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**TRADE UNION RESPONSES TO ECONOMIC LIBERALISATION IN GHANA**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study draws on three case studies to investigate the response by trade unions in Ghana to economic liberalisation. The first case study documents trade union struggles to counter the commercialisation and privatisation of electricity in the country in the last decade. The second and the third case studies explore the capacity of trade unions to engage with the deregulation and informalisation of the labour market. The second case study studies the market of informal food catering in Accra, its labour market, and the strategy and contradictions emerging from attempts to organise informal food caterers in the past ten years. The third case study analyses the regulatory changes in the port sector in Ghana since 2000, how this affected the labour market and labour in Tema and Takoradi ports, and the responses of a Ghanaian trade union to these changes.

Taken together, the findings of this research contribute to the existing literature on trade unions. The dissertation argues against influential overgeneralisations about the incapacity of trade unions to defend the interests of workers under neoliberalism and economic liberalisation, and instead calls for a more grounded and context-specific study of their relevance. The case studies presented in this dissertation present a mixed picture, where some tangible improvements were won by organised labour, alongside defeats and difficult compromises. Above all, this study shows that analysis of the possibilities of organised labour must be grounded in the study of labour markets, and of the sources of power and vulnerability that workers derive from their economic location.

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## **ABBREVIATIONS**

ACEP	Africa Centre for Energy Policy
AGI	Association of Industries
ALU	Association of Local Unions
AMA	Accra Metropolitan Assembly
ANC	African National Congress
CLOGSAG	Civil and Local Government Staff Association of Ghana
CONIWAS	Coalition of NGOs in Water and Sanitation
COTWUT	Communication and Transport Workers Union of Tanzania
CPA	Consumer Protection Agency
CPP	Convention Peoples Party
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
CUPE	Canadian Union of Public Employees
DCL	District Council of Labour
ERP	Economic Recovery Programme
EU	European Union
FAO	Food and Agricultural Organisation
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
FES	Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung
FNV	Netherlands Trade Union Confederation
GAWU	General Agricultural Workers' Union
GCCI	Ghana Chamber of Commerce and Industry
GDLC	Ghana Dock Labour Company
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GEA	Ghana Employers Association
GEMA	Ga East Municipal Assembly
GETA	Ga East Traders Association
GFL	Ghana Federation of Labour
GLSS	Ghana Living Standards Survey
GMA	Ghana Medical Association

GNAT	Ghana National Association of Teachers
GPHA	Ghana Ports and Harbours Authority
GPRTU	Ghana Private Road Transport Union
GRA	Ghana Revenue Authority
GRIDCo	Ghana Grid Company
GRNA	Ghana Registered Nurses Association
GSMU	Global Social Movement Unionism
ICAG	Indigenous Caterers Association of Ghana
ICLS	International Conference of Labour Statisticians
ICU	Industrial and Commercial Workers Union
ILO	International Labour Organisation
IMC	Interim Management Committee
IMF	International Monetary Fund
ISODEC	Integrated Social Development Centre
KITE	Kumasi Institute of Technology and Environment
LaNMMA	La Nkwantanang-Madina Municipal Assembly
LO/FTF	Danish Trade Union Council for International Development Co-operation
MDU	Maritime and Dockworkers Union
MME	Ministry of Mines and Energy
NDC	National Democratic Congress
NDLB	National Dock Labour Board
NDLS	National Dock Labour Scheme
NEDCo	Northern Electricity Distribution Company
NGO	Non-Governmental organisations
NHIS	National Health Insurance Scheme
NLC	National Liberation Council
NLC	Nigeria Labour Congress
NPP	New Patriotic Party
NRC	National Redemption Council
NUHEM	National Union of Harbour Employees

NVTI	National Vocational Training Institute
PAAG	Polytechnic Administrators Association of Ghana
PNDC	Provisional National Defence Council
PP	Progress Party
PSWU	Public Services Workers' Union
PURC	Public Utilities Regulatory Commission
PUWU	Public Utility Workers Union
PWD	Public Works Department
RWU	Railway Workers' Union
SAMWU	South African Municipal Workers Union
SAP	Structural Adjustment Programme
SCSSL	South East Company and Support Services Ltd
SDF	Social Democratic Front
SLT-HV	Special Load Tariff –High Voltage
SLT-MV	Special Load Tariff – Medium Voltage
SIMECA	Sindicato de mensajeros y cadets,
SMU	Social Movement Unionism
SSNIT	Social Security and National Insurance Trust
TGLEU	Textile, Garment and Leather Employees' Union
TUC (Ghana)	Trades Union Congress (Ghana)
TWU	Timber and Woodworkers Union
UCG	United Caterers of Ghana
UGCC	United Gold Coast Convention
UK	United Kingdom
UNCTAD	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
UNIWA	Union of Informal Workers Associations
US	United States US
UTAG	University Teachers' Association of Ghana
VRA	Volta River Authority
WDC	Workers Defence Committee

## **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 The Scope of the Research**

This study is about trade union responses to economic liberalisation in Ghana. It presents three case studies of how trade unions in Ghana confronted economic liberalisation and its impacts on the cost of living, trade union membership and trade union power, and the power of workers. The first case study explores trade union campaign against the removal of subsidies on electricity in the country. It examines the demands that trade unions made for government subsidies on electricity, the strategies they adopted to protest against electricity user fee hikes, and the outcomes of such struggles. The second case study is about trade union organising in the informal economy in Ghana. It studied the unionisation of traditional caterers – operators of informal restaurants that provide indigenous Ghanaian foods – and its impact on the power and the interests of informal economy workers. The third case study looked at the transformations in the casual labour regime at the ports in Ghana from 2000 to 2018, the reaction to these changes by one of Ghana’s trade unions, the Maritime and Dockworkers Union (MDU), and its impact on the power and interests of casual dock workers and on the trade union itself. These cases studies are significant, as they offer us a window to view the main domains of trade actions and trade union outlook in Ghana in the last three decades.

The case studies presented here epitomise the two main areas – outside the workplace and at the workplace – where trade unions in Ghana have operated in their struggles against the impacts of economic liberalisation in the country. On the one hand, the campaign against the removal of electricity subsidies represents struggles by trade unions outside the workplace against economic liberalisation in Ghana. On the other hand, the unionisation of informal economy operators and the reactions of the MDU to the reforms of the casual labour regime at the ports in Ghana, denote the trade union struggles against the workplace impacts of economic liberalisation in the country. The struggles outside the workplace in this study show the external outlook and movement orientation of the trade unions in Ghana, while the

workplace actions exhibit the institutional building objectives of the trade unions in the country.

## **1.2 The Debate on Trade Union Relevance**

This study of the trade union responses to economic liberalisation in Ghana is significant, as its empirical evidence allows to engage with the generalised scepticism about the relevance and efficacy of contemporary trade unions. The labour movement literature in the last two decades of the twentieth century presented a near consensus on a general and severe crisis of the labour movement (Silver, 2003:1). Scholars have argued that neoliberalism – by which we understand the promotion of private property rights, free market, free trade, and the reduction of the role of the state in the economy, as well as the creation and/or preservation of institutional frameworks that are appropriate for such practices (Harvey, 2005: 2) – represents a significant challenge to the organisational and political strength of trade unions (Lévesque and Murray, 2010; Engeman, 2014). The dominant narrative is that the efficacy of trade unions in representing and promoting the interests of workers has been fatally undermined by 1) globalisation – the increasing irrelevance of distance and the rise of transnational production and transactions (Eriksen, 2003: 2-3) – , and 2) neoliberal reorganization of production systems (Lévesque and Murray, 2010: 334).

Of crucial importance were also the debilitating impacts of neoliberalism on the power of workers and the sovereign state. It has been argued that the geographical mobility of capital allowed it to control and dominate labour, whose geographical mobility remained largely inhibited (Harvey, 2005: 168). At the same time, the hypermobility of capital diminished the capacity of the state to protect and promote the interests and rights of citizens and workers (Silver, 2003:4). These two processes, and the conditions they created, meant that labour movements across the world found themselves in crisis, as decline in strikes and other overt manifestations of labour militancy, falling union densities, decreasing real wages, and growing job insecurity (Silver, 2001; Lévesque and Murray, 2010; Engeman, 2014) became the norm in the 1980s. Significantly, the crisis of the labour movement has been described



terminal, based on the assumption that the transformations in the late twentieth century spurred a virtual disappearance of the distinctive social formations of workers (Silver, 2003:1).

The transformations in the organisation of production systems and the relocation of production across the world – or even the threat of relocation –, undermined the bargaining power of workers and kicked in motion, a “race to the bottom” in wages and employment conditions globally (Silver, 2003: 4). Narratives on awful conditions of workers and the repressive working conditions at the sweatshops of the world became common (Harvey, 2005: 169). Thus, economic liberalisation brought about a reduction in trade union density and intensified attacks on the rights and interests of workers around the world (Engeman, 2014).

It is in light of the above that significant literature emerged, questioning the continued relevance of trade unionism (Zolberg 1995; Castells, 1997; Moody, 1997; Gallin, 2001; Standing, 2011). Zolberg (1995: 28) has argued that ‘the distinctive social formation ... [of] "workers" to whose struggles we owe the "rights of labour" are rapidly disappearing and today constitute a residual endangered species’. According to Castells (1997: 354), the transformations in state sovereignty and work experience, by what he termed as “information age” – represented by new social structures, network society, interactions between social movements and political processes, and interaction between the power of networks and the power of identities – has undermined the ability of labour movements to 1) represent workers and 2) function as sources of social cohesion. Trade unions have been described in a telling way, as ‘relics of another era [and] in most cases poorly suited to be the military, administrative, or political schools of workers’ (Moody 1997a: 305). Standing (2011: 168) has expressed doubts about the ability of trade unions to represent ‘precarious interests’ and Gallin (2001: 537) has argued that ‘trade unions can no longer focus primarily on employment relationship in organising’. These generalised scepticism about trade union vitality have been influenced by the assumption that the changes in work organisation and employment relationships have made workplace labourism no longer viable (Rizzo, 2013: 291). Thus, informed by the debilitating impacts of globalisation and neoliberal

reorganization of production systems on the powers of workers and their trade unions, some influential labour movement scholars have expressed pessimism about the relevance of trade unionism in contemporary times.

However, against the crisis of the labour movement narrative, there are notable instances of the rise of workers and trade union powers, especially in newly industrialising societies (Dörre and Schmalz, 2018; Harvey, 2005). Indeed, the very processes and conditions that have been cited as the factors that undermined the powers of workers and trade unions in the global North, became the sources of labour movement revitalisation in the global South. It has been argued that relocations of production systems from the centres of global capitalism created new groups of workers who possessed a high degree of power in South East Asia, Mexico, and Eastern Europe (Dörre and Schmalz, 2018: 3). These new groups of workers have contributed to the rise of vibrant labour movements in South Korea and South Africa, and the flourishing of labour parties in Latin America (Harvey, 2005: 199). Significantly, since the 1980s, trade unions in South Africa, Brazil, South Korea, and South East Asia have drawn new members – who possess high workplace power as a result of their location in the growing industrial sectors – for collective actions (Dörre and Schmalz, 2018: 3).

In a way, the resurgence in workers and trade union powers in the global South shows that contexts mattered in how the mobility of capital and the relocation of production systems affected the power and the vitality of workers and trade unions across the globe. Indeed, the rise in labour militancy in the newly industrialising countries suggests that, contrary to the generalised narratives on declining trade union efficacy, organised labour remains an important source of resistance to neoliberalism, albeit in new forms and at new flashpoints.

Silver (2003) charted labour unrest across the globe and over the long-term (since the late nineteenth century) and suggested that the hotspots of labour militancy relocated across the globe, following momentous shifts in the way in which global production was reorganised. She argued against the tendency to depict the labour movement as a ‘historically superseded’ movement or a ‘residual endangered species’ (Silver, 2003: 19). Significantly, even in the advanced capitalist countries where globalisation and neoliberalism undermined the power

of traditional worker-based organisations, these worker organisations are by no means dead (Harvey, 2005: 199). Rather, labour and labour movements are continually made and remade, and therefore, it is necessary to pay attention to the resistance from those working classes that are being ‘unmade’ and recognise the emerging responses to both the creative and destructive elements of capitalism (Silver, 2003: 19-20).

How should trade unions remake themselves and go about protecting and promoting the rights and interest of workers in contemporary times? This question has attracted a number of answers regarding what unions, or new institutions, ought to be and do in response to the impacts of globalisation and neoliberalism. Standing (2011: 168) called for ‘a new type of collective body [which] will have to take up the challenge of “collaborative bargaining” ... , [and] consider the full range of work and labour activities that the precariat has to undertake’. Gallin (2001: 522) argues that organising workers in informal employment must be a trade union priority because 1) the informal economy has come to stay and 2) the informal economy is growing while the formal sector is decreasing in terms of organisational potential. He further posits that these two trends are related and irreversible in the short to medium term, and that the stabilisation of formal sector organisations and the building trade union strength require the organisation of informal sector operators (ibid.). Thus, the unionisation informal economy operators has been proposed as a necessary strategy for trade union renewal and revitalisation in contemporary times.

Another prominent proposition for trade union renewal is the Social Movement Unionism (SMU) strategy (Waterman, 1993; Moody, 1997; Lier and Stokke 2006; Camfield, 2007; Engeman, 2014; Scipe 2014). SMU involves trade union relationships with community groups and progressive civil society organisations (CSOs), to defend and fight for the interests of workers beyond the workplace, such as struggles for improved access to public services, to promote human rights, and for broad social and economic change (Lier and Stokke 2006; Scipe 2014). This trade union strategy has been suggested by some scholars as the most promising, and the only avenue, for trade union revival in contemporary times (Moody, 1997b; Camfield, 2007; Engeman, 2014). Waterman (1993: 246) recommends SMU as the ‘appropriate [trade union typology] for our contemporary world’. Lambert and

Webster (2001) even advocated for global social movement unionism (GSMU), as a response to the impacts of globalisation on the labour movement.

Aside the recommendations for the unionisation of informal/precarious workers and the adoption of SMU, there are other ideas on the sources of the powers of workers and trade unions, and on how to mobilise workers for collective action that have been important in the debate on trade union relevance and renewal (Kelly, 1998; Wright, 2000; Silver, 2003; Lévesque and Murray 2010; Kelly, 2019). Lévesque and Murray (2010: 334) emphasise that power is at the centre of the debate on the current state and the future of trade unionism. Wright's (2000) and Silver (2003), have postulated on two sources or forms of workers' power: structural power and associational power. The authors posit that structural power stems from the location of workers within the economic system (Wright, 2000; Silver, 2003). In contrast, associational power comes from the formation of collective organizations of workers (ibid.). Kelly's mobilisation theory offers an important contribution on how the power of workers can be mobilised and utilised, by conceptualising the conditions under which individual workers are transformed into collective actors, and, as such, capable of creating and sustaining collective action against employers (Kelly, 2019).

