. The resilience of the concept and its self-explanatory power are exceptional. The tautological character of its dualism emerged in my conversations with government officials and trade unionists in Tanzania as well as with fellow scholars at academic conferences where I presented drafts of the chapters.

For instance, I was made aware by a political scientist that I could not claim that law mattered in the informal economy because, by definition, the

latter was beyond the reach of the state—if law mattered, the sector in question would not be informal.³ One labour lawyer insisted that domestic workers in Tanzania could not be considered informal because they were formally recognized by the law; another labour scholar objected that street vendors could not be represented as workers if they were not in a contractual employment relationship.⁴ Anne Trebilcock's (2006) point about informal employment being an oxymoron to labour lawyers (and others) is duly noted. Such objections exemplify the problems brought about by imaginaries of the informal economy, certainly not the answers to it.

It was telling that to the street traders and domestic workers themselves the classification of their work as informal had little meaning unless it was connected to more concrete issues. By contrast, the notion of informality tends to remain insufficiently explained in much of the literature on the topic as well as by policy recommendations, failing to clarify which aspect of informality is to be addressed and shying away from the question of what makes a person, activity, or relationship 'informal' in the first place. This leads to—presumably—well-intended but often short-sighted, ineffective, or harmful policy interventions, without adequate inspection of deeper causes and wider circumstances. I thus saw a need to highlight that the informal economy lends itself to being used as a synonym for its causes, effects, and all sorts of conditions associated with it.

This brings me to the second and arguably much more serious objection. Is this book not part of the very conceptual politics I aim to critique? Am I not contributing to the self-sustaining academic industry of research on its own brainchild?

I wish to confront these questions with a counter-question: how can we best overcome the problematic uses of a concept? One way is to reject its use. This would, however, do poor service to researching different, actually existing forms of informality—economic, political, legal, urban—which still need to be better understood, a point on which I concur with other scholars (Banks et al. 2019; Harriss-White 2020). So far, a superior term has not been found and, once clarified and used with critical distance to its normative and political baggage, the notion of informality has value in summing up and aptly describing a range of phenomena.

Refraining from using the term would have also, quite simply, made writing this book and attempting to bring my claims across all but impossible. Critical usage of the ambivalent, contested, and conflict-laden concept was key to stimulating the debate over its different meanings and their implications. In the book, the conceptual discussion opened up important questions relating to the legal regulation of the economy and societal organization. Each aspect that was addressed, from the labour organization of domestic workers to the distribution of public urban spaces for street vendors, could have been discussed separately and without reference to the concept, yet it was their place in the conceptual politics surrounding the informal economy which allowed me to highlight how labour regulation in the two sectors is

embedded into wider contestations and political visions of economic and social order.

Another and perhaps more promising way to overcome a problematic concept is to make it redundant by bringing its underlying issues to the fore. Given the integration of the informal into the formal economy and the interlinkages between the two, questions of poverty and inequality, as well as political, economic, social, and legal exclusion, need to be addressed across the formal-informal dualism and its related constructed binaries between a developed North and a developing South, employment and entrepreneurship, public and private, legal and illegal, productive and reproductive. In the long term, I hope that the arguments I put forward in problematizing economic informality contribute to moving beyond these divisions towards matters of redistribution and ownership, political organization and participation, as well as visibility and voice, which are more pressing concerns for workers all around the world.

Notes

- 1 Bernards (2018) arrives at a similar conclusion.
- 2 This corresponds with the argument made by Danielsson (2019) with regard to the resilience of informality in a post-conflict setting.
- 3 This comment followed a presentation of my arguments at the Nordic Africa Institute, March 2019.
- 4 Comments following a presentation of a draft of Chapter 4 at the 37th International Labour Process Conference in Vienna, Austria, April 2019.

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