'Life is War': Informal Transport Workers and Neoliberalism in Tanzania 1998–2009

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ABSTRACT

This article analyses how informal labourers fare under flexible labour markets and economic liberalization, through a case study of transport workers in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. It highlights the mainstream conceptualization of urban informality as self-employment and its influence on policy. The article stresses the importance of class differentiation in the Dar es Salaam transport sector and the predominance of informal wage employment, the uneven degree of power commanded by bus owners *vis-à-vis* informal unskilled wage workers and the pernicious consequences of the lack of regulation of the employment relationship on the workforce itself and on society. It then interrogates the criminalization of the workforce and shows how labour over-supply, its fragmentation and geographical dispersion explain workers' lack of response to their plight. The longitudinal study of the rise and fall (1998–2005) of a labour association within the sector further highlights the tensions among the workforce and the forms and limits of their solidarity. The conclusion of this study suggests some policy implications.

INTRODUCTION

How labour fares under globalization and neoliberalism has been a remarkably understudied theme in recent writing on development in Africa. This dearth of scholarship is most glaringly apparent in the field of urban studies, despite the fact that the importance and continued growth of the informal economy in Africa's cities is widely acknowledged. Such silence has much to do with the influence of neoliberal and populist theories of informality on writing about the informal economy. According to the current orthodoxy on the urban informal economy, of which de Soto (1989, 2001) is the most significant theorist, self-employment and working for a family business are

the dominant employment relations. Entrepreneurs' *choice* of informality is thus presented as a response to over-regulation by a predatory state. As de Soto has trenchantly put it, the poor 'do not so much break the law as the law breaks them' (de Soto, 2001: 23). The significance of class in understanding how informality works is explicitly downplayed by this approach.[1]

A growing body of work by scholars such as Azarya and Chazan (1987), Tripp (1997), MacGaffey (1991) and Hansen and Vaa (2004), amplifies de Soto's conceptualization of the growth of informality as a process of poor people's empowerment. The agency of 'informal people' in bringing about deregulation from below is emphasized, as is the importance of a shared moral economy driving the spontaneous, unorganized, but nonetheless effective resistance of the African urban poor to their unresponsive governments. As Tripp has expressed it, the relaxation of government control over the economy in the 1980s 'indicated the beginnings of some long overdue adjustments in state–society relations that made the state responsive to societal needs' (Tripp, 1997: 139). This emphasis on agency is also to be found in much other writing on the African city. Simone, for example, suggests that urban life should not be seen as 'a series of policies gone wrong': agency and 'determination by urban Africans to find their own way' and 'the resourcefulness' and 'astute capacity' on which they draw hold the keys to understanding urban society in Africa (Simone, 2005; 1; see also Tati, 2001). Such a conceptualization of the urban poor has profound policy implications. From the World Bank to national and international NGOs, via national governments, micro-credit, micro-enterprise development and the formalization of property rights are top policy (and spending) priorities to support the would-be entrepreneurs that supposedly inhabit the world's slums.[2]

This article argues that such a narrative of urban empowerment is altogether too rosy. The African city has its dark side, characterized by the deepening entrapment of structural poverty and the general decline in quality of urban life, all of which have been apparent across much of the continent since the 1980s (Bryceson, 2006; Bryceson and Potts, 2006; Nelson and Jones, 1999; Rakodi, 1997). Africa's urban poverty worsened as never before

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1. In de Soto's words 'Marx would probably be shocked to find out how in developing countries much of the teeming mass does not consist of oppressed legal proletarians but of oppressed extralegal small *entrepreneurs*' (de Soto, 2001: 229, emphasis added, quoted for instance in Davis, 2006: 179; Krueckeberg, 2004: 2).
2. The point here is not to deny that self-employment is a widespread form of employment in the informal economy, but rather to emphasize policy makers' and orthodox theorists' exclusive focus on informality as (idealistically conceptualized) self-employment. See Chen (2008) for a useful typology of the continuum of employment relations to be found in the informal economy. See also Bateman (2010) and Rogaly (1996) for a less optimistic assessment of the potential of micro-finance for poverty reduction, and Gilbert (2002) for a critical assessment of the impact of the formalization of property rights on the urban poor.

during the 1980s, and the trend has continued.[3] At its lower end, the urban informal economy is characterized by very small-scale entrepreneurs and poorly remunerated, casually employed workers fiercely competing within saturated markets (Meagher, 1995). Thus, for many urban actors making a living informally is a necessity, not a choice.

Class Matters

Such a narrative of urban empowerment is also highly misleading in its class-blind approach to informality and the African city. By contrast, the central argument of this article is that class analysis, when empirically and historically grounded, is key to making sense of the formidable structural forces informal wage labourers are up against, and to analysing their agency in the process of development.[4] A few remarks on what is meant here by class analysis are necessary for the sake of clarity of the argument. First, class is a relational concept. Ownership of capital (such as land and other assets) as opposed to the sale of labour power determines people's class position in the structure of a given society, and their interests. The social relations between capital and labour, and the dynamics of class formation over time, are key drivers (albeit not the only ones) of processes of socio-economic change. As such, their study is central to understanding development. Second, an extraordinary heterogeneity characterizes the condition of labour today. This article draws on Bernstein's conceptualization of this phenomenon in terms of 'classes of labour', whose common ground, notwithstanding their heterogeneity, is the need to secure 'reproduction though insecure and oppressive — and typically increasingly scarce — wage employment and/or a range of likewise precarious small-scale and insecure "informal sector" ("survival") activities . . . in effect, various and complex *combinations* of employment and self-employment' (Bernstein, 2007: 6). Such complexity certainly makes categories such as 'worker', 'peasant', 'employed' and 'self-employed' fluid. At the same time it should not distract from the fact that sale of labour power is the main source of income to the poorest (Bernstein, 2007: 7).

Third, the identity, political consciousness and capacity to act collectively by 'classes of labour' cannot be 'read off' from their socio-economic position in society; there are a series of complexities and determinations in moving from 'the social facts' to the 'political facts', as Mamdani (1996: 219) puts

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3. When African governments were forced to adopt structural adjustment programmes informed by neoliberal ideology, the removal of 'urban bias' from policy making was one of the key targets, with particularly far-reaching consequences for the urban poor. For a critical assessment of the urban bias thesis, see Jamal and Weeks (1993).

4. A handful of recent studies document wage work in informal labour markets as a key source of income for the 'urban poor' (see Boampong, 2010; Jason, 2008; Lourenco-Lindell, 2002; Mitulla and Wachira, 2003).

it. Thus the study of labour identities and the extent to which these are experienced and expressed — or not — in class terms is an important line of enquiry in itself. Along these lines Harriss-White and Gooptu (2000) suggest that 'class struggle is first a struggle over class and only second a struggle between classes'. They show how and why the informal workforce in India remains engaged in the 'struggle over class' whilst capitalist classes actively wage an offensive against labour. In contrast to the blindness of scholarship to class in the informal economy in Africa, their work — as well as that of Breman (1996), Harriss-White (2003) and Lerche (2010) — sets the bar very high in documenting the abysmal conditions in which unskilled labour fares in neoliberal India. It examines the contingent ways in which both labour over-supply and labour fragmentation prevent the experiences of class dynamics from translating into widespread political radicalism.