Significantly, there are two main weaknesses that tend to apply to many contributions to the trade union renewal debate: first, there is a considerable dearth of critical attention to the contextual implications of theories; and second, there is limited emphasis on the tensions and the contractions that may be generated by implementing such recommendations. For example, despite the upbeat tone on the importance of SMU to trade union renewal, most of the influential SMU literature is overly abstract in their formulations, and pay inadequate attention to how contexts affect SMU and the complexities of SMU in practice (Lambert and Webster 2001; Waterman, 1993). Yet, as Lier's and Stokke's study of the Cape Town Anti-Privatisation Forum in South Africa shows, political economy conditions, different institutional priorities, and political background, can impinge on the viability and sustainability of trade union alliances with township groups, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and community activists (Lier and Stokke 2006: 804). In this sense, attention needs to be paid to the grounded practices of SMU and its contribution to trade union renewal.

Similarly, most of the influential propositions on the powers of workers and trade unions do not tell us much about the potential compromises and contradictions that trade unions may have to face in mobilising the power of workers and attempting to transform workers into active agents. Nonetheless, the few studies that have grounded narratives of the mobilisation of workers' power, especially that of informal labour, in contexts, have shown that the process can be daunting for trade unions, and may even be fraught with significant paradoxes and compromises (Von Holdt and Webster, 2008; Rizzo and Atzeni, 2020). In Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, even though informal public transport workers wield some structural power – as they are the main sources of public transport –, the difficulties that the Communication and Transport Workers Union of Tanzania (COTWUT) faced in holding the employers of these workers to account, generated unsolvable tensions between the association of the informal transport workers and the trade union, bringing about the abrogation of the partnership between the two (Rizzo and Atzeni, 2020: 12-13). Similarly, in South Africa, trade unions could not to forge adequate solidarity between casual and permanent workers at Durban port in ways that would generate sufficient associational power in order to take advantage of the structural power of the casual workers to improve their working conditions and job security (Von Holdt and Webster, 2008: 341). Also, the contentions that can characterise the mobilisation of informal economy workers by trade unions manifested themselves in Buenos Aires, Argentina, where the SIMECA (*Sindicato de mensajeros y cadets*), the organization of *motoqueros* (motorbike) workers, ceased to exist after their incorporation into the trade unions (Rizzo and Atzeni, 2020: 13). These three examples illustrate that the mobilisation of the powers of informal workers by trade unions can be complex and may even backfire. Moreover, they show that organising informal economy workers and harnessing their powers can create 'tension between institutionalisation and mobilisation in the construction of workers' power' (ibid.: 14).

### 1.3 The Research Problem

This introduction has already briefly reviewed Silver's (2003) call for more attention to contextual trade unions responses to the impacts of economic liberalisation, her argument that the relocation of production systems and the changes in work organisation generated new groups of workers with considerable power in some countries in the global South, which trade unions have mobilised in some cases. We would now pay attention to how these conditions and trends manifested themselves in Ghana.

Ghana entered into the neoliberal era with the adoption of the Economic Recovery Programme (ERP) in 1983, followed by a Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) in 1986. These programmes brought about momentous impacts on trade unions and their members. The ERP and the SAP led to massive destruction of formal employment that culminated in significant trade union membership declines and the necessity for the trade unions in the country to search for new sources of members. It is estimated that formal jobs in the public and private sectors in Ghana went down by about half, from 464,000 in 1985 to 230,000 in 1990 (Government of Ghana, 1995: 6). Given that trade unions in the country mostly organised formal sector workers, the decline in formal jobs brought about substantial declines in trade union membership. Nearly one in three trade union members left his or her trade union as a result of the direct and the indirect effects of the SAP (Panford, 2001: 223). The main trade union federation in Ghana, the Trades Union Congress (Ghana) – TUC (Ghana) – lost about 115,000 members from 1985 to 1996 (ibid.). This placed a necessity on the trade unions in the country to start looking at the informal economy for new members.

Aside the membership loss, the trade unions in the country were also confronted with declines in the welfare of their members. The austerity measures of the economic recovery and adjustment programmes included public sector wage restraint and the removal and reduction of subsidies on many public services. In 1985, the government of Ghana increased postal tariffs by 365 percent and water and electricity user fees by 150 percent and 1000 percent, respectively (Herbst, 1993: 62). These, and the other increases in costs of goods and services affected the purchasing power of incomes in Ghana (Panford, 2001: 223). Notably, such

debilitating impacts of the economic recovery and adjustment programmes on the cost of living and the welfare of workers in the country, manifested themselves at the same time when the trade unions in the country were faced with severe membership declines. Hence, the introduction of economic liberalisation constituted an important existential threat to trade unionism in Ghana.

Nevertheless, it is important to note that trade unions in Ghana have not been passive to economic liberalisation and its impacts. The TUC (Ghana) has renounced ‘globalization with its underlying neoliberal ideology, underpinned by the free market principles ... [and the] threat they [pose] to the interest and well-being of working people and their trade unions’ (TUC, 2012a: 3). This statement has been accompanied by actions, as the trade unions have undertaken some initiatives at workplaces and outside the workplaces in attempts to mitigate some of the negative impacts of economic liberalisation on their members, the wider society, and the trade unions themselves. At the workplace, the trade unions have responded to membership declines in many ways. These include intensified efforts at organising in the informal economy and the involvement of the MDU in the establishment of the Ghana Dock Labour Company (GDLC) to absorb retrenched casual dockworkers at the ports in Ghana. Outside the workplace, electricity tariff hikes and their effects on the incomes of workers and the general welfare of the poor have been one of the key sources of recurrent conflicts between the trade unions and the government of Ghana in the last decade.

Despite their significance, these struggles and initiatives by the trade unions, and their implications for union renewal in Ghana, have attracted limited research attention. In addition, most of the literature that exists on trade union response to economic liberalisation in Ghana tends to be union-centric. This is because these studies have mostly focused on what the trade union initiatives and struggles mean for trade unions in the country (Adu-Amankwah, 1999; Anyemedu, 2000; Gockel and Vormawor, 2004; Boakye, 2004; and Britwum and Martens, 2008). Virtually no attention has been paid to the impacts of the trade union actions against economic liberalisation on rank-and-file trade union members and non-union members in Ghana. Also, there is dearth of literature on the tensions and contradictions that were generated by the trade union responses to economic liberalisation in Ghana.

Similarly, little is known about the compromises that trade unions in Ghana have had to make in their resistance to economic liberalisation in Ghana. These are the analytical foci of the three case studies in this research.

#### **1.4 Research Aim**

The main aim of this research is to examine the outcomes of the trade union struggles against workplace and outside the workplace impacts of economic liberalisation in Ghana. Specifically, this research sought to explore what the trade union resistance against policies that diminished the incomes of workers and their efforts to recruit more members mean for workers and the trade unions in Ghana.

#### **1.5 Research Question**

In the light of the above, the main research question for this study is what have been trade union responses to economic liberalisation in Ghana? These responses can be categorised into two forms: struggles at the workplace and resistance outside the workplace. These two forms can be further categorised into attempts to prevent the implementation of economic liberalisation policy measures and dealing with their effects. Based on these levels and terrains of resistance, the main research question was explored through the following sub-questions:

1. What has been the trade union response to electricity tariff reforms in Ghana?
2. What has been trade union response to union membership decline in Ghana?

#### **1.6 Main Contributions**

The insights from this study contribute to the debate on the current state and the future of trade unionism in three important ways. First, the study of trade unions endeavours against



economic liberalisation in Ghana provide a bottom-up narrative to the debate on the power and relevance of trade unions in the twenty-first century. We have reviewed the generalised pessimism about the relevance and efficacy of trade unions (Silver, 2003; Lévesque and Murray, 2010; Engeman, 2014). Against such narrative, this study brings to the fore what trade unions in Ghana have achieved in their struggle against the removal of subsidies on electricity, and their relationship with, and representation of informal labour in the country. In addition, the empirical evidence in this study shed lights on 1) how the powers of informal workers – informal economy persons operating in informal settings and casual workers in formal settings – are yielded; and 2) the outcomes of the mobilisation of such powers by the trade unions in Ghana. These insights of this study are of useful conceptual value, as they enter into a critical dialogue with influential overgeneralisations about the incapacity of trade unions to defend the rights and interests of workers under economic liberalisation, through an empirically grounded and context-specific study of trade unionism.

The second contribution of this study is that it engages with the debate on trade union revitalisation and what strategic priorities it must take, through a discussion of one instance of SMU. In this chapter, we have seen the buzz about the necessity of SMU for trade union revival (Waterman, 1993; Moody, 1997b; Camfield, 2007; Engeman, 2014). We also know, at least from the example in Cape Town, South Africa, that the practice of the SMU typology can be burdened by contextual issues (Lier and Stokke 2006: 804). This shows that we need more empirical insights into the conditions under which trade unions must relate with other social movements and the appropriate strategies that should be deployed towards SMU goals. It is in this sense that the study of how trade unions in Ghana went about their struggles outside the workplace against the impacts of economic liberalisation is important, as it presents a grounded and context-specific contribution to the debate on SMU and trade union renewal.

The third contribution of this study is towards an understanding of the strategies that worked, those that did not work, and the contradictions and tensions that emerged in the process of organising outside the workplace or at the workplace in Ghana. Therefore, the insights that come from the study of these struggles are important for trade union organising and

mobilisation policies and future actions in Ghana. In addition, such lessons may also provide some inspiration for workers and trade unions around the world, that find themselves in similar situations to those that their counterparts in Ghana have faced in last three decades.

## **1.7 Main Arguments**

The main arguments of this study are two. First, the empirical evidence presented in this study represent an alternative narrative to the generalised scepticism about trade union relevance and vitality. Each of the three case studies in this study has some notable positive outcomes. In chapter six, we shall see that the trade union struggles on electricity tariffs secured some modest discounts on electricity user fees for unionised and nonunionised electricity consumers, illustrating the relevance of trade unions to all electricity users in Ghana. I argue the persistence of electricity subsidies in Ghana, albeit modest, is an illustration of the power of the trade unions in Ghana to withstand one of the imperatives of economic liberalisations in the country, i.e. the fiscal squeeze efforts by the government of Ghana and the objective to achieve full cost recovery in the electricity sector by passing all the costs of electricity production and distribution onto consumers.

In addition to the above, to some extent, the empirical evidence of the case studies of the trade union struggles at the workplace offer alternative accounts to the pessimism about trade union relevance and vitality. In chapters seven and eight, we shall see some significant benefits, especially the protection against the decisions of public authorities, that trade unionism brought to informal economy operators, albeit limited. Similarly, chapter ten illustrates how the inclusion of casual workers into the MDU brought some improvements in social protection coverage among casual workers at the ports in Ghana. In light of the outcomes of these trade unions responses to economic liberalisation in Ghana, this thesis argues that even though the powers of trade union have been reduced, trade unions are still relevant and capable of promoting the interests of workers.

The second main argument of this thesis is that trade unions struggles against the impacts of economic liberalisation in Ghana comes with some significant contradictions for the nature of trade unions and for the interests of some sections of organised labour in the country. Notably, the three case studies of this research, revealed the tensions, contradictions, and the compromises that trade unions in Ghana have had to make as they went about struggling on electricity tariffs, seeking new members in the informal economy, and responding to labour market flexibilization at the ports in Ghana. In chapter six we shall see how trade unions in Ghana compromised the interest of about 6000 electricity workers and their trade unions – since opposing electricity user hikes limits collective bargaining outcomes of electricity workers – in order to attain marginal discounts on electricity tariffs for electricity consumers in the country. Such a contradiction poses questions about the *raison d'être* of trade unionism. Similarly, significant paradoxes exist in the unionisation of informal economy operators and the trade union relationship with casual workers at the ports in Ghana. In chapters seven and eight, this study shall show that the unionisation of informal economy operators in Ghana is both limited and contradictory, because almost all the trade union members in the informal economy at the time of this study, were own-account workers and petty enterprise owners. This form of organising leaves out informal paid workers, who are arguably the most vulnerable, from trade union coverage and protection. In this sense, the extent of trade union coverage is contradictory to the character of trade unions as organisations of workers. In a similar vein, the chapters on the labour market reforms at the ports in Ghana and the reactions of the MDU to these, show that the power of casual workers and their collective actions were inhibited by the manner of their inclusions into the MDU. In addition, the relations between casual port workers and the MDU at the time this study ended, was fraught with suspicions, tensions, and conflicts. In light of these outcomes, this thesis argues that trade unions struggles against economic liberalisation can conflict with the interests of some organised workers, and may even contradict the character of trade unions.

## **1.8 The Structure of the Thesis**

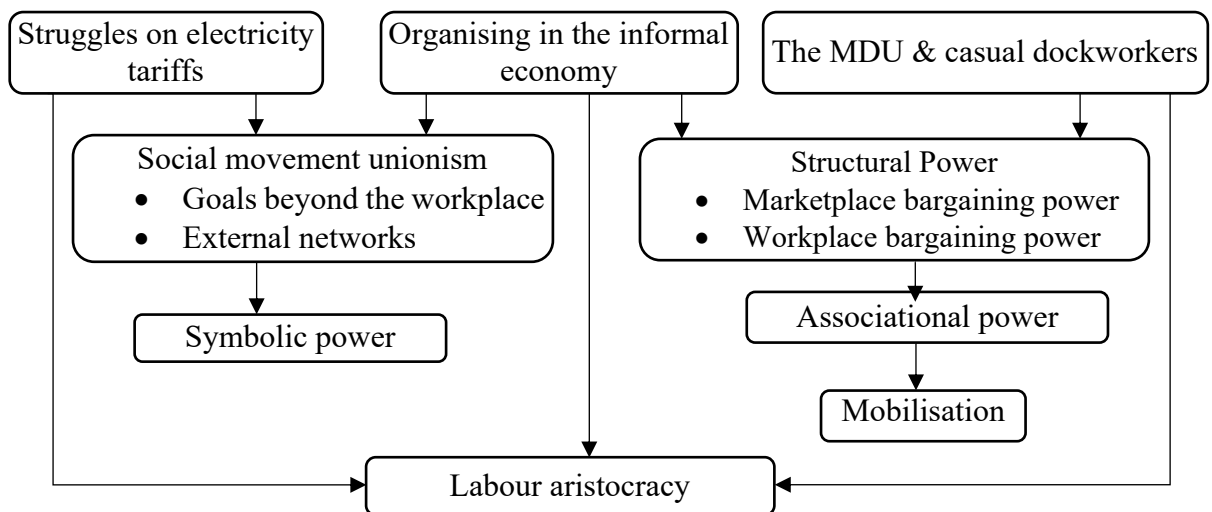
This thesis is divided into eleven chapters. The next chapter is about the conceptual framework of this thesis. It focuses on SMU and three other concepts about the powers of workers and trade unions that were central to this study, namely, structural power, associational power, and symbolic power. In addition, the chapter also discusses mobilisation theory – the process of transforming workers into active agents –, and the labour aristocracy debate i.e. the assumption that privileged workers and their trade unions separate themselves from other segments of working people. These are followed by a discussion of the research methods that were used in this study in chapter three. Chapter four sets the stage for the analysis of trade union responses to economic liberation in Ghana by highlighting evolutions in trade unionism and socioeconomic development in Ghana in the last century. The next chapter presents the reforms in the electricity sector and electricity tariff hikes that associated economic liberalisation in Ghana. In chapter six, the analysis focusses on trade union struggles on electricity tariffs in Ghana. Chapter seven looks at the relationship between trade unions and the informal economy in Ghana, and how it evolved over time. This sets the stage for the analysis of the unionisation of traditional caterers of Accra in chapter eight. Chapter nine focuses on ports, the reforms in their operations and labour recruitment strategies from the 2000s, and how these affected the casual labour regime in the ports. This is followed by an analysis of how casual labour regime changes affected the interests, power, and struggles of casual workers in chapter ten. Chapter eleven provides the conclusions of this study.

## CHAPTER 2: THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### 2. 1 Introduction

This chapter presents the conceptual framework that was used to explore trade union responses to economic liberalisation in Ghana. Diagram 1 illustrates the connections between the three case studies in this study and the concepts and theories used in this study. It shows that I engaged with the literature on Social Movement Unionism (SMU) and with the notion of symbolic power by Von Holdt and Webster (2008) in examining the outcomes and the significance of struggles of the trade unions outside the workplace. Diagram 1 shows that to problematise the workplace struggles, I engaged with Wright's (2000) and Silver's (2003) ideas on the sources of workers power: associational power and structural power (marketplace bargaining power and workplace bargaining power) and with mobilisation theory (Kelly, 1998). Finally, Diagram 1 illustrates how the trade union actions presented in this study connect with ideas on labour aristocracy.

**Diagram 1: Conceptual framework**



The above framework is significant to this study in two main ways. On the one hand, these concepts are deployed to illuminate our understanding of the struggles at the workplace and

outside the workplace by trade unions in Ghana. On the other hand, the causation runs in the other direction, as my research findings are useful material to engage critically with some of the assumption and claims underlying these concepts.

## **2.2 Unpacking Social Movement Unionism (SMU)**

SMU emerged in labour literature to explain trade union mobilisation and strategies that were deployed against state power in authoritarian political regimes and in response to economic crisis in newly industrializing countries (Engeman, 2014: 3). Important postulations on SMU were developed out of observations of the struggles that the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) of South Africa, the Kilusang Mayo Uno (KMU) – May First Movement – of the Philippines, and the Central Única dos Trabalhadores (CUT) – Unified Workers’ Central – of Brazil, waged on outside the workplace issues (Scipe 2018: 351). In South Africa, SMU was triggered by an apartheid political system that denied the rights of workers through racial exclusion and politics of discrimination (Masiya, 2014: 444). The apartheid political regime banned the major political parties in the country (Lier and Stokke 2006: 810). Consequently, the trade unions – those that were mostly made up of black workers – forged alliances with community groups and played an active role in the resistance movement that toppled the apartheid regime in South Africa (ibid). In the Philippines, the KMU played an active role in struggles against adverse political and economic conditions in the country. The union worked with women groups, students, peasants, indigenous people, and others to fight against economic policies that were based on keeping the cost of labour cheap (Scipes, 2018: 353). The KMU also played a key role in the overthrow of a dictatorship in 1986 (ibid.). In Brazil, industrial labour unions in São Paulo fused workplace, citizenship, and human rights issues, and fought against a repressive dictatorship (Flores, et., al, 2011: 74). These struggles by the COSATU, the KMU, the CUT have come to symbolise SMU – struggles and endeavours that trade unions undertake against socioeconomic and political conditions in their societies.

It is important to note that given the context – developing and newly industrializing countries – and the trade union demands – for social change and the overthrow of repressive political systems – that gave rise to the initial conceptualisation of SMU, a debate has ensued on the application of SMU to trade union struggles beyond those in the global South. Arguably, the circumstances and the issues that the COSATU, the CUT, and the KMMU faced, and their struggles, may be qualitatively different from those of the outside workplace campaigns that trade unions in the developed world waged. Significant political marginalisation, public service deficits, and discrimination – including racial discrimination – shaped the trade union struggles in the developing world (Flores, et., al, 2011; Engeman, 2014; Masiya, 2014; and Scipe 2018). These conditions and issues largely differ in magnitude and in expression in the global North, even when they are similar. According to Scipe (2014), a key element of SMU is that it amounts to a trade union challenge to the established social order in conjunction with political allies, both domestic and international. Similarly, Camfield (2005: 287) posits that social movement unions share solidaristic orientation with the strategic goal to ‘build a broad social movement of unions and community-based organizations to change society’. Engeman (2014: 1), argues that the SMU strategy adopts social change goals beyond the representation of trade union members and contract negotiations, and it often requires the building of alliances with community organizations in pursuit of social change goals. Scipe takes the social order change argument further by stating that because trade unions in the United States (US) and Canada do not challenge their social order, these trade unions practice unionism that is qualitatively different from SMU – a form of the economic type of trade unionism he termed *social justice unionism* (Scipe, 2014).

Against such reasoning by Scipe, SMU is said to be a common trade union character and/or ideology in North America (Kumar and Murray, 2006: 81). Interestingly, in spite of sharing Scipe’s position on the social order change imperative of SMU, Camfield and Engeman identify SMU with the trade unions in the United States (US) and Canada. Camfield (2007: 285) presents SMU as the most influential approach of trade union renewal among a number of trade unions in the US. Hence, even though SMU emerged in the literature on labour movement to describe trade union mobilisation against state power in authoritarian political contexts in newly industrializing countries, its later applications – particularly in the US –

have described trade union grassroots mobilisation and organising traditionally underrepresented groups (Engeman, 2014: 3).

Notably, public sector workers and their trade unions in the US have combined workplace and community struggles – such as the Justice for Janitors Campaign by the United Farm Workers – in ways that echo the key propositions of SMU (Flores, et., al, 2011: 74). In addition, the SMU credentials of trade unions in the US is also exemplified by the trade union involvement in the 2006 immigrant rights marches in Los Angeles. The trade unions ‘that participated in organising these marches [the 2006 immigrant marches in Los Angeles] – thus, practicing social movement unionism – allied with large community organizations, preferred reform goals and advocated tactics perceived as effective’ (Engeman, 2014: 1). In Canada, the “eleven-week strike of 2000–2001” that was organised by the York University local of the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE), involved active support from several community organizations in a way that ‘helped it to frame the strike as one in defence of public education’ (Camfield, 2007: 296-297). These examples show that even though trade unions in North America may not campaign for the overthrow of their social order, they forge alliances with community groups and struggle on outside workplace issues in ways that resonates with SMU.

SMU literature emphasise two broad leitmotifs. The first is that trade union actions and struggles must focus on issues that transcend factory gates. Moody (1997b: 60), espouses that by SMU, we understand labour movements ‘whose demands include broad social and economic change’. SMU entails trade union support for community claims for voice in politics and policy-making in order to make demands for expanded services and rights (Seidman, 2011: 95-96). This means that the aspirations of social movement unions ‘reach beyond the realm of production and outside the factory gates ... and includes issues of consumption and transport, gender, environmental issues and rights-based approaches’ (Lier and Stokke, 2006; 806). Therefore, SMU is about moving beyond unions’ bread and butter struggles at the workplace by adding struggles on outside workplace issues that affect the weakest parts of society and workers to the trade union agenda.



The strategic priority for trade unions to focus on issues outside the workplace, goes the reasoning of advocates of SMU, is due to the devastating impacts of economic reforms inspired by neoliberal ideology (Masiya, 2014: 448) on work organisation, collective bargaining, and conditions at work. These imply that the defence of workers' interests at the workplace might be difficult. Furthermore, workplace struggles alone cannot be enough to mitigate the onslaught of economic liberalisation on other aspects of workers' lives, such as the commodification and increased commercialisation and privatisation of public services, housing, transport, and land. In South Africa, the trade unions needed to work with other social movements to fight against the unjust state system that facilitated the payment of low wages at the workplace (ibid.: 445). Therefore, for pragmatic and relevance considerations, advocates of SMU call for a refocussing of trade union priorities (Scipes, 2014).

The second leitmotif of SMU literature is about process. Given the broader goals of SMU, work by trade unions is envisaged as a process of building relationships with community and civil society groups (Moody, 1997b: 60), and it is to be embedded in a network of community and political alliances (Von Holdt, 2002: 285). Waterman (1993: 265) posits that SMU is to be 'intimately articulated with the movements of other non-unionised or non-unionisable working classes or categories [and] intimately articulated with democratic movements for the continuing transformation of all social relationship and structures'. Significantly, community networking in SMU and its effects on trade union inclusion have the potential to alter traditional union structures and constituencies. This is because social movement unions extend union coverage to migrants, youth, and other underrepresented workers (Camfield, 2007: 287).

In spite of the consensus among SMU theorists on the necessity for trade unions to forge relationships with community groups, there are some differences in opinion on the nature of this relationship and the role of unions in it. Moody (1997b) argues that trade unions should lead and provide vision and content in their alliance with other social movements. According to him, SMU 'implies an active strategic orientation that uses the strongest of society's oppressed and exploited, generally organised workers, to mobilize those who are less able to sustain self-mobilization: the poor, the unemployed, casualised workers, [and]

neighbourhood organisations' (Moody 1997b: 59). Contrary to this view, Scipe espouses that SMU should be based on equal relationship between trade unions and its alliance partners (Scipe, 2014).

Notwithstanding these differences of perspectives, trade union and community relationships in SMU need to be anchored on a shared understanding of socioeconomic challenges and how to address them. Scipes (2014) prescribes that leaders and members of social movement unions need a common appreciation of the difficulties faced by the weakest in society and how different forms of discrimination and inequality are produced in the existing social order. This shared understanding is developed and adopted through interactive process within union hierarchies and must dominate unions (ibid.). In addition to the consensus within unions, SMU also involves shared aspirations between trade unions and community groups. This, according to Scipes, is necessary to promote an effective coordination of alliances and efforts towards addressing the challenges of economic liberalisation (ibid.).

The goals of, and the collaborations in, SMU make it a useful strategy for trade union revitalisation (Engeman, 2014: 14). We have seen that the aims and strategies of SMU are inclusive. This enhances the capacity of trade unions to contest economic restructuring measures because when unions present employers' demands and government's economic reforms as antagonistic to the interests of both union members and the users of public services, they are more likely to extract broad support than when union struggles are expressed in narrower terms (Camfield, 2007). In the US, although public sector unions remain a key force in the labour movement, they have had to rally public opinion in order to influence workplace conditions and rights (Engeman, 2014: 13). In Canada, SMU enabled the public sector unions to build 'power through a highly democratic praxis that links workplace organizing with a broad movement-building orientation [that] makes it best suited for responding to the challenges facing public sector workers' (Camfield, 2007: 297). Similarly, the trade unions in Korea have kept their relevance – in spite of the shifts in the sources of labour militancy from large enterprise unions in the manufacturing sector to irregular workers in small and medium-size manufacturing firms and the service industry – by providing solidarity support for irregular workers and organising national and regional

campaigns which articulated the issues that these workers faced at the workplace and outside the workplace (Chang, 2012). Therefore, the inclusive goal and strategies of SMU make it an important trade union approach for renewal and revitalisation.

In addition to the above, SMU contributes to trade union renaissance by encouraging grass-root activism in two ways. First, trade union members live in communities and are therefore, also affected by community issues. This means that when trade unions link workplace issues with community concerns, they touch on the issues that affect the social and community lives of workers and their families – this approach promotes active union membership. In Canada, SMU endeavours – support for other unions and community organizations – enhanced active membership in the CUPE (Camfield, 2007: 297). Second, the internal trade union process in SMU promotes grass root activism by giving trade union members a significant voice in the way their unions operate. The tendency for social movement unions to place democratic membership control – by developing the knowledge of union members and promoting their activism – at the centre of building union power helped to erode bureaucratic social relations within trade unions in Canada (ibid.: 287). In this sense, SMU contributes to making the trade unions more ‘accountable and responsive to an active (rather than passive) membership’ and succeeds in promoting and sustaining active membership participation, solidarity, and commitment (ibid.: 97). Such outcomes of SMU are vital for trade union renewal and vitality in contemporary times.

These key ideas about SMU, its goals and the process through which it is to be achieved, provide useful pointers for examining the objectives, strategies, and outcomes of trade union activities and struggle outside the workplace in Ghana. As shown by Diagram 1, trade union organising in the informal economy in Ghana is an instance of SMU. This is because until trade union membership began declining sharply about three decades ago, due to the impacts of the economic recovery and structural adjustment programmes, informal economy operators in Ghana largely remained outside trade unions (Boakye, 2004; Britwum and Martens, 2008). Informal economy unionisation, therefore, constitutes a trade union attempt to establish relationships beyond the factory gate. Therefore, SMU literature on the nature of trade union relationship with ‘non-unionised’ workers (Waterman, 1993) and the role played

by trade unions in such alliances (Moody, 1997b; and Scipe, 2014) provide useful entry points for the analysis of the relationship between trade unions and informal economy workers in Ghana.

In addition to providing insights into our understanding of trade union relationship with actors in the informal economy, SMU perspectives provide critical leads for exploring the trade union struggles on electricity user fees, the outcomes of such protests, and the kinds of relationships that are fostered during or by such protests. The struggles against electricity tariff increases in Ghana are an instance of SMU as they occur outside the workplace and focus on ‘issues of consumption’ (Lier and Stokke, 2006; 806). In addition, these are not typical trade union bread and butter struggles, and through such protests the trade unions in the country reach beyond the interests of their members. Also, as we shall see in chapter 6, the trade unions in Ghana frame their demands against electricity fee increases as popular claims and draw on the support from non-union members. Therefore, SMU ideas provide relevant insights into the study of the trade union struggles on electricity user fees in Ghana.