This article examines how 'classes of labour' fare under neoliberalism through an African example, the case of workers in the transport sector in Dar es Salaam. The analysis draws on four periods of research (1998, 2001–2002, 2009, 2010), and a combination of quantitative and qualitative sources. Grey literature and Tanzanian newspapers, from 1983 to the present, provided the key facts of the transition from state to market in the provision of urban transport, as well as many illustrative examples of the inefficiencies of the deregulated and privatized transport system. As labour relations appeared central to understanding the performance of the private sector, I designed a questionnaire aimed at quantifying the prevalence of different types of employment in the sector, the characteristics of the workforce and conditions of, and returns from, work. In November 1998 I administered the questionnaire which was answered by 668 transport workers (drivers and conductors represented 48 and 52 per cent of respondents, respectively) randomly selected at four different locations in the city (Mwenge and Ubungo stations, Posta Baharini and Kariakoo). The sample constituted 3.75 per cent of the estimated total workforce (at 17,800 in 1998). Through observation (at times participant) and semi-structured interviews with workers from different routes, I both deepened and probed the picture that emerged from the questionnaire, namely the predominance of highly vulnerable informal wage labourers, and the patterns of labour fragmentation in the sector. These varied sources were also explored to interrogate and document the criminalization of the workforce by public authorities and the public.

The analysis also investigates the political sociology of transport workers, both the reasons behind their lack of voice and political quiescence *vis-à-vis* bus owners and the state, and existing forms of workforce solidarity. The in-depth and longitudinal (1998, 2001–2002, 2009) study of one association, consisting of people from various 'classes of labour' in one route, aided this line of enquiry in three ways.[5] First, the associational goals that *some*

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5. The name of the association and the route to which it was linked is kept anonymous to protect informants.

workers set for themselves, and the values that these reflected, facilitate an understanding of workers' strategies to negotiate precariousness and of whether their collective action embodied a moral economy of the poor — an alternative set of values from below, as Tripp (1997) and other populist scholars would suggest. Second, by attending some of its meetings, reading the minutes of others, interviewing its leaders and ordinary members, and observing the daily interaction and tensions between different categories of transport workers across the association's life, I explored the ways in which labour over-supply and labour fragmentation matter to workers' identity, as they erode the workers' common ground. The study of the association's politics therefore opens a window into the 'struggle over class'. Last, but not least, the patterns and rhythm of labour circulation *within* the sector are an important element in understanding both the precariousness faced by transport workers and their political behaviour. Access to the association's archive, and most notably its data on the turnover of members, allows some appreciation of the modalities of labour fluidity over time.

THE CONTEXT: DEREGULATION, PRIVATIZATION AND INFORMALIZATION IN THE TRANSPORT SYSTEM IN DAR ES SALAAM

Dar es Salaam is the largest city in Tanzania, and home to two and a half million people according to the 2002 Population Census. It is a neoliberal city. In the early 1980s, mirroring the broader shift from state to market taking place at a national (and global) level, the government withdrew from direct involvement in key city services such as waste collection (Kironde, 1999), water (Kyessi, 2005) and housing (Lugalla, 1995). Indeed it has progressively withdrawn from regulating the activities of the private sector in providing these services. Passenger transport is no exception.[6]

From 1970 until 1983 the public sector provided passenger transport services in Dar es Salaam under a monopoly regime. Throughout this period the population of the city grew dramatically, as did demand for transport. A complex set of causes, both internal and external, prevented the Tanzanian state from increasing the supply of public transport to match growing demand. The key external factor was the shortage of foreign exchange, a result of the oil crisis of 1974, which severely affected central government's capacity to fund urban services. UDA, the Dar es Salaam transport parastatal company, received about one-third of the foreign exchange it requested from the central government for the period 1974–83. Inadequate funding in turn impacted on UDA's capacity to purchase additional buses and spare parts. Among the internal factors, absenteeism and under-qualified personnel were listed by UDA as causes for its difficulties (UDA, 1994:

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6. This section synthesizes the fuller account of the transition from state to market in the Dar es Salaam transport system provided in Rizzo (2002: 136–45).

31–32). The mismatch between transport demand and supply manifested itself in chronic transport shortages and ultimately forced the government to abandon its initial refusal to allow the private sector into service provision. In 1983 the first private buses, known as *daladala*, appeared.[7]

The modalities of government regulation of the transport sector in the period 1983–2008 reflect the direction of policy making in Tanzania at a more general level. For the period 1983–91, government commitment to the privatization and deregulation of public transport was relatively coy. Private operators sub-contracted licences for transport from the government, which retained not only control over entrants but also authority over fare policy. The response by the private sector was modest and transport shortages persisted. From 1989 the pace and depth of liberalization dramatically increased, following intense pressure by donors dissatisfied with the commitment of the Tanzanian leadership to reforms. Such a momentous change was reflected in policy changes in the transport sector, the most important of which were the removal of state control over entrants into the sector and a fare policy which was increasingly profit-oriented and, since 1996, entirely determined by market forces.[8] The number of buses in service rose dramatically until, in the late 1990s, an over-supply of buses became evident. Dar es Salaam's transport system had therefore done a u-turn from a publicly run, and under-supplied system to a privately run, and over-supplied one in the late 1990s. Two issues need to be underlined in making sense of the general significance of this particular instance of privatization and deregulation.

First, the reform of the transport system yielded outcomes that were less positive than would have been predicted by advocates of neoliberal reform. Alongside the problem of traffic congestion (to which the over-supply of buses contributed) examples of the inefficiency of the private sector's performance include: speeding; overloading of vehicles; chronic tensions between private operators and students over travel at subsidized rates; and a high occurrence of lethal accidents involving private buses. Nor have fares fallen. During the early 1990s, when the number of private operators began to grow exponentially, passengers faced dramatic increases in fares. Between 1991 and 1996 there was a fivefold increase.[9] Taken together, these findings therefore confirm the wisdom of a wealth of studies which have stressed the shortcomings of privatization and deregulation, the fallacies of the belief in

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7. The name *daladala* comes from the name of the 5-shilling coin *dala* — the cost of one ride in 1983. Conductors used to ask passengers for *dala, dala*.

8. Interestingly, in 2001, for reasons beyond the scope of this article, the government reclaimed the authority to set transport fares through SUMATRA, the Surface and Marine Transport Regulatory Authority, which became operational in 2004.

9. Fares grew from 30 shillings in 1991 to 150 shillings in 1996. If one takes into account the concomitant devaluation of the Tanzanian Shilling, it is true that the real growth in transport fares becomes less extreme, from US$ 0.10 in 1991 to US$ 0.258 in 1996. Nonetheless, the 1996 fare was higher than that paid in the period from 1985 to 1991, when the fare oscillated between US$ 0.13 in 1985, US$ 0.052 in 1988, and US$ 0.065 in 1990.

the virtues of unfettered markets, and the need for state regulation of, and incentives to stimulate, the performance of the private sector (see, for example, Adam et al., 1992, Cramer, 2000). Second, in order to make sense of the performance by private operators, it is central to appreciate the significance of class differentiation *within* the private sector in Dar es Salaam's transport system, to which the analysis now turns.