However, a shortcoming of most of the influential contributions on SMU is that they do not emphasise the importance of context and the complexities of SMU in practice (Lambert and Webster 2001; Waterman, 1993). For instance, Waterman (1993) abstracted ten generalised SMU propositions. He identified that SMU focuses on:

1. Struggles for increased worker and trade union control over the labour process, investments, new technology, relocation, subcontracting, training, and education policies that are carried out in dialogue and common action with affected communities and interest groups in ways that avoid conflicts and positively increase the appeal of the demands of the struggles;
2. Struggles against exploitative and technocratic working methods and relations in order to bring about socially-useful products, reduced hours of work, equity in the distribution of resources and domestic work, and for increase in the time available for noneconomic activity for cultural self-development and self-realisation;

3. Issues that are of concern to unionized or non-unionizable workers such as petty-commodity sector, homeworkers, peasants, housewives, technicians, and professionals;
4. Intimately expressed with other non- or multiclass democratic movements such as base movements of churches, women, residents, ecological, human rights, and peace movements;
5. Struggles for the continuing transformation of all social relationships and structures in a democratic and cooperative direction;
6. Intimately articulated with political forces such as parties, fronts, and states with similar orientations i.e., those which recognize the importance of a variety of autonomous forces in the struggle for the transformation of society;
7. Relationship with allies while maintaining the position as an autonomous, equal, and democratic partner, by avoiding the claim to be, or subordinating itself to, a “vanguard” or "sovereign" organisation or power;
8. New social issues within society as they arise for workers and express themselves within unions itself, including struggles against authoritarianism, bureaucracy, sexism, and racism in society;
9. Shop-floor democracy and encourages direct horizontal relations between workers and between workers and other popular or democratic social forces in society;
10. Direct local and international shop-floor, grass-roots, and community contacts and solidarity between workers and other popular or democratic forces, irrespective of social system, ideology, or political identity (Waterman, 1993: 266-267)

Waterman sought to apply these propositions in analysing women issues at work, forms of women’s organisations in trade unions, and actions against sexual harassment in unions in South Africa. He also looked at the organisation of women outside the unions, feminist attitudes and issues, and persistence of tradition. Yet, two issues can be found with his analysis. First, it does not provide adequate insights into how the ten propositions manifest themselves in trade union strategies and the effects of social, economic, and political milieu

in South Africa on SMU. Second, the consequences of SMU for internal trade union cohesion and the contestations that can emerge between social movement unions and their alliance partners were not featured much in Waterman's analysis – such issues are often muted in SMU abstractions.

A notable exception to such approach to SMU postulation is the research by Lier and Stokke on the Cape Town Anti-Privatisation Forum. This research shows how political economy conditions can impinge on the viability and sustainability of trade union alliances with township groups, community activists, and NGOs. In this instance, political relations between the state, trade unions, and the civil society in South Africa affected the collaborations between trade unions and social movements in Cape Town (Lier and Stokke 2006: 804). Specifically, the post-apartheid political and socioeconomic context wrecked the unity required in SMU by creating significant gaps between the CSOs that aligned to the African National Congress (ANC) and oppositional social movements – those that did not align with the ANC –, on the impacts of cost recovery policies and how to go about mitigating them (ibid.). This played out massively in the anti-privatisation campaign in Cape Town that was initiated by the South African Municipal Workers Union (SAMWU). The campaign brought about collaboration between the SAMWU and township activists, residents' groups, and NGOs in Cape Town (ibid.: 812). However, this collaboration did not achieve significant organisational capacity, popular support, and political strength that were necessary for 'effective political mobilisation to materialise under a forum umbrella – ["umbrella body"]' (ibid.: 814). The idea establishing an "umbrella body" generated mixed reactions among the collaborators because an "umbrella body" implied a hierarchy in which some of the social movements would to be subordinated (ibid.). In addition, significant contestation emerged on the political strategies of this alliance. While the SAMWU and some of the community organisations favoured political consultations and negotiations, others saw such engagements with local state structures as futile (ibid.). Consequently, the forum made limited and, in some cases, no inroads, into formal structures of power in the city (ibid.). Thus, the post-apartheid political configuration – the different relationship between social movements and the ANC – and conflicting positions on SMU structures and strategies, worked against the effectiveness of the collaboration between the SAMWU and community groups in Cape

Town against privatisation. These shows that contexts matter in the way that SMU can manifest itself.

In the light of the above, research that is more attentive to contexts, within the SMU framework, therefore exposes the limitation of overly abstract formulation of what trade unions and progressive elements of civil society can or ought to do. In practice, alliances and areas of joint work between several institutions are difficult balancing acts of the priorities, languages, and politics of different institutions. Therefore, given the importance of context on SMU manifestations, this thesis aims to provide a fine-grained and less abstract account of how trade union attempted to go beyond the factory gate in their opposition to electricity user fee hikes in Ghana and in organising informal economy operators.

### **2.3 Symbolic Power**

To explore the implications of the trade union campaigns on electricity user fees for the image and power of the trade unions, the analysis draws on Von Holdt's and Webster's notion of symbolic power and how trade unions can mobilise it. Symbolic power builds on moral power and symbolic leverage. Moral power emerges from the formulation of the struggles of workers as struggles of right against wrong in ways that appeal to opinion makers, politicians, and civil society (Fine, 2006). Symbolic leverage comes from organisational endeavours that draws on exploitation and social discrimination (Chun, 2005). Trade unions generate symbolic leverage by exposing 'contradictions between collective understandings of morality and legality in a particular place' (ibid.: 498). Thus, the presentation of workers' campaigns as fights against immoralities and illegalities generate symbolic power.

By symbolic power, it is meant a type of power mobilised in a sphere of public contestation where actions such as street marches and discursive strategies that emphasise social and citizenship rights, and not only workers' rights, are articulated (Von Holdt and Webster, 2008: 337). This form of power is constituted in the public sphere and draws on images and ideas that resonate with the wider community and with public consciousness (ibid.).

Symbolic power comes from the contestation of social injustice in the public domain (ibid.: 347). This makes it an important form of power for labour movements that face loss of ‘older and more traditional sources of power in the labour market or [at] the workplace’ (ibid.: 337).

The most notable instance of the mobilisation of symbolic power can be seen in South Africa, where the trade unions used worker advice centres to facilitate advocacy and organisation, build strong workplace structures, mobilise support from community organisations for consumer boycotts, and participate in broad political alliances for liberation (ibid.). Specifically, the trade unions in the retail sector in South Africa generated symbolic power through informal protest against racism and the organisation of political and consumer support for formal strikes and public picketing (ibid.: 343). Such mobilisation of symbolic power has been most significant where the workplace is in the public sphere because of the involvement of customers in the struggle (ibid.: 337). Significantly, the general trade union discourse and action in South Africa have been influenced by the symbolic power of the struggle against racial and colonial oppression (ibid.).

In light of the above, the notion of symbolic power is relevant to our understanding of the public denouncements of electricity tariff increases by the trade unions in Ghana, and the overt trade union actions that derived from it. At the same time, as we shall see in chapter 6, the concessions, albeit marginal, that the unions have sometimes forced from the government of Ghana, have implications on the symbolic power that trade unions command. Understanding this nexus in its complexity can enhance our appreciation of both SMU and trade union power in the instance of Ghanaian trade unions struggles on electricity.

## **2.4 Structural Power and Associational Power**

In order to fully appreciate how the inclusion of informal economy operators and casual workers into the trade unions yielded power and how such power has been utilised, I drew on Wright’s (2000) conceptualisation of workers’ power and its further elaboration by Silver (2003). These ideas are useful for this study because a) their assumptions emphasise the



importance of structure and agency in explaining the nature and dynamics of social groups and b) they conceptualise the sources of the power of workers as central to the processes of collective organisation of workers (Rizzo and Atzeni, 2020: 3).

Wright identified two sources of workers' power: associational power and structural power. Structural power stems from the location of workers within the economic system (Wright, 2000: 962). This power is the primary power resource of workers and can manifest itself without collective interest representation (Dörre and Schmalz, 2018: 2). Structural power 'results directly from tight labour markets or from the strategic location of a particular group of workers within a key industrial sector' (Wright, 2000: 962). Thus, structural power comes from dependencies among social partners at the place of work and from the labour market (Dörre and Schmalz, 2018: 2). It derives from the power of workers to cause disruption and interrupt or restrict the valorisation of capital (ibid.).

Structural power manifests itself in two forms: marketplace bargaining power and workplace bargaining power. Workers' marketplace bargaining power results from tight or loose labour markets and is therefore related to skill levels across jobs and to whether workers possess skills that are in high or low demand (Silver, 2003: 13). Workers who possess marketplace bargaining power can change jobs easily and bring about training costs and loss of production to their employers (Dörre and Schmalz, 2018: 2). This compels their employers to pay higher wages to these workers in order to avoid the costs of labour attrition (ibid.). Therefore, the global mobilisation of reserve labour that generates labour supply glut, including of skilled labour, undermines the marketplace power of workers (Silver, 2003: 14).

In addition, marketplace bargaining power of workers is influenced by other labour market conditions and government policies. Low unemployment and the ability of workers to stay out of the labour market and survive on nonwage income contribute to building the marketplace bargaining power of workers (Silver, 2003: 13). Similarly, state policies and intervention that impose limits on labour markets and create segmentation of workers – into core workforces, vulnerable workers, and the unemployed – influence marketplace bargaining power of workers (Dörre and Schmalz, 2018: 3). This is because such limitations

bring about hierarchies among workers and generate different resources among them (ibid.). Therefore, it is not surprising that in the global South, informal economy workers possess less marketplace bargaining power compared with the more powerful and relatively well-paid workers who enjoy a privileged position in major industrial companies (ibid.). In South Africa, increasing workplace differentiation has meant that formal sector workers operate in stable employment relations, enjoy better wages and benefits, and are able to access democratic workers and trade union rights (Von Holdt and Webster, 2008: 338). Yet, in the same country, casual or informal economy work has less stable employment relations and barely enable people to “make a living” (ibid.). Thus, labour market conditions and government policies matter in the marketplace bargaining power of workers.

In contrast to the above, workplace bargaining power is related to specific sectors. Workers with high workplace power are those ‘who are enmeshed in tightly integrated production processes, where a localized work stoppage in a key node can cause disruptions on a much wider scale than the stoppage itself’ (Silver, 2003: 13). This power is mobilised through work stoppages, strikes, sabotage, and go-slows (Dörre and Schmalz, 2018: 2). Workplace bargaining power manifests itself when entire assembly production processes are shut down due to a stoppage in a segment or when entire establishments that rely on the ‘just-in-time delivery of parts have been brought to a standstill by railway workers strikes’ (Silver, 2003: 13). Therefore, neoliberal relocations of production away from the centres of global capitalism brought about new worker milieu with a high degree of workplace bargaining power in some countries of the global South – such as China, South East Asia, Mexico – and Eastern Europe (Dörre and Schmalz, 2018: 3).

Workplace bargaining power comes from the status of workers in the production process and other points in the capital cycle (Dörre and Schmalz, 2018: 2). Transport sector workers have some “circulation power” or “logistical power” that can be deployed to slow the circulation of capital and labour (ibid). Similarly, dock workers possess considerable workplace bargaining power because of their strategic location in the economy (Von Holdt and Webster, 2008: 341). Also, care and education workers may exercise “reproduction power” through strikes that compromise the ability of other workers of the economy to go to work (Dörre and

Schmalz, 2018: 2).

However, whether workers can harness their structural power or not, depends, crucially, on whether they yield associational power. This power emanates from the formation of collective organizations of workers such as unions, parties, work councils, and any other form of workers' organization (Wright, 2000: 962). Wright argues that associational power also comes from other forms of institutional representation of workers, including representation on boards of directors in schemes of worker co-determination or community organisations (ibid.). This power is important in ameliorating the lack of structural power (Von Holdt and Webster, 2008).

Associational power can be exercised in three spheres: at the workplace, at a sectoral level, and in the political system (Dörre and Schmalz, 2018: 3). The strength of this power in the three spheres is influenced by socioeconomic context. Generally, associational power is said to be 'strong within the sphere of production, somewhat less strong in the sphere of exchange, and rather weaker in the sphere of politics' (Wright 2000: 985). Yet, in Sweden, at the height of social democracy, associational power was 'very strong in the spheres of exchange and politics and perhaps a bit weaker in the sphere of production' (ibid.). In comparison, associational power in the US has been strongest in the sphere of exchange within certain limited sectors – even though it is diminished in all three spheres (ibid.)

It is important to note that associational power comes by pooling the primary – structural – powers of workers together (Dörre and Schmalz, 2018: 3). This is done through a 'concrete process of contestation and mobilisation that could transform workers from a state of invisibility and marginality into a state of explicit recognition in political and economic arenas' (Chun, 2005: 498). The mobilisation of this power necessitates the emergence of organisational process and collective actors who have the capacity to formulate and implement strategies (Dörre and Schmalz, 2018: 3). Therefore, associational power is a function of membership numbers, infrastructural resources – material and human resources –, and organisational efficiency which manifests itself in efficient division of labour and allocation of resources in the organisation (ibid: 4).

Such nexus between trade union membership numbers, trade union resource availability and efficient utilisation, and associational power, has been used to explain some of the differences in the situations of trade unions in the global North and South in contemporary times. The decline of trade unionism in the US and many parts of Europe has been explained as an outcome of the diminishing associational power that has come about as a result of declining union membership and its impact on trade union infrastructural resources (Dörre and Schmalz, 2018: 3). In contrast, since the 1980s trade unions in South Africa, Brazil, South Korea, and South East Asia have drawn trade union members with a high degree of workplace bargaining power owing to the growing industrial sectors in these countries to engage with democratic movements (ibid.).

Importantly, union member participation – willingness to pay union dues and act – and internal cohesion and solidarity between trade union members, also influence associational power (Dörre and Schmalz, 2018: 4). In the US, France, Germany, and the United Kingdom (UK), internal cohesion in trade unions has been weakened as many union members became more reluctant to get involved in trade union activities, and be active (ibid.). Such phenomenon has implications for the exercise of associational power. This is because solidarity between trade union members is important if structural power can be mobilised into associational power to improve working conditions. In South Africa, the inability the trade unions to forge solidarity between casual and permanent workers at Durban port prevented the unions from establishing sufficient associational power that would allow them to make use of the workplace bargaining power of the casual workers to improve their working conditions and job security (Von Holdt and Webster, 2008: 341).

In addition, exogenous factors also influence associational power. The most important among such factors is the negative effect of globalisation on state sovereignty (Silver, 2003: 14). Associational power is embedded in national legal framework that ensures the rights of workers to form or join trade unions and collective bargaining (ibid). Consequently, the weakening of the state by the forces of globalisation has meant that these guarantees are compromised. Significantly, the attacks that states and employers, under the influence of

globalisation, have waged against workers and their organisations have undermined the associational power of labour by making it hard for workers' organisation to promote the interest of their members (ibid.). This has been compounded by the creation of global labour reserves that de-legitimised trade unions and labour parties by making it difficult for such organisations to meet the aspiration of their members (ibid). Therefore, globalisation and its implication for state power undermines the exercise of associational power at the national context.

The above notwithstanding, the mobilisation of associational power is important for both workers and their employers. Associational power can help capitalists to solve certain kinds of collective action and coordination problems at the workplace (Wright, 2000: 978). Strong associational power of workers brings about effective involvement of workers in creative problem solving at the workplace in ways that have positive effects on capitalists' interests (ibid.). This brings about productivity and profit gains through:

- i. high bargained cooperation between workers and capitalists;
- ii. rationalised systems of skill improvement and job training;
- iii. increased capacity in dealing with macroeconomic problems;
- iv. increased willingness of workers to accept technological change because of the relative job security they enjoy because of union protections (Wright, 2000: 959-960)

These positive effects of associational power must be looked at alongside its importance in enabling workers to exert influence in the organisation of work and production systems. This is because increasing associational power 'undermines the capacity of capitalists to unilaterally make decisions and control resources of various sorts' at the workplace (Wright, 2000: 959-960). Yet, this should not be seen as a loss of capitalist power that detracts from its interests, since it, as we have seen, can bring about productivity and profit gains.

This conceptualisation of the sources of the powers of workers and of trade unions is a useful tool for our understanding of contemporary trade unions and give insights into the future of trade unionism. It stands in contrast with other influential narratives, such as those by Gallin

(2001) and Standing (2011), for its avoidance of overgeneralisation. Gallin posits that the typical employee-employer relationship is being replaced by several diffused and indirect but dependent relationships in the process of production and therefore, trade unions can no longer focus primarily on employment relationship in organising (Gallin, 2001: 537). Based on this prognosis, Gallin prescribes that trade unions need to ‘focus on the worker and his/her needs for protection and representation’ (ibid). Similarly, Standing calls for ‘a new type of collective body [which] will have to take up the challenge of “collaborative bargaining”,... [and] consider the full range of work and labour activities that the precariat has to undertake’ (Standing, 2011: 168).

Such scepticism about the ability of trade unions to represent workers in new forms of employment and the call for reforms in trade unionism, are not entirely new. In some ways, even though they have some distinguishing elements – such as their proposed emphasis on the necessity to include informal workers into trade unions in new ways –, these propositions connect with the earlier labour aristocracy debate, which I discuss later in this chapter. For those scholars – such as Standing (2011) – who have doubts about the ability of trade unions to represent informal workers, a focus on social protection and away from rights at works is the future of trade unions or of new bodies to represent precarious workers. However, for Silver, labour and labour movements are continually made and remade and therefore, attention must be paid to the formations of new working classes and the resistance from those working classes that are being ‘unmade’ as well as the ‘identification of the responses from below to both the creative and destructive sides of capitalist development’ (Silver, 2003: 19-20). More attention to specific contexts is therefore needed.

The ideas on sources of workers and trade union powers are significant to the analytical framework of this study, as they offer useful pointers for examining the power of informal economy operators and casual workers and how such powers have been mobilised and utilised by these workers and their trade unions. It is important to note that informal economy workers provide some of the essential socio-economic goods and services such as transportation and food production and distribution in Ghana (Owusu-Bempah, et. al, 2013). Similarly, casual workers at the ports in Ghana possess some power due to the essential

services that some of them provide for port operation in the country (interview with Musa, 2018). Therefore, understanding the extent to which such power – structural and associational – is yielded and mobilised and who benefits from such powers is an important analytical task, as doing so will provide a context-specific empirical basis to engage with the debate on the current state and future of trade unions and to reflect on the sources of workers and trade unions powers.

## **2.5 Mobilisation Theory**

In order to problematise how the informal economy operators and the casual dock workers in this study have, or have not, used their structural power and associational power to protect and promote their interests, this thesis draws on insights from mobilisation theory. Mobilization theory talks about the necessary conditions that bring about the transformation of individual workers into collective actors who are disposed to, and capable of, creating and sustaining 1) collective organisation, and 2) collective action against employers (Kelly, 2019). The theory offers a useful framework for analysing strikes and protests by combining both structural and subjective factors with action categories in ways that enable deeper understanding of collective conflictual actions (Martin 1999: 1208). Mobilisation theory accentuates a dialectical relationship between structure and agency (Darlington, 2018: 1), and is built on five key concepts, namely, interest, mobilisation, organisation, opportunity, and forms of collective action (Martin 1999: 1207). Two of these concepts – interests and opportunity – are central to the analysis of the struggles of the workers and the trade unions in this study.

### ***Interest***

Interest is used in mobilisation theory to conceptualise how ‘individuals acquire a sense of injustice (the conviction that an event, action or situation is “wrong” or “illegitimate”) and how this grievance becomes collectivised’ (Holgate et. al. 2018: 607). This concept assumes

that mobilisation requires transition from dissatisfaction to injustice. Injustice mostly arises when management violates established rules or when employer actions conflict with shared beliefs (Kelly, 1998: 28), and 2). It also comes from the emergence of a recognition that workers' interests are opposed to those of employers (Darlington, 2018: 3). Mobilisation theory emphasises that even though dissatisfaction is necessary, it is not the sufficient condition for collective action – 'the sine qua non for collective action is a sense of injustice' (Kelly, 1998: 27).

The conversion of injustice into collective interest requires attribution, social identification, and leadership (Kelly, 1998: 29-30). Attribution involves blaming employers for injustice (Holgate et. al. 2018: 607) or assigning grievances to employer actions (Darlington, 2018: 3). Thus, effective attribution blames an agency, mostly an employer, which becomes the target for collective organisation for the grievance, rather than uncontrollable forces or events (Kelly, 1998: 29-30). Social identification is about feeling part of a distinct group in opposition to an outgroup (Holgate et. al. 2018: 607). It involves the emergence of sentiments of "us" against "others" who have different interests and values (Kelly, 1998: 29-30). Leadership, is about the 'central role of the subjective agency of activist leadership in channelling workers' grievances into collective forms of mobilisation (Darlington, 2018: 3). Leadership has been identified as essential in the framing injustice and generating a "we" feeling among workers (Holgate et. al. 2018: 607) in order to diminish managerial legitimacy and underscore the necessity for collective response (Kelly, 1998: 33).

### ***Opportunity***

The use of opportunity in mobilisation theory is about the strength of workers and employers, and their chances of success and the dangers in collective actions. The concept problematises 'the balance of power between the parties [in dispute], the costs of repression by the ruling group and the opportunities available for subordinate groups to pursue their claims' (Tilly 1978: 55). In this sense, opportunity mostly depends on state policies and actions, actions of



employers, and the balance of power between those with power and subordinates (Kelly, 1998: 37).

Analysis of opportunity brings to the fore the extent to which disputants 'are vulnerable to new claims which would, if successful, enhance the contender's realisation of its interests' (Tilly, 1978: 113). This supposes that what is an opportunity to workers may represent a threat to their employers. Hence, perceptions on opportunity and threat of disputes influence contenders to 'engage in two kinds and levels of collective action: a low intensity of action to counter threats of loss, [and] a higher intensity of action to take advantage of opportunities for gain in the area of the group's interest' (ibid.: 140). This is because dominant groups may stage counter-mobilisation efforts in attempts to alter subordinate definitions of interests, to obstruct effective collective organisation, and to inhibit mobilisation and collective action (Kelly, 1998: 26). Thus, opportunity is a necessary condition in the transformation of injustice into collective action against employers.

### ***Mobilisation***

Mobilisation is the acquisition of collective control over the required resources for collective action (Kelly, 1998: 25). It involves the process through which a group goes 'from being a passive collection of individuals to an active participant in public life' (Tilly 1978: 69). Mobilisation relies on the definitions of interests, the level of organisation, and the costs and benefits of taking action (Kelly, 1998: 33). Mobilisation is also influenced by the resources under collective control (Tilly 1978: 54). Kelly (1998: 33), argues that workers consider the costs and benefits of collective actions in their participations in such actions.

Typically, mobilisation may be defensive, offensive, and preparatory (Tilly 1978: 73). Defensive mobilization is triggered by external threats that induce group members to pool their resources together to fend off the enemy (ibid.). Offensive mobilisation involves pooling resources together in response to opportunities to achieve group interests (ibid.). Preparatory mobilisation is presumptive (ibid). It manifests itself when groups pool resources

together in anticipation of future opportunities and threats (ibid.). These elements make mobilisation an important factor in collective action.

### ***Organisation***

Organisation is applied in mobilisation theory to refer to the structure of a group or those elements – such as centralisation of power and scope of representation – that affect the capacity for collective action (Kelly, 1998: 25). It emphasises the efficiency and effectiveness or the structural features – such as differentiation, centrality, and stratification – in collective actions (Tilly 1978: 64). Organisation relates to union size and density, and other structural properties, namely, the number of shop stewards, shop steward-member ratio, and union decision-making structures (Kelly, 1998: 37).

The concept of organisation is also about group inclusiveness, in other words the extent to which a group comes close to absorbing the lives of its members (Tilly 1978: 64). The assumptions on organisation provide insights for the analysis of how group members relate to the group, and the level of interaction or the density of social network among members in shaping collective organisation and action (Kelly, 1998: 37). Inclusiveness in organisation is shaped by the time and the energy that group members spend in social interaction among themselves (Tilly 1978: 64). Together, structure and inclusiveness – key elements of organisation – are critical conditions for collective action.

### ***Collective Action***

In mobilisation theory, collective action refers to joint action in pursuit of common goals (Tilly 1978: 84). Collective action produces inclusive and indivisible goods or outcomes (ibid. 85). It is a function of the balance of interests, opportunity, organisation, and mobilisation (Kelly, 1998: 26). Collective action is also influenced by power, opportunity/threat, and repression (Tilly 1978: 84). It includes strikes, overtime bans, go-

slows, work-to-rule, petitions, lobbying, and other forms of non-cooperation by workers that question the legitimacy of employers (ibid.). Among these, strike stands out as the most powerful form of collective action available to workers because it is the most costly to employers (ibid.)

The above reasoning on interest, mobilisation, organisation, opportunity, and collective action make the mobilisation theory significant, as they provide both objective and subjective – structural and agency – perspectives on the collective actions of workers against employers. Therefore, it is not surprising that the mobilisation theory has become widely influential in labour studies (Kelly, 2018: 702).

Nonetheless, some of the key concepts of the mobilisation theory has attracted significant criticisms. Martin (1999: 1209) maintains that the relevance of injustice – a key aspect of the concept of interest – is not well established in the mobilisation theory. He argues that a sense of injustice is also influenced by the prior values of employees, and that workers may associate little weight to issues that external observers may consider to be unjust (ibid.). In addition, Atzeni (2005: 57) has argued that injustice is subjective and volatile. According to him, the construction of mobilisation as a process based wholly on injustice is reductive. He maintains that even though injustice is ‘one aspect of subjective intervention whose importance remains unquestioned in shaping workers’ grievances ... [it is] not the basis of mobilisation’ (ibid.: 57). Despite these criticisms, the objective and subjective elements of the mobilisation theory provide useful tools for the examination of collective action of the workers and their trade unions in this study.

## **2.6 Labour Aristocracy**

What are the repercussions of the electricity subsidies struggles for trade union orientation in Ghana? What does the unionisation of informal economy operators and casual dockworkers mean for trade union character? As Diagram 1 shows, in order explore these issues, this study engaged with ideas on labour aristocracy. Labour aristocracy refers to conservatism among

workers and their trade unions (Celik, 2017: 20). The concept was first coined by Frederick Engels, in correspondence with Marx from the 1850s onwards, to explain the growing conservatism of the organized segments of the British working class (Post, 2006). For Engels, unionised British workers - skilled workers in the textile sector, in iron, and steel, were “a privileged and “bourgeoisified” layer of the working class, a “labor aristocracy” (ibid.)

From Engels onwards, the concept gained traction in labour studies. Workers in the labour aristocracy category are seen to be socially and politically distinct from the rest of the working people because they are located at the forefront of labour movements and enjoy higher economic and social privileges (Celik, 2017: 21). The members of the labour aristocracy category are usually unionised workers, trade unions, and labour leaders (Waterman, 1975: 57). Labour aristocracy has also been used to analyse differences in social identities among working people. Labour aristocrats ‘possess certain ideological, cultural and social values, and exhibit behaviours that [make] them distinct from other workers and class segments’ (Warhurst and Nickson, 2007: 770). Most crucially, workers in the labour aristocracy category are said to be privileged workers who are disposed towards conservatism and therefore, more unlikely to support movements towards socialism (Kerswell, 2019: 70).

In Africa, the application of the concept gained currency in the post-colonial era to analyse the socioeconomic and political positions of urban workers in formal employment and their trade unions (Arrighi, 1973; Waterman, 1975; Breman, 1976; Celik, 2017: 22). The labour aristocracy category was used to describe the minority of African workers who earned decent wages and those that engaged with trade unions (Celik, 2017: 22). These workers had regular employment and standardised working conditions that gave them a secure existence (Breman, 1976: 1939). The African labour aristocrats included workers in multi-national companies (Celik, 2017: 22), private sector workers, workers in government institutions, and workers in large factories (Breman, 1976: 1939). The so-called labour aristocrats on the continent exhibited marked differences in material conditions and social identities. Trade union membership (Waterman, 1975: 58) and formal education (Breman, 1976: 1940) separated African labour aristocrats from other workers.

In addition, labour aristocracy as a concept helped to bring to the fore the contrast between a minority of urban formal sector workers and the majority of workers who eked a living in the informal economy – in both rural and urban centres – (Breman, 1976; Kerswell, 2019). It was argued that skilled and semi-skilled formal sector workers who earned higher wages and salaries – sometimes three times or more than what could be earned in the informal economy – in the urban sector severed relations with those in the rural economy (Jeffries, 1975: 58). A large gap therefore emerged between the modern sector and traditional sector workers (Arrighi, 1973: 130).