PRIVATE BUS OWNERS AND INFORMAL LABOUR IN THE TRANSPORT SYSTEM

Results from a questionnaire focusing on labour relations in the sector suggest that over 90 per cent of the sample has a purely commercial relationship with employers, not mediated by kin (only 7.6 per cent) or friendship (1.7 per cent) (Rizzo, 2002: 155). Therefore, there is a clear division in the sector between a class of bus owners and of bus workers. Nearly 83 per cent of the sampled workforce is not employed with a contract or a fixed wage. Workers in this category operate the bus as a sort of daily franchise, for which the owner demands a daily fee (*hesabu*). The daily return for the worker will consist of what remains once the *hesabu* has been paid and the cost of petrol — towards which owners do not contribute — has been deducted. Therefore, in stark contrast with mainstream views of the informal economy, the informal actors, on which this article primarily focuses, earn a living as labourers rather than as small-scale entrepreneurs. The precise number of bus workers is not known, but is estimated to be between 20,000 and 30,000 people.

As for the entrepreneurial class, over the years surveys concur in suggesting that the ownership of buses is highly fragmented. In 1989 data from the Ministry of Communication and Transport indicated that only two entrepreneurs owned more than two buses (Mamuya, 1993: 113). In 1994 a survey by UDA stated that the average bus fleet comprised one to two buses per entrepreneur (UDA, 1994: 48). My own discussions with workers confirm this. As for the socio-economic background of the owners, local newspapers as well as workers suggest that those with access to public sector employment are highly represented in the category of bus owners.[10] Thus class and gender (there are no women drivers and conductors) are the two social institutions that notably regulate the transport system and its labour market. Religion and ethnicity, so pervasive in regulating informal economic activity elsewhere in developing countries (Harriss-White, 2010), do not seem to play a significant role in this instance.

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10. *Daily News*, 27 July 1991.

Owners are organized through the Dar es Salaam Commuter Bus Own-
ers Association (DARCOBOA),[11] whose main lobbying target is the
government. The relationship between bus owners and bus workers, un-
mediated by the state, takes place on an atomized basis, whereby employers
(unilaterally) 'agree' terms and conditions of work with employees on a
one to one basis. No 'struggle between classes' is thus observable in the
passenger transport system.

THE OVER-SUPPLY OF LABOURERS AND ITS SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPLICATIONS

In Tanzania it is common for *daladala* workers to write comments on their
windscreens or on the bodies of their buses. These writings allow an in-
valuable insight into workers' perceptions of life under neoliberalism. For
example, the words *Kazi mbaya; ukiwanayo!* ('Bad job; if you have one')
appeared on the back of one bus, an overt comment on the over-supply of
workers competing for employment in the sector. In line with the findings
of the few existing studies of informal labour in urban Africa, this indicates
that the over-supply of job seekers is a major problem experienced by work-
ers (Boampong, 2010; Lourenco-Lindell, 2002). Exploring the contingent
consequences of the over-supply of labour is therefore a useful starting point
to make sense of the limited agency of the workforce in negotiating flexible
labour markets.

Given the excess of unskilled job seekers in Dar es Salaam, the balance
of power between workers and bus owners is clearly tilted in favour of
the latter as the two parties 'negotiate' the daily fee. In the words of one
worker, 'they can ask you whatever they want and you have to accept it'.[12]
Such power asymmetry condemns transport workers to great occupational
uncertainty, extremely harsh working conditions and meagre returns. On bad
days workers will only earn enough money for the daily fee and/or for petrol.
Over 67 per cent of sampled workers answered 'it depends' to a question
on the daily return from work. The minority of workers who answered
the question indicated an average daily earning of 2,654 shillings in 1998
(approximately US$ 3.90). Taking into account the cost of living and the
existence of dependants, this sum is hardly enough to get by. Furthermore,
the employment relationship with a bus owner is extremely insecure, lasting
on average less than eight months (Rizzo, 2002: 155). The texts that workers
choose to display in the windscreens of their buses often unequivocally
refers to the hardship of life and to the mismatch between their efforts and

11. It should be pointed out that a relatively small number of bus owners, between 280 and
    300 at the time of fieldwork in 2009, were members of DARCOBOA. Interview with
    Mr Gwao, General Secretary of DARCOBOA, 16 September 2009.
12. Interview with Mashaka, Dar es Salaam, 10 December 1998.

returns. Among the numerous examples are: 'Money Torture'; *Maisha ni Kuhangaika* ('Life is about suffering'); *Kula Tutakula Lakini Tutachelewa* ('We'll eat, but we'll eat late').

   Given that the daily fee is virtually non-negotiable, workers' chance to maximize their return from labour rests on two factors: the number of trips made during the day and the returns from each trip. The average working day, of fifteen hours, suggests that demand for transport shapes its length. Within this time, in order to increase their income, workers aim to complete as many trips as possible and speeding, one of the trademarks of the *daladalas*, is an obvious way to achieve this. In order to maximize returns from each trip, the practice of overloading vehicles and refusing transport for passengers entitled to social fares, most notably students, are well documented in the media.[13]

THE CRIMINALIZATION OF THE WORKFORCE

The lack of regulation of service by the private sector, and in particular its employment relations, are therefore the key cause of the many inefficiencies of the (privatized and deregulated) transport sector. The words 'Life is War', in the windscreen of one bus, vividly suggest that workers' unruly conduct has to be understood as a necessary part of the struggle to make ends meet. However, this is not how Tanzanian institutions, the public sector, the association of bus owners, or the general public, frame and explain the problems with the transport system. Over the years, newsprint coverage of these problems reveals an immutable discourse that criminalizes the workforce and attributes the many accidents (caused by speeding and other dangerous practices) and the chronic tensions of the transport system (between workers and students, workers and policemen) to the hooliganism and greed of its workforce. A constant reference to the need for the 'cleaning' of the transport system can be observed. Cleaning efforts take more or less authoritarian forms. For example, requiring the workforce to wear identification badges and uniforms, first introduced in 1991 by the Minister for Home Affairs to facilitate control of workers refusing to ferry students, is a measure that the state adopted time and again to discipline the workforce, each time with no tangible results .[14] The more authoritarian version of attempts to bring order to the transport system is the imprisonment of 'dirty workers', an experience shared by so many that it has earned itself the nickname 'university' — i.e. where lasting lessons are taught.

   So, as Lugalla puts it, even in the case of transport the state understands 'the causes of urban poverty in terms of the poor themselves. Poverty is

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13. See Rizzo (2002: 147–50) for references on Tanzanian media coverage.
14. See *Daily News*, 28 June 1991 for the first time; *Mtanzania,* 2 September 2007 for a more recent recurrence.

not seen as a reflection of the organization of the entire socioeconomic and political system. Because of this, the solutions instituted by the state to solve urban poverty end up treating the phenomenal forms rather than the essential relations behind the problem' (Lugalla, 1995: 178–79). However, the reasons for such a myopic approach need interrogation, starting with the observation that events in Dar es Salaam show striking continuity with a tradition of criminalization of the urban workforce and the unemployed by the state in colonial Africa (on colonial Dar es Salaam see Burton, 2005; on sub-Saharan Africa see Cooper, 1983; Worger, 1983) and nowadays across the developed and developing world (Wacquant, 2003, 2010). As Bernstein (2010: 116) notes 'the economic and social power of capital, rooted in a system of property and commodity relations, has to be secured through its political and ideological rule, exercised . . . through the state'. In this particular case the state, whose employees include bus owners, frames transport problems in a way that ideologically — and not accidentally — downplays the importance of unregulated relations of employment to the behaviour of workers.

It should be noted that states are not monolithic entities and are better understood as an 'organization of organizations' (North et al., 2009: 17). The attitude of the state towards transport problems is not always functional to the interests of bus owners, as shown by another instance of tackling a symptom (speeding) rather than the cause of transport problems. On 31 October 1996 the Parliament approved an amendment to the 1973 Road Traffic Act which prevented any vehicle from providing public transport unless a speedometer and a mechanical device limiting speed to 50 km per hour was installed (United Republic of Tanzania, 1996: 146). The measure was abandoned five months after its initial enforcement, as it emerged that high-level officers had pushed for the measure with the aim of pocketing kickbacks from the two local firms that were allocated the business of installing the mechanical speed limiters. Urban transport policy thus reflects the outcome of a political struggle among competing interests.

A major absence in this struggle is noticeable here, namely the voice of the workers themselves. Interviewing them elicits a strong feeling of anger with the fee expected by employers and with the bus owners' lack of willingness to understand their circumstances on days in which the *hesabu* could not be collected. Coupled with this, workers feel profound disillusionment with the integrity of the government's various attempts 'to clean' the transport system. Such a feeling is effectively illustrated by a *daladala* worker through the following words, displayed on a *daladala* windscreen: *Kama kuoga ni usafi kwa nini taulo imechafuka?* ('If to wash means to clean, why does the towel get dirty?'). However, beyond disillusioned sarcasm, transport workers do not engage collectively with public institutions or employers over the terms of employment and/or the direction of transport policy more broadly. Why do transport workers accept this state of affairs?

MAKING SENSE OF THE POLITICAL QUIESCENCE OF WORKERS

The Spatial Dispersion of Workers

In addition to the over-supply of unskilled workers, the spatial unit in which bus workers operate matters as the concentration of workers in one place has been shown to aid their organization and collective action (Iliffe, 1979: 399). For example, during Dar es Salaam's famous dockworkers strikes in the late 1940s, a group of unskilled dockworkers was able to make claims on employers and to win concessions, notwithstanding similar issues of labour over-supply. Part of their strength rested on being able to temporarily close off the docks, preventing other workers from breaking their strike. The atomized nature of the current transport system, with about 30,000 people working on about 10,000 buses, arguably acts as a barrier.

Labour Fragmentation: The Phenomenology of Transport Workers

Another important factor is that there is no such a thing as 'a transport worker'. Appreciating the significance of class fragmentation in the labour market is one of the first steps to understanding the lack of voice by its workforce. Davis's observation that the informal transport sector 'generates jobs not by elaborating new divisions of labour, but by fragmenting existing work, and thus subdividing incomes' neatly fits what can be observed in Dar es Salaam (Davis, 2006: 181). Three different divisions or 'classes of labour' are visible in the transport labour market.

Daladalamen for Life

The first category is referred to by the workforce as *daladalaman maisha* (*daladala* worker for life). *Daladala* workers for life usually work in pairs (a driver and a conductor). Despite the wording chosen by workers to identify this group, 'workers for life' are not permanent employees. They are in charge of a vehicle and, as a result, are responsible for returning the daily fee to the bus owner, but have no formal contract. The reference to 'working for life' stems from the need to spend their life working on the bus to make ends meet. This is not an overstatement considering that the working week (or life) of a *daladalaman* typically consists of fifteen hours per day for an average of 6.67 days a week (Rizzo, 2002: 152).

People on the Bench

The second category of workers is known either as *day waka* (day workers) or *watu wa benchi* (people on the bench). The distinctive characteristic

of this second group lies in the fact that they are part-time day workers whereas '*daladalamen* for life' might be termed full-time day workers. The interaction and difference between '*daladalamen* for life' and 'people on the bench' is best understood by drawing on an agricultural metaphor often used by transport workers: *kukomaa* (to over-ripen). '*Daladalamen* for life' 'over-ripen' when they operate the bus from the beginning until the end of the working day. This is extremely taxing on workers' physical and mental well-being, considering the heat, the need to speed, avoiding collisions with other speeding buses and impounding by road police, to engage in turf wars with students, and to do all this in the presence of often argumentative passengers. Severe back pain, mental distress, and its somatization in the form of ulcers, are the vicious (and common) manifestations among workers of extreme working conditions.

Workers thus only 'over-ripen' on bad days, when they predict that their return from labour will be insufficient to divide what they earn with bench workers. However, as much as possible, '*daladalamen* for life' avoid over-ripening by taking a break for part of the working day. During that time *day waka* take over the operation of the bus. On a fairly bad day this might be for only two trips. Once dismounted, the *day waka* will be paid a small amount, normally enough to buy a cheap meal. On a less bad day, when the '*daladalamen* for life' need or can afford more than an hour off, the shift of the *day waka* is more substantial, perhaps as much as half of the working day, and so is his share of the cake.[15] Given the shortage of alternative employment opportunities, there are almost equal numbers of 'workers for life' and *day waka* at any station. This estimate is borne out by the author's observation and by the fact that in December 2001 the number of '*daladalamen* for life' on one route was fifty-four, the number of 'bench workers' fifty-six.[16]

While the difference in tasks performed by the two classes of transport workers is easy to grasp, the dynamics that lead a person to become a worker on the bench need explaining. The vast majority of these fifty-six were former '*daladalamen* for life' who had lost their employment status for various reasons. Twelve workers had had an argument either with the owner or the driver. For fourteen, the buses had been sold. For twelve, buses had broken down and had not been repaired. Six had been involved in road accidents. Five had fallen ill. The remaining seven *day waka* were people the association had 'become accustomed to'. A teenager, who at the time of

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15. Religious practices influence the division of labour between 'daladalamen for life' and *day wakas*. During Ramadan, fasting Muslim workers will only work for half the day. Interestingly, religious syncretism takes place as non-Muslim workers follow suit. Ramadan is therefore the best month of the year for *day wakas*.

16. There were two '*daladalamen* for life' working on each of the twenty-seven buses serving the route in December 2001 (giving a total of fifty-four). The list of the fifty-six 'bench workers' for the same period appeared in an association file, a copy of which is in the author's possession, entitled '*Wasiona kazi* (The jobless) — Name of Route'.

fieldwork in 1998 used to sell water at the station, was part of this group, as were two people introduced to the station by '*daladalamen* for life'.