Scholars in labour studies took different positions on the role of the so-called privileged workers in the politics and socioeconomic development of the continent. For some, African privileged workers and their organisations took self-interested and conservative positions (Breman, 1976: 1940; Waterman, 1975: 57). It is argued that even though organised labour in Africa – especially in the 1960s and 1970s – did not oppose their governments over the ownership and management of the means of production, they resisted reallocations of surplus by the states in ways that could lead to greater equality and significant transformations of their societies (Arrighi, 1973: 141-142). This happened, goes the argument, because more equality in resource reallocation would have inhibited consumption by, and potentially detracted from the social and economic interests of, African labour aristocrats (Arrighi, 1973: 141-142). These arguments portray African labour aristocrats as selfish.

Other scholars maintained that privileged workers and their trade unions played positive and central roles in the socioeconomic development of African states. The so-called labour aristocrats were central in the political struggles that decolonised the continent (Freund, 1984; Davison, 1954). Subsequently, they became prominent and radical actors in the development of their societies as demonstrated by waves of general strikes which became part of the decisive trade union actions against repressive governments and non-progressive socioeconomic policies (Waterman, 1975: 57, 60).

The empirical chapters of this thesis will revisit whether the main arguments of the labour aristocracy concept hold true in Ghana. On the one hand, there is evidence to question the

appropriateness of the application of the labour aristocracy to describe the upper strata of workers and trade unions in the country (Jeffries, 1975). In colonial times, as we will see in chapter 4, urban formal workers and their trade unions staged audacious and successful strikes that challenged the legitimacy of the British colonial government (ibid.: 67). Significantly, even though the trade unions in Ghana have oscillated between political unionism and emphasis on workplace issues since the country gained political independence in 1957, they have also been significant advocates for democracy and more egalitarian redistribution of national resources in the country.

In the post-independence era, urban workers and their trade unions related with their communities and struggled against unjust socioeconomic policies. It has been argued that even though skilled railways and harbours workers were ‘part of the better-paid [and] relatively secured section of the manual working-class ... [they] proved [to be] the most radical mass force in Ghanaian politics (Jeffries, 1975: 58). Strikes and demonstrations by these workers – such as the September 1971 demonstrations – received widespread support from other urban groups who looked up to the railways and harbours workers for resistance against non-egalitarian socioeconomic policies in the country (ibid: 67). In addition, between 1983 and 1992, trade unions in Ghana struggled for democratisation and resisted economic policies that compromised the interest of workers and their families (Kraus, 2007: 83). Similarly, in the 2000s, as we shall see from chapters five onwards, the struggles of trade unions in Ghana against the removal of subsidies on electricity and the unionisation of informal economy operators and casual dock workers are largely contrary to what labour aristocrats stand for and how they behave. In this sense, I argue that these trade union endeavours support an earlier proposition that the application of labour aristocracy in Ghana misrepresents the position of skilled workers in the country, because they and their trade unions opposed ‘politicians and bureaucrats over the pattern of distribution of the national surplus, and over the failure to curb corrupt practices by state officials, to the detriment of both rural producers and urban poor’ (Jeffries, 1975: 60). At the same time, as we shall see in the study of trade union presence in the traditional restaurants in Accra and at the ports in Ghana, trade unions’ direct reach of the most vulnerable workers remain critically weak. So

some aspects of the labour aristocracy theory, namely the fact that unions remain organisation that reach a minority of (better remunerated) workers, holds true.

## **2.7 Conclusion**

In this chapter I have reviewed the literature on SMU, Wright's (2000) and Silver's (2003) conceptualisation on the sources of workers power, the notion of symbolic power by Von Holdt and Webster (2008), and the mobilisation theory (Kelly, 1998), suggesting that, when combined, they provide a useful analytical framework for the examination of the struggles outside the workplace and at the workplace of trade unions in Ghana. I have also argued that trade union struggles in Ghana conflict with some of the key tenets on labour aristocracy. In the next chapter, the research methods of this thesis are reviewed.

## **CHAPTER 3: THE RESEARCH METHODS**

### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents the research methods that I used in this study of the trade union responses to economic liberalisation in Ghana. It discusses the research design, the sampling techniques, and the informants of the case studies. This chapter also reviews the data collection instruments, and how the data that were collected was analysed. In this chapter, I also highlight the limitations of the study and how I went about mitigating their effects on the research process. This chapter also presents the ethical principles that guided the study and provides some reflections on what my positionality – as researcher of the TUC (Ghana) and a PhD student – meant for my access to trade unions, interactions with informants, and interpretation of the findings of the study,

### **3.2 The Research Design**

The research is built on three case studies: trade union struggles on electricity tariff hikes in Ghana, the unionisation of informal economy caterers in Accra, and trade union response to labour market changes at the main ports in Ghana. The focus on electricity tariff struggles was informed by the fact that they occur outside the workplace and the subsidies they generate transcend trade unions and their constituents, providing empirical evidence to engage with the literature on trade union outlook and relevance in contemporary times. The case study on organising in the informal economy looked at the inclusion of traditional caterers into the TUC (Ghana). This selection was informed by the significant presence of paid employment at the traditional restaurants, offering the opportunity to engage with the assumptions about the informal economy as the new source of trade union membership and to explore what trade unionism means for workers and employers in the informal economy. The third case examined how the Maritime and Dockworkers Union (MDU) became both the employer and the trade union of the casual workers at the ports in Ghana, and provides



insights into how such contradiction affected the interests and the powers of the casual workers and the MDU. Together, the three case studies cover the two terrains in which the trade unions responded to economic liberalisation in Ghana: outside the workplace (resistance to electricity tariff increases) and at the workplace (dealing with membership decline), as already argued in chapter two.

The research relies on case studies because of two other reasons. First, as space-bound units of analysis, case studies enable in-depth exploration of phenomena within a context (Hammond and Wellington, 2012: 17). This means that using case studies was essential for deeper appreciation of the various ramifications of the three instances of the trade union responses to economic liberalisation in Ghana. Second, and related to the first point, the fact that a small N- cases were under analysis, meant that a variety of sources, to be identified in a more flexible way, could be used.

In spite of the above, the use of case studies in this research requires some considerations about the generalizability of the findings of this study. Some might argue that the single cases or the small number of cases that case studies focus on make extrapolating the findings of case studies problematic (Buchanan, 2012: 364). Thinking about the Ghanaian context, trade unions in the country have done, and are doing, several things in their struggles against economic liberalisation or in reaction to the impacts of economic liberalisation in the country. Therefore, focusing on three instances of trade union actions might be deemed as selective.

At the same time, a counter argument can be made, namely, that by looking at three examples of the trade union responses to economic liberalisation in Ghana, we see the possible spaces of the trade union struggles against, and reaction to, the impacts of economic liberalisation in the country. Through these three case studies, we see depth by which one can contribute to, test, and challenge grand narratives on how unions in Ghana, or more generally beyond Ghana, respond to membership loss and rising cost of living. This, therefore, entails turning the criticism of case studies on its head, as the overgeneralisation and lack of empirics behind grand narrative can be exposed and challenged by in-depth case studies – the lessons of the three case studies provide useful insight for our understanding of trade unions and economic

liberalisation in other contexts. This is because generalizability or external validity in applying the findings of a case study to settings other than the one that was studied can be achieved (Buchanan, 2012: 365).

Buchanan identified four ways in which case study findings may be generalizable. The first is moderatum generalizations, or speculative associations that can be made because certain 'characteristics that point to particular structures in one situation can lead to a hypothesis that the existence of such structures in a further situation will lead to at least some similar characteristics' (ibid.). The second mode of case study generalizability is naturalistic generation. This derives from enduring meanings that comes from repeated experience and encounter we get from cases and their applications in different contexts (ibid.). The third, analytical refinement, is about using the experience and observation of a case study of a phenomenon to move to theory by broadening our understanding through the accumulation of fresh observations (ibid.). The fourth is isomorphic learning. This involves the application of the lessons from an event to other settings. These four modes of generalisability show that in spite of the difficulties with extrapolating the findings of case studies to the general population, we can use the lessons of case studies beyond the initial unit of analysis. Therefore, using the case study design did not detract from the usefulness of applying the lessons and insights from this research in similar contexts.

### **3.3 The Sampling Techniques**

The sampling methods used in the selection of the participants for the case studies were non-probability sampling techniques. My choice of non-probability sampling techniques was informed by theoretical, methodological, and practical considerations. I used non-probability sampling techniques in this study because they are consistent with the qualitative research approach which shaped this research. In addition, I employed non-probability sampling techniques because they allow researchers to make judgement about population characteristics that are relevant to the data required to address the research aim (Saunders, 2012: 39). Furthermore, non-probability sampling techniques allow for non-random

sampling (Walliman, 2010: 96). These elements of non-probability sampling ensure that personal characteristics of participants or possession of relevant information and knowledge anchor the sampling process instead of randomness, making non-probability sampling useful for the exploration of the three cases of the trade union responses to economic liberalisation in Ghana.

However, it needs to be clear that using non-probability sampling meant that the likelihood of selecting units in the population to be part of the study is unknown. Using non-probability sampling in this study meant that some of the units in the population of the study had a chance to be chosen to be participants while others did not (Saunders, 2012: 41). Nonetheless, non-probability sampling techniques remained the most useful option for my case studies, given the theme of the research, namely, to attain deeper insights into the trade union responses to economic liberalisation in Ghana. As always with non-probability sampling, what needs to be judged by readers is whether the author's judgements about the informants' characteristics that are relevant for the data requirement of the study and the related sampling strategy are sound (Walliman, 2010; Saunders, 2012). The analysis now discusses the sampling techniques used, namely the quota, purposive, and theoretical sampling techniques, and whether they provided the most effective ways to select the participants of the three case studies in this research.

### ***3.3.1 Quota Sampling***

The first sampling procedure in this study was quota sampling. This sampling technique involves creating sampling grids that reflect the population parameters of interest (Bernard, 2011: 144). This means that quota sampling promotes representativeness because it enables researchers to establish a range of sampling parameters that are relevant to the study and sample on the basis of the created parameters (Newell and Burnard 2011: 147). In this study, the populations of the three case studies were stratified into sampling grids made up of units who shared similar characteristics. These include trade union leaders, trade union members, informal economy employers, and informal economy workers. The rests were managers of

the GDLC, casual workers of the GDLC, civil society organisation (CSO) activists, and public officials. These sampling grids represent the populations of the three case studies and whose experiences and voices were relevant to our understanding of the three cases of the trade union responses to economic liberalisation in Ghana. Therefore, even though the eventual samples that were selected from the sampling grids were not proportional, using the quota sampling ensured the representation of the views and experiences of the various elements or the different interest groups in the populations of the case studies in the findings of this study.

### ***3.3.2 Purposive Sampling***

Having established the sampling grids, I used purposive sampling to select the individuals who took part in the three case studies. Purposive sampling allows researchers to make judgements in choosing participants who are informative and best able to ensure that researchers answer their research questions and meet their aims (Saunders, 2012: 41). Using purposive sampling ensured that I anchored the selection of the participants of the case studies on my knowledge of the population of the study. My work as a researcher at the TUC (Ghana), had equipped me with an insider's knowledge of the key actors in the various trade union struggles against economic liberalisation in the country. Armed with this insight, using purposive sampling was apt, as it enabled me to select persons who were key observers or affected parties in the three case studies. Therefore, the purposive sampling technique ensured the selection of trade unionists, trade union activists, public officials, and others who had experienced and had useful information on the three cases of the trade union responses to economic liberalisation in Ghana.

### ***3.3.3 Theoretical Sampling***

In addition to the above, the selection of the participants in this study was also influenced by theoretical sampling. This was because theoretical sampling allows data gathering to be

informed by relevant concepts and ideas that emerge from ongoing data collection process (Saunders, 2012: 42). This sampling technique enables modification in sampling and the inclusion of other potential respondents who were not initially considered but emerge in the course of data collection to be relevant in providing more insights into research questions (Charmaz, 2000). A theoretical sample is ‘cumulatively chosen according to developing categories and emerging theory based upon a simultaneous collection, coding and analysis of the data’ (Saunders, 2012: 42). Employing this sampling technique enabled me to widen the sample selection I made before my fieldwork. In the case study of the unionisation of traditional caterers, my first week of fieldwork – interviews with the caterers – brought out the importance of the regulatory functions of tax authorities to the operation of traditional restaurants in Accra. Therefore, even though these were not included in the initial sample plan, it became necessary to include tax and city officials in the sample. In the case study on the trade union response to labour market changes at the main ports in Ghana, the initial interviews showed the importance of the historical antecedence of the reforms to our understanding of the trade union reactions and how the casual workers at the ports perceive them. Consequently, I had to revise my sampling to ensure that I involved as many people as it was possible – in the end, about a quarter of the participants, – who had experienced the various labour market changes at the ports.

Also, using theoretical sampling was important for the two-phased approach I used in the data collection processes in this study. I conducted my fieldwork in Ghana from September to December 2017 and February to June 2018. The benefit of breaking the data collection process into two was that the theoretical sampling approach aided me to reflect on the initial findings of the study in order to identify new ideas, explore, and include additional sources of data. Therefore, using theoretical sampling in this study did not only ensure that I added persons who had characteristics of interest to the three case studies, but it also allowed me to explore and include emerging insights into the planning of the second round of fieldwork. In the case study of the trade union struggles on electricity tariffs in Ghana, the initial findings from the first phase of my fieldwork revealed that national trade union leaders and district trade union activists in Tema sometimes disagreed on the value of the outcomes of the struggles. Therefore, I had to explore this theme in the second phase of my fieldwork. This

required that I went back to talk to three of the trade union officials I interviewed in the first phase and conduct a focus group discussion with trade union activists in Tema. Similarly, in the case study on the trade union response to labour market changes at the main ports in Ghana, my initial fieldwork revealed that the MDU's interest in the GDLC – 20 percent shares – was an important theme around which casual workers at the ports analysed their power. Therefore, I had to explore this theme further in my second phase fieldwork in order to get better insights into how the labour market reforms had affected the power and interests of these casual workers. In all, the clarifications I sought in the second phase of my fieldwork meant that about 30 percent of the participants in this study were engaged twice.

### **3.4 The Data Collection Instruments**

The primary data that were collected for the three case studies were from interviews, 158 in total, a focus group discussion with 8 participants, and observations.