Those Who Hit the Tin

Wapiga debe (literally 'those who hit the tin') is the last category of transport workers. In an over-supplied transport system such as that of Dar es Salaam, at any one time and at any given station one can observe more than one bus leaving for the same destination. En route the crew solicit prospective passengers, whilst at final stations *wapiga debe* take over this task, encouraging passengers by hitting the body of the bus and shouting its final destination. Once the bus is full they are paid the price of one fare by the crew. They fill up bus after bus throughout the working day. This category of transport 'call boys' appears at most bus stations in urban Africa (on Malawi, see Tambulasi and Kayuni, 2008; on Africa more generally, see Godard and Turnier, 1992).

Wapiga debe occupy the very bottom rung of the transport workforce ladder, both in terms of social status and the unskilled nature of their job. The main skill they require is the ability to shout, a task that, performed over time, wears out their vocal cords, hence their characteristically cracked voices. Many smoke heroin and marijuana, or sniff glue, to cope with the scorn they are subjected to as a result of the demeaning nature of their work. As one of them put it 'any man with a sound brain knows that shouting a destination and pulling people into the bus all day is not a job. We do it because we are in trouble. But it is not a job . . . The heart hurts when you think about life, because it is not life to be here at the station. You can't bring your family "Come to the office" . . . This is a pavement and as it is a pavement it is not an office'.[17] *Wapiga debe* are the outcasts of the transport system and the attitude of public institutions towards them is even fiercer than towards other categories of transport workers. Campaigns by municipal authorities to crack down on *wapiga debe* are a regular feature of the transport system, occurring in 1993, 1996, 1997, 2005, 2007 and 2009. In 2005 the Dar es Salaam City Council even hired a private security firm to deal with the problem. Some of its staff members were injured following an attack by *wapiga debe* 'aggrieved that they [were] denied a source of livelihood'.[18]

Given the lack of alternative employment opportunities, campaigns to do without *wapiga debe* have proven unsuccessful. On the contrary, and notwithstanding the low social status of the job, competition is fierce among a vast number of *wapiga debe*, their age varying from early teenage to forties. *Wapiga debe* in most places are organized in gangs, which 'negotiate'

17. Interview with D., Dar es Salaam, 12 August 2010.
18. See *Uhuru,* 15 April 1993; *Nipashe*, 17 February 1995; *Daily News*, 20 March 1996; *Uhuru*, 12 May 1997; *The Guardian*, 9 Juy 2005; *Mwananchi*, 2 September 2007.

solutions to market congestion. Negotiation can take different forms, from petty warfare to a more peaceful division of the market. '*Daladalamen* for life' often have little choice but to let *wapiga debe* take over part of their work (and income), as they are exposed to varying degrees of intimidation and potential retaliations by gangs. Turning down the help of *wapiga debe* might result in a smashed window or a flat tyre, and bearing the cost of repairs.

The analysis so far has documented the significance of socio-economic differentiation between classes in the transport system and the fragmentation of its workforce between different 'classes of labour'. Although '*daladalamen* for life', *day wakas* and *wapiga debe* share the characteristic of selling their labour in the transport sector to earn a living, the three groups perform different tasks from one another. In most *daladala* stations, and for most routes, the interaction between the three categories follows the pattern described, one in which overworked workers subcontract part of the day to underemployed workers, and in which gangs of men vie for space at stations to fill buses. On some routes, however, workers interact in a way characterized by a higher degree of organization.

WORKERS' ASSOCIATIONISM: FORMS AND LIMITS OF SOLIDARITY

Bearing in mind these 'classes of labour', the analysis now investigates one instance of transport workers' associationism and yields three types of insights. First, it critically assesses whether the association embodied a moral economy of the poor and put forward an alternative set of values 'from below', by exploring the goals that workers set for themselves, and the values that these reflected. Second, it analyses the interaction and tensions between different categories of transport workers across the association's life to illustrate the contingent manifestation of the 'struggle over class' in the transport system. The key question addressed is the extent to which labour over-supply and labour fragmentation visibly matter to workers' identity. Last, but not least, access to the association's archive, and most notably its data on the turnover of members over time, allows an appreciation of the patterns and rhythm of labour circulation *within* the sector — an important element in understanding both the precariousness faced by transport workers and their political behaviour.

The Organization and Goals of the Association: Managing but not Challenging Precariousness

The association under scrutiny was formed in 1998. It groups together workers from the three 'classes of labour' in the transport system (i.e. drivers and conductors 'for life', bench workers and *wapiga debe*) and does not include

bus owners or self-employed bus workers (i.e. those operating their own bus). It was established following a road accident involving a *daladala*, in which the driver was found guilty of serious violations of road safety rules and taken to jail. The owner of the *daladala* decided not to become involved. In a move that signalled a collective consciousness of the plight of their colleague, workers amassed enough money to bribe the jail personnel and obtain the worker's release. The initiative *per se* was not a new step, as being jailed was, and still is, part and parcel of working in the Dar es Salaam passenger transport sector. However, having settled the problem, a group of workers from the route decided to shift from *ad hoc*, yet highly frequent, collections of funds to aid colleagues in trouble, to a more systematic way of saving funds as a cushion against future problems. They were later able to convince others to join them.

Geography is a significant factor in understanding why transport workers from this particular route were able to institutionalize their interaction in contrast to workers from other routes, and why the organization took the specific form it did. Workers exploited the fact that their route shared no more than a handful of bus stops with other routes. This characteristic is the exception rather than the rule; in Dar es Salaam most bus routes overlap, sharing the vast majority of bus stops.[19] Taking advantage of their *de facto* monopoly of service, workers self-regulated the way in which they provided transport by doing without the cut-throat competition over fares and passengers that can be observed in unorganized routes. Instead they formed orderly queues at both ends of the route, so that at any one time there was only one vehicle waiting to fill up before departure.[20] Furthermore, they opted not to compete with each other over fares, instead setting the fare throughout the day at its rush hour value of 150 shillings. This measure yielded substantial additional income to the workforce as, on unorganized routes, the excess of buses forced their crews to lower the fare to 100 shillings during off-peak times.

The way in which workers prevented competition over fares and passengers also enabled them to generate income for both the association and its individual members. Queuing of buses at the ends of the route should have made the task performed by *wapiga debe* redundant, as passengers could have easily found their own way to the first bus going to their destination. Yet the task was preserved as the pillar to establish both a rotating source of income for individual members of the association, as well as a collective

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19. For example, buses from Kariakoo to Manzese will share the large majority of their bus stops with buses from Posta to Ubungo, from Kariakoo to Ubungo, from Kariakoo to Kimara, and so on.

20. It is important to note that workers from most routes that share only a few stops with other buses tend to adopt similar queuing strategies. Workers on routes whose stops mostly overlap with other routes cannot take advantage of such a measure. If they queued at the end of their route and workers from overlapping routes did not, they would lose custom. That is why *Mbele kwa mbele* (Always ahead) is the most common practice among *daladalamen*.

welfare fund. Concerning the former, association members took their turn, in pairs, to fill the buses. Given the number of members, these 'turns' took place approximately every two months. One's turn consisted of sitting on a bench at the station, noting down the plate number of each departing bus, from which they claimed the standard fee demanded by *wapiga debe* (150 shillings, or the cost of a bus ticket, worth approximately US$ 0.22 at December 1998 exchange rate). Although both the number of buses in service and the number of rides per bus vary on a daily basis, the total amount collected by the association's pair of *wapiga debe* at the end of a day was not insignificant, between 40,000 and 60,000 shillings (approximately US$ 58 and US$ 88 per pair at December 1998 exchange rate).[21] The association generated income for its welfare fund in two ways. First, every day each '*daladalaman* for life' paid the cost of one ticket into the association fund. Second, the association deducted a fixed commission from the two *wapiga debe* each day (a total of 10,000 shillings or US$ 14.70 per pair).

'Workers for life' and *day waka* made up the vast majority of the association's constituency from the outset, and throughout its existence. In the list of members for late 2001 these categories made up 110 out of 127 members: fifty-four '*daladalamen for life*' (working on the twenty-seven buses serving the route) and fifty-six *day waka*. Of the remaining seventeen members, six were *wapiga debe.* By allowing these men access to income-generating shifts and to the saving fund, the *daladalamen* pre-empted the retaliation that would have come from their being sidelined. Eleven were 'absentee members' — former workers on the route who had found employment elsewhere, in most cases on *daladala* in other routes, but retained a bus filling shift by continuing to contribute a fee to the association on a daily basis.[22]

The analysis so far has documented the contingent reasons that both prompted and allowed a group of workers to bring some regulation to the modalities of service provision and to set up a common fund. The fact that its members could earn between US$ 21.65 and US$ 36.65 (approximately) every two months is some feat, the significance of which should not be underestimated nor, given the relatively small sum workers earned through their shift and the interval between them, overemphasized.[23] The way in which funds were spent reflects the values and goals that underpinned workers' collective action. It thus represents an entry point to engage with populist

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21. The variation depended on how many buses were operating on the route at a given time (from twenty to thirty), and on how many trips in a day each of them was able to complete (fifteen on an average day in 2002).

22. There is no single file containing the total number of members in late 2001. The total has been worked out by consulting the names that appeared on the roster of bus filling shifts for the last four months of 2001.

23. The two figures on individual earnings are calculated by subtracting the association commission from the total sum that pairs could obtain from one day of 'work', and then by dividing the result by two.

claims that a moral economy, rooted in a shared notion of justice, bonds 'the poor' together against the state.

There are two ways in which members could use the funds of the association: grants and loans. Grants were strictly limited to supporting members in three circumstances: the burial of people from their nuclear family, covering the health expenditure of hospitalized members and bribing authorities to release from jail members arrested for offences (real or presumed) against road safety rules. Loans were awarded on a case by case basis. Members made written requests to the association asking for support to cover hospital expenditure for their households or to purchase food when facing food shortages.

The association therefore provided its members and their families with an informal source of welfare protection and social wage. Access to the association funds partly mitigated the severe state of insecurity and material deprivation in which unprotected workers live. At the same time, to stress the political potential of this instance of associationism to 'change the rules' of the game (Tripp, 1997) would be highly misleading. The association's goal was to help members to manage the consequences of precarious employment rather than to challenge its causes. Furthermore, this workers' institution did not engage in the 'struggle between classes': no claims were made on the state or on employers.[24] In addition, its money was systematically used for bribing policemen or jail personnel. Whilst essential to help members in trouble in the short term, in the long term this fuelled the maintenance of the very socio-economic relations that generate the precariousness of the workforce. As this article has shown, it is the uneven and unregulated power relations between employers and workers that compels the workforce not to comply with road safety regulations in their struggle for survival, and makes it vulnerable to the police.[25]

The Association's Tensions as a Window into the 'Struggle over Class'

The tensions between individuals and different categories of transport workers in the daily life of the association further highlights the limits of often unwarranted claims about solidarity among the poor. The over-supply and fragmentation of labour visibly impacted on workers' collective identity, ultimately eroding their common ground. Tensions over the use of the welfare fund and entitlement to the income-generating shift of filling buses were the

24. The only exception is the fact that the association reported the occasional invasion of its route by other unlicensed buses to the transport authorities. Such activity should be understood as a move to defend the monopoly of service on the route, on which the association depended.
25. It is interesting to note that during fieldwork in 2009 several informants claimed that traffic police on the street were subject to severe pressure from superiors to extract bribes. They claimed that in the same way in which a bus worker is expected to deliver a certain amount of money every day, a police officer stationed on the streets was expected to return a certain amount of money each week. Failing to do so would be punished by transfer to a post which lack of contact with the public makes less lucrative.

contingent elements of the 'struggle over class' in the Dar es Salaam transport labour market. Three kinds of tension emerged. First, from the outset there existed a structural imbalance between members' needs for support and the association's capacity to provide it. One month after its foundation, opening a meeting to discuss 'the problems of shifts and how to help each other', the chairman stated:

> An outrageous series of problems has emerged. Problems that are so big that even the purpose of saving money has been lost. People do not understand why we save money. Consequently everyone with a problem expects money to come from the association. If a licence [of a driver] has expired, someone wants money from the association; his dad is ill, he expects money from the association; he has not eaten yet, he wants money from the association . . . I remind you that money can be issued if someone has lost a close relative, is in hospital or is arrested by the police . . . But outside these cases, the money of the association cannot be touched. [26]

The struggle that developed over the right to bus-filling shifts reveals the second source of tension between transport workers, as different categories of workers, rather than individual workers, argued heatedly over the allocation of these shifts. Addressing the issue, the chairman put forward his own understanding of what constitutes a 'transport worker', and of the entitlements that came with it. Part of the audience disagreed:

> Chairman: Let's move to the problem of shifts. Drivers and conductors all of us here. I don't think that there are other groups.
> B: There is another group.
> Chairman: Which group?
> B: People who are jobless.
> Chairman: How is it called?
> B: People of the pavement (*kijiweni*).[27]
> Chairman: 'Let's move to the problem of shifts. There are some of us, drivers and conductors who are really jobless, they sit on the bench and I would like to say that to do your shift [of filling buses] there at the station is not a job. It is a little extra for every man from Z. Whether you are a driver, a conductor or jobless, a little sum of money earned quickly is useful for everyone. But do not consider it a job. . .
> X:[28] Sorry, but it is absurd that you say that to fill a *daladala* is not a job when you have a job and I don't. For us it is essential. I can even go for two weeks without one shilling and suddenly I earn 10,000, 15,000, 20,000 shillings. A big help if you think that you get your 2,000 shillings every day. We would earn the same money so it doesn't make any sense when you say it is not a job.
> Chairman: Listen X, many of us there at the station have our jobs. And if you have a job you cannot do another . . . If you want to tell me that this is a job you are wrong because a job is

26. Quote from a transport workers association meeting, Dar es Salaam, 20 December 1998. The author attended the meeting, the audio recordings and transcripts of which are in his possession.
27. *Kijiwe*, literally meaning 'pavement', indicates in Swahili slang the spot where the unemployed and underemployed converge to look for work.
28. Tragically, at the time of fieldwork in 2009 I learned that X was caught stealing from a house in a well-off neighbourhood and was stoned to death by the house's resident and its security guard.

what you get up for every morning and you know that your job is waiting for you. That is what a job is.