#### ***3.4.1 Interviews***

I used both structured and semi-structured face-to-face interviews in the three case studies. The structured interviews involved using standardised questions, while the unstructured interviews had a more flexible format based on a broad question guide which allowed interviewees room for digression away from the guide (Walliman, 2010: 99). I used interviews because they enable the understanding of human experience through talk, and a type of interaction that allows informants' understanding of their experiences to be expressed in their own words (Brinkmann, 2014: 278; Taylor et. al., 2016: 102). As Hammond and Wellington put it, interviews 'go deep because they allow the researcher to see an event or context from the point of view of the people s/he is researching' (Hammond and Wellington, 2013: 91). Interviews also aided adaptability through which I followed up ideas, probed responses, and explored intents and feelings of the interviewees in this study (Bell, 2004). Thus, using interviews in this study provided the opportunity for me to learn the views and

experiences of trade unionists, informal economy operators, casual workers, and other informants, of the trade union responses to economic liberalisation in Ghana.

In spite of the above, using interviews in this study came with some challenges. First, the circumstance of the interview and my positionality, constituted a potential source of bias in the responses of the interviewees. One has to be aware that an interview is always an account emerging out of a particular dynamic situation between the interviewer and the interviewee (Hammond and Wellington, 2013: 91-92). As a result of this, ‘the story’ that is presented by an interviewee could be one of many stories which s/he could tell (ibid.). Given my work for the TUC (Ghana), interviewees could be reluctant to voice criticisms of unions and of the TUC (Ghana), or use the interviewees as a channel to voice criticisms and resentments against trade unions. In one instance, a casual dock worker intimated: ‘you are from TUC and the MDU is part of the TUC, if you promise that you would not take this interview somewhere [meant reveal it to officials the MDU], you will hear things’ (interview with Apapa, 2018). In another instance, an officer of one of the traditional caterers associations of the TUC (Ghana) kept asking me to ‘tell the TUC that we are not happy that they [the TUC (Ghana)] do not give the contracts for serving food and snacks at trade union meetings to us (interview with Gifty, 2017). The second difficulty that came with using interviews in this study was that the interviews were, as they always are, costly and time consuming to organise. I had to book appointments and travel long distances to meet interviewees. Sometimes, interviewees were not available or not ready, so the interviews had to be rescheduled. In spite of these drawbacks, I chose face-to-face interviews for this study because they enabled observation of workplaces and a closer interaction with informants, such that facial expressions and nuances in the tone of voice of respondents could be observed.

### ***3.4.2 Focus Group Discussion***

In addition to the interviews, I conducted a focus group discussion with grassroots trade union activists – district level and rank-and-file members – of the affiliates of the TUC (Ghana) in

Tema. This provided an effective way for me to learn the range of perspectives of shop floor union leaders on my research questions. This is because ‘focus groups provide in-depth insights and can be used to tease out how people feel about a given topic and help to determine the mood or climate regarding a particular topic’ (Kandola, 2012: 258). The group dynamics in focus group discussion stimulate and promote conversation and reactions among the discussants (Mack et. al., 2005: 51-52). Another reason for conducting a focus group discussion in this study was that focus groups create conditions that make discussants feel at ease with their peers and make them ‘more likely to relax and jog each other’s memories and thoughts’ (Hammond and Wellington, 2013: 93). These conditions of focus groups can provoke interactive answers and debate among the participants (Alvesson and Ashcraft, 2012: 241). Such interactions and debate among discussants can provide interesting insights into the research topic. Therefore, using a focus group discussion in this study was useful in enabling me to learn a wide variety of views of grassroots trade union activists on the research questions within a short time.

Nonetheless, focus groups have their challenges. Primary among these challenges is that the group can be swayed by more dominant members (Hammond and Wellington, 2013: 93). In addition, it is difficult to sometimes deduce the extent of agreement on the topic under discussion among discussants (ibid.).

Nevertheless, I used a focus group discussion in this research for two reasons. First, I could mitigate the potential impact of the group dynamics on the responses of participants. I consciously ensured that all the discussants were given the opportunity and encouraged to express their views on the various themes under discussion. Also, in order to enhance free expression, the focus group consisted of discussants who share similar power relations. I did not allow national trade union leaders to participate in, or to be present during, the focus group discussion with shop floor trade union activists. The second reason why I used a focus group discussion in spite of its challenges was that, it is not in all instances that dissent among focus group discussants is problematic. In this instance, I was interested in grassroots perspectives on the trade union responses to economic liberalisation in Ghana and not necessarily their consensus or the extent of their agreement on the topic. Therefore, in spite



of the outlined challenges associated with focus groups, the mitigation measures I used and the kind of information that I sought for, made a focus group discussion a relevant data collection technique for this study.

In spite of the above, I conducted only one focus group discussion. This was because of practical difficulties and ethical considerations. The practical challenges came from the working times of most of the participants of the study. The work schedules of the trade union leaders who took part in this study made it impossible to get a common convenient time to bring them together for focus group discussions. Similarly, it was not possible to stop the informal economy operators and their workers from their work for them to attend focus group discussions – most of the interviews took place when they were at work. The ethical considerations mostly related to anonymity and the safety of the participants in the case study of the trade union response to labour market changes at the main ports in Ghana. My initial interviews with the casual dock workers showed that they were unwilling for others, including their colleagues, to hear their opinion on the topic. This meant that I could not put them together in focus group discussions. Therefore, with the exception of the trade union activists in Tema, practical and ethical challenges made focus group discussion least likely to generate desired data from the other target groups of informants of this study.

### ***3.4.3 Observations***

Aside the interviews and the focus group discussion, I also employed non-participant observation in collecting data in this study. I used observations because they show actual behaviour rather than reported behaviour (Hammond and Wellington, 2013: 111). Thus, observations were necessary in this study because of the potential mismatch that sometime exists between action and words (ibid.). In this study, the observations enabled triangulation of the data I collected through the interviews and the focus group discussion. In the case study on organising in the informal economy, the traditional restaurant owners extolled the accommodation that they provide to their workers in the interviews. Yet, the observations revealed that almost all of the accommodation places were poorly ventilated and congested.

Similarly, in the case study on the labour market reforms at the ports, the managers of the GDLC emphasized the importance of the creation of a waiting area for the casual dock workers. However, my observations of several mosquitoes nets, leading to subsequent questions to the casual dock workers, revealed how the workers have had to convert the waiting area – with no bathing facilities – into temporary accommodation in response to increased job uncertainty (I elaborate on this in chapter 10), something that the managers of GDLC did not mention to me in the interviews. These examples show how using observation assisted me to check biases, as well as instances of underreporting and misreporting.

### **3.5 The Participants of the Case Studies**

Together, 166 persons participated in the three case studies – see list of participants at Appendix A. These include 42 participants in the case study on the trade union struggles on electricity user fees, 81 in the case study on informal economy organising, and 43 in the case study on reactions of the MDU to the labour market changes at the ports in Ghana. The different numbers of the participants of the three case studies were influenced by two factors. The first factor was the saturation principle. The saturation principle in qualitative research approach allows researchers to sample until a saturation point is reached when responses begin to be homogeneous (Schutt 1999). Under such circumstance, data collection can be discontinued. In this study, by the time I conducted interviews with 70 percent of the participants in each of the three case studies, similarities begin to show in the responses. Yet, I continued to hold interviews for further confirmation of saturation before I stopped.

The second factor which influenced the differences in the numbers of the participants of the three case studies was the different scope of the cases and the characteristics of the target group of informants for the three case studies. We have seen that the case study on the unionisation of informal economy operators had the highest participants. This is because it had the widest scope and the most heterogenous set of informants among the three case studies. It, therefore, required that I engaged with different informal economy operators – traditional restaurant operators and their employees – in order to get adequate insights into

their experiences of their inclusion into trade unions. By contrast, the case studies on the trade union struggles on electricity tariffs and the implications of the reactions of MDU to the labour market changes at the ports in Ghana, had a more limited scope and more homogenous sets of informants. Saturation was therefore with a smaller number of informants.

### ***3.5.1 Participants of the Case Study on Electricity Tariff Struggles***

A total of 42 persons participated in this study. These include trade unionists, officials of the Public Utilities Regulatory Commission (PURC), CSOs, and business associations in Ghana. I had two meetings with the current Secretary General of the TUC (Ghana) to discuss this and the other two case studies. I interviewed three former Secretary Generals of the TUC (Ghana). One of the three former Secretary Generals of the TUC (Ghana) who took part in this study represented the trade unions at the PURC. I also interviewed a former Chairperson of the TUC (Ghana) who also represented the trade unions at the PURC. The heads of the Organising Department, Industrial Relations Department, and the Administration and Legal Affairs Department of the TUC (Ghana) also participated in the study. I conducted interviews with two former General Secretaries and a current General Secretary of three of the affiliates TUC (Ghana). One of the two former General Secretaries represented the TUC (Ghana) at the PURC. In addition, past and serving national officials of the Public Utility Workers Union (PUWU) and the Public Services Workers Union (PSWU) – the two unions which organise in the utilities sector – were also interviewed. I interviewed three former General Secretaries and a current Industrial Relations Officer of the PUWU as well as the current Deputy General Secretary of the PSWU. I sought to obtain trade union views outside of the TUC (Ghana) through interviews with an official each of the Ghana National Association of Teachers (GNAT) and the Ghana Medical Association (GMA). The GNAT and the GMA are not affiliates of the TUC (Ghana).

In order to get grassroots views on the topic, I also engaged with the workers and local union officials at the Electricity Company of Ghana (ECG), the Ghana Water Company Limited

(GWCL), and the Volta River Authority (VRA). The ECG is the main distributor of electricity in Ghana and the VRA is the foremost electricity generation company in the country. The workers of the ECG and the GWCL are organised by the PUWU while the PSWU unionises workers of the VRA. Seven local unions activists and workers of the ECG, the GWCL, and the VRA were interviewed.

Further trade union rank-and-file views on the trade union struggles on electricity were obtained through data collection in Tema. Tema is a harbour city, the hub of industry, and the bastion of trade union activism in Ghana. I had two interviews with the Chairman and a member of the Tema District Council of Labour of the TUC (Ghana). In addition to the interviews, I conducted a focus group discussion with workers in Tema. Eight persons, drawn from trade union activists in Tema, including one female, participated in the focus group discussion. The share of females in the focus group discussion mirrors the representation of women in trade unions in Ghana.

The trade union perspectives from the above sources were complemented by the views of officials of the PURC, CSOs, and the Ghana Employers Association (GEA). I interviewed a commissioner of the PURC and an officer of the GEA. Officials of eight utilities CSOs participated in the study. They include an official each from the Africa Centre for Energy Policy (ACEP), the Integrated Social Development Centre (ISODEC), and the Kumasi Institute of Technology and Environment (KITE). The rest were from Imani Centre for Policy and Education, the Coalition of NGOs in Water and Sanitation (CONIWAS), and Water and Sanitation for Urban Poor (Ghana). I also interviewed two officials of the Consumer Protection Agency (CPA).

### ***3.5.2 Participants of the Case Study on Organising Informal Economy Workers***

A total of 81 persons participated in this study. These include trade union officials, the leaders and members of the associations of traditional caterers that are affiliated to the TUC (Ghana),

and traditional restaurant workers. I also interviewed an official each of the Accra Metropolitan Assembly (AMA) and the Ghana Revenue Authority (GRA).

Eleven trade unionists participated in this study. I held two meetings with the current Secretary General of the TUC (Ghana) to discuss trade union organising in the informal economy. I interviewed two former Secretary Generals of the TUC (Ghana), a current General Secretary of one of 17 affiliates the TUC (Ghana), and two former General Secretaries of two of the 17 affiliates of the TUC (Ghana). I also interview two officers who worked as Informal Economy Desk officers of the TUC (Ghana) and the Head of Industrial Relations Department of the union.

To complement the above sources, I held interviews with some leaders of the informal economy associations of the TUC (Ghana). These include the General Secretary and the Deputy General Secretary of the Union of Informal Workers Association (UNIWA). I also interviewed a leader of the Novotel No.2 Traders and Foodstuff Market Association of TUC (Ghana) and a National Executive Committee (NEC) member of the UNIWA.

In order to get the perspectives of traditional caterers on their unionisation, I interviewed 35 traditional restaurant owners, including the leaders of their associations, the United Caterers of Ghana (UCG), the Indigenous Caterers Association of Ghana (ICAG), and the Ga East Traders Association (GETA). In addition, I interviewed 33 of the paid employees working at traditional restaurants. Most of the traditional caterers and their employees who participated in this case study were females. This is because, as I explain in chapter nine, traditional restaurants work in Accra is dominated by females.

### ***3.5.3 Participants of the Case Study on the Labour Market Changes at the Ports in Ghana and Trade Unions Responses to them***

A total of 43 persons were interviewed for this study. They include two officers of the MDU, three management personnel of the GDLC, three members of the permanent staff of the

company, and 35 non-permanent staff of the GDCL. The non-permanent workers of the GDLC who participated in this study included three of the leaders of the Non-Permanent Staff Union of the MDU. Only two of the participants of this case study were females. This reflects the share of females in the composition of the workforce of the GDLC.

It is important to note that about a quarter of the participants of this case study had been at the ports for sixteen years or more, prior to my interviews with them in 2017/18. This meant that they had experienced the changes in casual work organisation at the ports. Therefore, they had adequate insights into how the port reforms and the changes in the casual labour regime have affected the powers and interests of the casual workers at the ports and their union over the long term.

### **3.6 Secondary Data**

The primary data from the interviews, the focus group discussion, and observations were supplemented by secondary data sources. These include reports and documents from trade unions, covering the period from 19984 to 2018, from informal economy associations – from 1996 when the trade unions started to actively organise them –, from utility companies for the period 2003-2017, from government agencies for the period 1989-2018, and from other civil society organisations, such as the ISODEC and the KITE, for the period 1987 to 2018. Media reports (1980-2019) also provided useful information on how trade unions have responded to economic liberalisation in Ghana.

### **3.7 Data Analysis**

The data from the interviews, the focus group discussion, and the observations in this study came in two forms: recorded interviews and written memos. This was because while some participants were willing for the interviews to be recorded, others were reluctant for the whole or part of the interviews to be recorded.

I used NVivo to organise and analyse the significant volumes of text from the transcribed interviews. This began with uploading the transcribed interviews and other texts from secondary sources into the software. NVivo is a qualitative computer software application used to store and organise data, categorise and analyse data, and discover patterns in the data. Therefore, using NVivo assisted me to effectively handle and manage the significant amount of data that emerged from the three case studies.