Y: If the work pays you, if it feeds you, and if you know that's where you find the money to eat, it is a job. And I, the one who has no *daladala* and sits on the bench, am telling you this. . .

Chairman: I repeat that filling a bus is not a job.

S: Again this story!

Chairman: As it is not a job everyone has the right to it.

S: As it is not a job, it is for those who are jobless.

A third instance of tensions among transport workers is the booming trade in the shifts to fill buses among association members and the disagreement among members over the practice. The association was set up to help a group of workers alleviate the harsh consequences of the commoditization of labour. However, the right to fill buses became a commodity in itself and the way in which it was bought and sold vividly shows, in line with Davis, that in the informal economy 'petty exploitation (endlessly franchised) is its essence' (Davis, 2006: 181). Those who sell their shifts, typically in advance, pocket less money than if they performed the task themselves. People sell out of sheer necessity, due to the need for money prior to the date of their scheduled shift, or fear of arrest (as the practice of filling buses is illegal).

The vice-secretary openly criticized such trade and the logic of petty exploitation that underpinned it, by warning its members that 'to sell one's shifts is equal to expelling oneself out of the organization'.[29] Yet his warning carried little weight among association members as a vibrant trade in shifts was observable in 2001–02, and again in 2009. To give a sense of its significance, out of the forty-six shifts scheduled for the period from 31 August 2009 until 21 September 2009, twenty (i.e. nearly half), were sold.

Transport Workers' Horizontal Mobility and its Implications

The above instances of tension among transport workers, the dialectic confrontations over what constitutes a 'transport worker', and the dynamics of petty exploitation among themselves vividly illustrate the contingent way in which transport workers in Dar es Salaam, as in India, are fragmented and engaged in 'the struggle over class'. It is crucial to add some dynamism to the static picture of workforce fragmentation so far presented, by exploring patterns of labour fluidity and their political implications. Two key insights from research on the functioning of the informal labour market in India are a useful starting point. First is the existence of high levels of horizontal circulation of unskilled 'footloose labour' across different sites, as Breman (1996) eloquently described it. Second is the rigidity of the segmentation

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29. This handwritten comment appears at the bottom of an untitled association file (a copy of which is in author's possession) containing the roster of the shifts.

of the labour market, as ascriptive social institutions such as caste and religion make the transition from one sub-category of wage worker to another almost impossible. By contrast ethnicity and religion do not regulate access to different categories of transport work in Dar es Salaam. The experience of being a transport worker revolves around great horizontal mobility across sub-categories of transport work, from being a '*daladalamen* for life' to a *day waka*. But how quickly does labour turn over, and what are the patterns of labour fluidity in the sector?

In the absence of data on the workforce as a whole, the association's 'archive'[30] is an invaluable source in this respect as it constantly checks, updates and records the number of buses operating on the route, as well as the names and total number of members who are in the roster of bus fillers.[31] Analysis of these data suggests that workers changed status or moved elsewhere at great speed.[32] As a result of the departure of some buses from service (due to breakdown, accident or sale), the arrival of new buses, and changes in personnel (due to workers' illness or disagreement with owners), roughly one-fifth of the 132 members had a new status in 2002, either as new 'workers for life' or as newly benched *day wakas*.[33]

The constant state of flux in which workers find themselves begs another question. Given the significance of access to this island of welfare for the workforce, and the fact that there is an over-supply of workers in the first place, it becomes essential to understand the dynamics of inclusion in, and exclusion from, the association, as they ultimately determine the beneficiaries of its financial support. 'Urban space is never free', as Davis crucially points out. Indeed, access to the 'job' of filling buses in Dar es Salaam, similarly to 'a place on the pavement, the rental of a rickshaw, a day's labour on a construction site, or a domestic reference to a new employer . . . require(s) patronage or membership in some closed network' (Davis, 2006: 185).

There is some sort of 'carrying capacity' of the association, a threshold of the number of people it can support and beyond which it does not go. The high horizontal fluidity of its labour force goes hand in hand with the fairly constant number of its total members: 127 in December 2001 and 132 in June 2002. On the one hand, the dynamics of inclusion into the association

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30. The archive of the association consisted of two plastic bags containing the following types of documents: the list of buses and members of the association, the rosters with shifts at the station, various letters of request for help and a record of money. Copies of the files used for this article are in the author's possession.

31. Knowing the number of buses in service and the number of members had important implications for planning the roster and for potential access to the association's funds.

32. The speed of labour mobility for the period December 2001–June 2002 was discerned by comparing the lists of buses and members serving the route in late 2001 with those for June 2002. The author generated the lists of buses and members for June 2002 by asking route workers what had changed from the 2001 lists.

33. See the Appendix, which presents in fuller detail the data to justify this step of the argument.

related to factors outside the control of workers. New buses began operating on the route, and their '*daladalamen* for life' joined the association, as this brought advantages which were obviously too substantial to turn down. This constant influx of people was then offset by the fact that some people left the association and moved elsewhere in their struggle for survival.

The dynamics of exclusion, on the other hand, partly had to do with factors outside workers' control and partly with the fierce competition among workers for a foot in the association. The number of association members increased because '*dadalamen* for life' lost their buses due to their sale, due to 'misunderstandings' with the owner or a colleague, or to illness. Once 'benched', they joined those already on the bench waiting for a '*daladalaman* for life' to subcontract part of the working day to them. This created an over-supply of bench players in comparison to the number of jobs available to be subcontracted. As a result, a silent scramble for scraps of work — another manifestation of the 'struggle over class' (or indeed the struggle to be part of it) — took place among association members. The weakest members of the association simply did not obtain enough offers of work to get by, and moved on elsewhere: 15 per cent of the 127 members in December 2001 were no longer members in June 2002. What constitutes weakness/strength among bench players? Times of service on the route and family connections with 'workers for life' are significant predictors of receiving support when in need. Even more significant is the choice of 'workers for life' as to who they support and how much they 'support' colleagues on the bench. 'Workers for life' who did not help many *day wakas* are rewarded with the same currency once on the bench. 'If you didn't help me when I was down, why should I help you now?' as one worker put it.[34]

The association, an expression of solidarity alongside chronic internal tensions, continued to exist until 2005, six years after its establishment. The collective pooling of funds and informal welfare came to an end for reasons that were contested at the time of fieldwork in 2009. Its leaders blamed the turnover of the workforce and the unwillingness of former colleagues to contribute to the collective fund as the key cause of the demise of the association. Several members blamed instead the leaders for stealing the funds of the association.[35] Whatever the merit of these two hypotheses, it should be stressed that the over-supply of workers and their fluidity, while certainly representing major obstacles to collective organization, have been successfully overcome in other contexts. Other factors are obviously at play in explaining successes and failures in organizing the unorganized, and

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34. Interview with P., Dar es Salaam, 18 September 2009.
35. Arguably the two accounts are compatible, as the high fluidity of its workforce might have triggered doubts about the sustainability of the association among its leaders, leading them into the misappropriation of its funds.

no deterministic general conclusion can be drawn from this case study.[36] Furthermore, not everything was lost with the break-up of the association. After 2005 workers retained some degree of market self-regulation by preserving the queuing system at both ends of the route and the income-generating rotation of filling the buses. Regular collections were no longer made, or saved. Instead *ad hoc* collections of money were, and still are, organized when 'people from the route' are in need. On balance, such developments made workers more exposed to the whims of the labour market as, following the break-up of the association, their cushion to manage precariousness no longer existed. At the same time, their residual collective initiatives are evidence that some degree of workers' collective consciousness survived. Only future developments will reveal how politically significant such collective identity is, and whether the learning experience earned through the association will reappear in transport labour politics and revive itself through new forms of workers' collective action.

CONCLUSION

This article has analysed how informal labourers fare under neoliberalism through a case study of Dar es Salaam transport workers. In contrast to the class-blind approach of much of the literature on informality and on urbanization in Africa, this study has shown that political economy and its distinctive focus on class differentiation is essential to make sense of who does what in the informal economy and of the socio-economic impact of liberalization on urban passenger transport. Through its focus on labour relations in the transport sector, the article has analysed the costs of the failure to regulate employment relations and its causal link to the many inefficiencies of the privatized and deregulated transport sector. The over-supply of unskilled workers significantly tilts the balance of power towards bus owners in the 'negotiation' over terms and conditions of employment. In contrast to the populist emphasis on the agency of the urban poor in developing countries, a claim often made without due attention to the formidable structural constraints they face, this article shows that the most tangible way in which these workers exert their agency is by dragging society into the 'war' that work as a *daladalaman* entails. The agency of a highly vulnerable and exploited workforce lies in speeding, and in the systematic negation of road safety rules.

The 'struggle between classes', between bus owners on the one hand, and transport workers on the other, is not fought openly. In a context of over-supply of unskilled labour, bus owners exert their power over workers by

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36. I intend to write a paper further exploring the theme of the constraints to, and possibilities of, the organization of informal labour, based on my 2010 research on the recent efforts by the Tanzania transport union to organize *daladala* workers.

dictating working terms and conditions to the workforce on a one-on-one basis. They also lobby the state through their own association. The official discourse and practice of criminalization of the workforce by public authorities, which consistently conceals the harsh reality faced by the workforce and instead lays the blame for transport problems at its door, has to be understood as an ideological part of the 'struggle between classes'.

This article has also explored the factors that prevent transport workers from challenging the *status quo* through demands on employers and/or on the state. Rather than taking class identity for granted, it explored the dynamics of the 'struggle over class' among transport workers. It investigated the causal link between structural features of the labour market (such as the excess of unskilled labourers, their geographical dispersion, and their fragmentation among three different 'classes of labour') and workers' identity. The study of the rise, life and fall of one association grouping *some* of Dar es Salaam's transport workers provides a further close-up look at the dynamics of the sometimes fratricidal 'struggle over class'. It cautions against romanticizing associationism in the informal economy as a vehicle of the moral order of the poor. Although the establishment of the institution signalled transport workers' shared consciousness of their common plight — a solidarity that partly survived beyond the break-up of the association — its goals focused on managing, rather than challenging, precariousness and on oiling the highly exploitative labour relations by which workers were constrained. The life of the association was also rife with chronic tensions between individuals and among its 'classes of labour', battling for the distribution of too little (employment and informal welfare funds) among too many (jobless people and people in need of its funds). United they stood in being affected by the lack of employment opportunities in Dar es Salaam, divided they fell in the struggle for employment.

What of the policy implications of this study? Bringing employment back to the centre of development policy is the first lesson of wider relevance that one might extrapolate from this case study on informal labour. The existence of an over-supply of unskilled labourers is symptomatic of a lack of employment alternatives across the economy. The lack of alternative employment opportunities also explains the myriad of very small-scale, self-employed workers competing in low-value and over-saturated markets (often in combination with highly precarious forms of wage employment). This suggests the urgent need for a policy focus on labour demand, the boosting of which is much more central to poverty than currently thought by policy makers. Along these lines Amsden calls for reversing the systematic focus 'on the supply side of the job market and forgetting about the demand side', a situation she provocatively terms policy makers' 'job dementia' (Amsden, 2010: 60).

A second, and related, conclusion supported by this study is the urgent need to depart from what I suggest is the labour or class 'dementia' currently affecting policy makers. Fashionable policy priorities such as

micro-credit, micro-enterprise development and the formalization of property rights rest on the orthodox, and inadequate, conceptualization of informality as (rosily idealized) self-employment. This myopically disregards the fact that the only property owned by millions of urban poor is their labour, sold directly through wage labour and/or indirectly through 'survivalist' self-employment. A move away from such class-blindness seems unlikely unless the influence over policy making by a fragmented and mostly unrepresented workforce increases. While a discussion of how this can be achieved lies beyond the scope of this article, it has tried to stress the urgency of this task through an analysis of the abysmal conditions of unskilled urban labour under neoliberalism.

APPENDIX

Labour Mobility: December 2001 to June 2002

This appendix presents in fuller detail the data to justify one step of the argument presented above (see footnote 33).

In December 2001 there were twenty-seven buses operating on the route. Over the following six months seven new buses began operating on the same route, thus bringing fourteen new members to the association. During the same period, eight of the twenty-seven initial buses were not operating on the same route any longer. These buses had either been sold, had broken down, been involved in an accident, or had been moved elsewhere. In the process sixteen workers had lost their jobs. Of those sixteen, eleven had joined the group of people on the bench, and five had moved elsewhere. Of the fifty-six people who were on the bench in December 2001, fifteen people were no longer present at the station six months later. Thus, over six months about 15 per cent of the 2001 member base was no longer connected to the association. Over the same period 11 per cent of the members were new entrants, and an additional 8 per cent of members had changed status, moving from over-employment as '*daladalamen* for life' to under-employment on the bench. Thus, over a relatively short period of time, about 19 per cent of members of the association were either newcomers or had changed occupational category.

   Dec 2001 list of operating buses (27)
      June 2002: 8 out of 27 buses OUT
         16 workers 'redundant'
            11 of them became *bench player* + 5 moved elsewhere
      June 2002: 7 new buses IN
         14 new members
  BALANCE OF MEMBERS (December 2001–June 2002):
  IN 14 + 11 (bench) =   25
  OUT 5 + 15 (from the previous list of bench players) = 20
                                         + 5

Labour fluidity (as percentages) over the 6 months:
(19% either new members or in a new occupational category)
(15% no longer active member)
34% of people involved in the association have experienced significant change (either as new entrants, being downgraded to the bench or exiting the association).

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