The first stage of data analysis in this study involved data management and organisation. This included coding, developing memos, and summarising the data into patterns and configurations (Daymon and Holloway, 2011: 304). Subsequently, I focused on discovering and abstracting meanings in the texts. This stage of the data analysis process focused on exploring, describing, and gaining insights into the data (Hoskins and Mariano, 2004: 64). It involved exploring the transcripts and the memos for general themes and generating coding headings to describe the data (Newell and Burnard, 2011: 118). This process is useful for two reasons. First, it enables researchers to discover and explain underlying themes, core patterns, and concepts that form the basis for inferences and interpretations (Hoskins and Mariano, 2004: 64). Second, it aids the interpretation of the data because it brings ‘meaning and insight to the words of participants in the study’ (Daymon and Holloway, 2011: 304).

The next stage of my data analysis involved looking at the relationships between the themes in two ways. First, I focused on exploring how the themes in the data relate to one another (Bernard, 2011: 337-338). Second, I examined how the characteristics of the participants of the study account for the existence of certain themes and the absence of other themes (ibid.). This approach helped in the analyses of the differences that were observed in the positions of trade unionists and informal economy operators on the status of the latter in trade unions (see chapter seven). In addition, this way of analysing the data came in handy when I was looking at the varied perspectives of the casual workers of the GDLC and their trade union, on the outcomes of the trade union reaction to the labour market reforms at the ports in Ghana in chapter ten. Exploring the relationships between the themes that emerged in the three case studies in these two ways enhanced the rigour of my analysis. These two approaches to

analysing the data enabled me to see how the various themes interact among themselves and how the characteristics of the informants of the study influence the patterns of the themes in this study.

It is important to note that the data analysis and the entire processes in this study were iterative. This meant that data collection and analysis in this study involved an ongoing iteration that produced fuzzy categories of ideas that were reduced to fewer and clearer conceptual structures over time (Kenealy, 2012: 416). This was possible because the analysis in this study progressed through an iterative process of applying, modifying, and re-applying (King, 2012: 430) the analytical template and framework. Thus, using iteration in this study provided opportunity to refine the initial and emerging ideas and themes in the data collection and the analytical processes in order to enhance understanding of the ideas and the themes in the study. Iteration enables pre-understanding to inform and shape further understanding in the research process, leading to greater understanding of the phenomenon under study (Duberley et. al., 2012: 21-22). Using multiple iterations is valuable because they help to improve and refine reflections on life experiences (Humphreys and Learmonth, 2012: 326). In practice, to this study, this meant significant reinterpretations of the importance of some of my findings in the light of emerging evidence and insights. For instance, my initial interpretation – after the first stage of fieldwork – was that the trade union struggles on electricity tariffs in Ghana achieved high outcomes. However, subsequent data and interviews with district level union leaders and rank-and-file union members in the second stage of my fieldwork showed otherwise. Therefore, I moderated my assessment of the outcomes of the campaigns from high to modest to reflect the situation. Similarly, I had to refine my initial upbeat assessment of the importance of the trade union presence at the traditional restaurants after it emerged, in the course of the fieldwork, that the most vulnerable at these places – paid workers – were not covered by trade unions. In the same way, my first interpretation of the implications of the reactions of the MDU to the labour market changes at the ports in Ghana was that they promote the interests and power of the casual dockworkers. However, the second stage fieldwork brought out the fact that a dual function of the union – as an employer and the sole representative of the casual workers (see chapters nine and ten – emerged with the casual labour reforms at the ports in Ghana which



placed some limitations on the power and labour militancy of causal dockworkers of the GDLC. Thus, iteration enabled refinement of my views on the outcomes of the trade union responses to economic liberalisation in Ghana.

### **3.8 Research Ethics**

This study was guided by the SOAS research ethics policy and the ethics principles for social science research of the Academy of Social Sciences of the UK. The SOAS research ethics policy requires the SOAS and its researchers ‘to maintain the highest ethical standards and to foster values of honesty, rigour, openness, care and respect’ (SOAS, 2019: 3). It demands that ethical research must be guided by the following five principles:

- i. Maintaining the highest rigour and integrity in all aspects of research;
- ii. Ensuring that research is done according to appropriate ethical, legal and professional frameworks, obligations, and standards;
- iii. Promoting a research environment that is underpinned by integrity and based on good governance, best practice, and promote the development of researchers;
- iv. Employing transparent, robust, and fair processes to deal with allegations of research misconduct should they arise;
- v. Collaborating to strengthen the integrity of research and to reviewing progress regularly and openly.

The five ethical principles for social science research of the Academy of Social Sciences emphasise that:

- i. Social science is central to a democratic society and should be inclusive of diverse interests, values, funders, methods, and perspectives;
- ii. All social science should safeguard the privacy, autonomy, diversity, values, and dignity of individuals, groups, and communities;
- iii. All social science should be guided by emphasis on integrity and the use of the most appropriate methods for the research purpose;

- iv. All social scientists should act with their social responsibilities in mind in conducting and sharing their research;
- v. All social science should focus on maximising benefit and minimising harm.

The foregoing 10 ethical principles guided this study. The influence of the SOAS research ethics policy and the ethics principles for social science research of the Academy of Social Sciences in this study ensured that this research met the highest ethical standards and best practice in the world. The two ethical guides emphasise care, respect, and dignity of research participants and researchers. Consequently, in spite of the fact that most of the data that I collected and used in this study were not highly personal or sensitive, I made every possible effort to protect the participants of the study. These efforts included ensuring that participation in this study was voluntary and devoid of any inducements and false promises. In addition, participation in this study was by informed consent. It is important to note that although I went to the field with consent forms, those participants who showed or expressed reluctance or discomfort in signing the consent forms were allowed to give verbal consent instead. This gave them assurance of safety. Also, the data I collected in this study have, and would remain, confidential. In line with this, participants' anonymity has been guaranteed through the use of pseudonyms in storing the data and writing of the report. This way, the responses of the participants in this study cannot be attributed to a particular respondent. These steps ensured my duty of care to the participants of this study in line with the SOAS research ethics policy and the research ethics principles of the Academy of Social Sciences.

In addition to the above, the SOAS research ethics policy and the research ethics principles of the Academy of Social Sciences emphasise highest standards of rigour and integrity throughout the research process. These impose a necessity on the researcher to mitigate the potential impacts of his or her positionality on the data collection process, data analysis, and data interpretation. This was necessary because potential bias can arise out of a researcher's influence on what s/he is studying (Mackieson, et. al., 2019: 965). However, the rigour and integrity requirements of the ethical rules that guided this study ensured that through reflexivity, I was continually conscious of, and made the necessary effort to avoid potential

biases that could arise in this study as a result of my positionality as a trade union researcher and as a PhD student.

### **3.9 Reflections on my Positionality and the Research Process**

Nonetheless, my positionality had interesting – and at times unexpected – implications for the access, the interactions with informants, and the interpretation of the evidence in this study. Given my work and relations with trade unionists in Ghana, I assumed that it would be straight forward to arrange interviews with them or to access trade union documents. I was therefore, surprised that not all former colleagues and trade union activists were willing to grant interviews or allow access to official trade union documents. In one instance, a former colleague at the TUC (Ghana) refused to “search” for trade union reports for me, stating that ‘I cannot not stop my work and look for the reports. They have paid you to do this research and you expect me to stop my work to help you, but you could not buy even a phone from London for me’ (Communication with Abo, 2017). This encounter, and other experiences with some trade union officials who used their work schedules as excuses to refuse the requests for interviews, show that researching one’s own group or institution, may not always mean unfettered access. It also shows how one informant expected a significant gift (a smart phone) in exchange for his time.

The second issue that comes from reflecting on my positionality and the research process is the role of researchers in data collection. How should researchers handle obvious misrepresentation of events from participants? Should researchers be neutral or mere listeners in their interactions with respondents? In the case study of the trade union responses to electricity tariffs hikes, some trade union activists in Tema – in a focus group discussion – misrepresented some of the events of a trade union struggle in 2013. The activists maintained that the Secretary General of the TUC (Ghana) at the time, agreed to a small reduction in the gazetted electricity user fees increase with the government of Ghana, to then abscond to Abuja, Nigeria. They insisted that the Secretary General travelled out of the country in order to jeopardise the planned demonstrations and strikes against the electricity

tariff hikes. Meanwhile, I knew – as I was involved in the preparations and the journey to Abuja – that the trip was to take part in a biennial meeting between the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC), the COSATU and the TUC (Ghana). This has been planned two years earlier. Interestingly, when I tried to explain this, the activists rejected my explanations. One of them retorted that ‘you are not here to explain things to us. You are just here to ask questions. Just listen to us’ (Nanney, focus group discussion in Tema 2018). This encounter with these trade union activists in Tema brought into sharp focus the role and posture that researchers must assume in their interactions with respondents. It also shows that positionality can be useful in preventing expending research time and resources – that are always limited – in pursuing emerging issues and accounts that at first sight might appear to be “interesting findings” but may well turn out to be misrepresentations of events.

The third was a lesson about the pros and cons of “insider’s knowledge”. There is no doubt that having prior insider’s knowledge and familiarity with the area and sector of study can be an advantage to researchers. Yet, this can also mean uncritical “acceptance” – and non-interrogation – of paradoxical concepts that are “common” knowledge” in the sector. In the case study of the labour market reforms at the ports, the term “permanent casual”, despite its inherent and obvious contradictions, appeared generally accepted at the ports. It came up repeatedly in my interactions and interviews with casual dockworkers, trade union leaders, and officials of the GDLC at Tema port. This term, as I shall explain in chapter ten, refers to casual workers who perform regular jobs at the ports. The common use of “permanent casuals” at the ports, especially by the casual workers themselves, “normalised” the term such that it escaped initial interrogation from me. This is despite the fact that the labour laws in Ghana (Act 651) requires employers to regularise – make permanent – casual workers who work for six months or more at the same undertaking. This experience shows that positionality can “blind” researchers, preventing them from observing obvious contradictions in “taken-for-granted” concepts and terminologies.

### **3.10 Conclusion**

This chapter has shown the strategy and methods adopted for data collection, for sampling, and for the analysis for this study. It discussed how I mitigated the potential impacts of the research methods. I argued that combination of different data collection instruments can promote data triangulation and that the findings of case study research can be generalised. Finally, I discussed the ethical dimensions of this research and reflected on the implications of my positionality for the research process. I have shown that being “an insider” presents both opportunities and challenges to the researcher, requiring reflexivity and critical attention to access, the behaviour in the interactions with informants, and the interpretation of “common” knowledge.

## **CHAPTER 4: TRADE UNIONISM AND SOCIOECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN GHANA**

### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents trade unionism and socioeconomic development in Ghana in the last century. It will show that trade unionism in Ghana has been strongly connected to the political and socioeconomic conditions in the country. These conditions have shaped, and continue to influence, trade union orientation, trade union struggles, and trade union relations with the state. The chapter seeks to explain why trade unions in Ghana have oscillated between emphasis on workplace bread-and-butter issues (business unionism) and support for, or formal alliance with, political parties and ruling governments (political unionism), in response to different socioeconomic circumstances in the country. The chapter also discusses the rise of economic liberalisation in Ghana since the 1980s, and its impacts on workers and their trade unions. The insights in this chapter are significant for this study in two ways. First, they constitute a narrative that engages with some of the underlying assumptions on labour aristocracy theory. Second, the insights in this chapter set the stage for the analysis of the changes in trade union orientation/typology and of the three trade union responses to economic and labour market reforms in Ghana in the subsequent chapters.

The main trade union typologies that unions in Ghana predominantly assumed in the twentieth century – business unionism and political unionism (Gerritsen, 1972; Panford, 1997; Britwum and Martens, 2008; Hart, 2014) – defined trade union outlook and external relationships in the country. Generally, the practice of business unionism leads trade unions to billet themselves within, and to be absorbed by, the industrial relations system of their societies – operating within political systems to promote the immediate interest of their members and their institutions (Scipes, 2014). Arguably, such narrow focus of business unionism reinforces the widely held notion that trade unions are inward looking, caring mainly about their members as they focus on their real wages and the level of employment (Oswald, 1985). In contrast, political unionism prioritises trade union relations with political

parties. Typically, political unions give primary loyalty to political parties and subordinate workplace issues to "larger" political and socioeconomic issues (Scipes, 2014).

What were the factors and the forces that shaped the oscillations in trade union typology in Ghana? To explore these, the rest of this chapter is divided into seven sections. The next section presents business unionism in Ghana from the early 1900s to the 1940s. Section three discusses the first episode of political unionism in Ghana. This is followed by discussions of the returns of the trade union in Ghana to business unionism (1966 to 1971) and political unionism (1972 to 1981) in sections four and five, respectively. Section six discusses the context of economic liberalisation in Ghana. I then turn the attention to the effects of economic liberalisation on trade unions and their members in section seven. This is followed by the chapter conclusions in section eight.

#### **4.2 Business Unionism in Ghana (early 1900s to 1940s)**

The history of trade unionism in Ghana can be traced to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century when the country was still under British colonial rule. Trade unionism in Ghana emerged out of workplace struggles of African employees of the British colonial administration and its private enterprises for improved working conditions, i.e. the earliest trade unions in the country adopted the business unionism orientation. African workers in the Gold Coast, as Ghana was formerly called, resorted to protests and strikes to back their demands for better working conditions. In 1919, employees of the Public Works Department (PWD) protested against delay in the payment of their wages (TUC, 2012b: 2). That year, miners also had an industrial action (Hart, 2014: 201). In 1926, fishermen at Sekondi embarked on a strike action and refused to ferry the Prince of Wales on his visit to the Gold Coast to boost their demand for a pay increase from nine pence to one shilling and six pence (TUC, 2012b: 2). The recourse to protests and strikes in this period related to the lack of an effective industrial relations system in the country at the time.

Significant industrial relations framework emerged in the late 1930s and early 1940s,

marking a watershed in the history of trade unionism in Ghana. The colonial government established a Labour Department in 1938 to, among other things, establish industrial relations machinery and encourage and assist the formation of “responsible” trade unions in the country (Rimmer, 1961: 209). In 1941, the colonial authority passed the Trade Union Ordinance which established the legal framework to allow trade unionism in the country (Davison, 1954: 599). The ordinance gave recognition to unions and ushered the birth of the labour movement in the country (Trachtman, 1962: 184). In addition to the ordinance, two officers of the British trade union movement were deployed to the Labour Department to assist in the development (and control) of unions in the colony (Davison, 1954: 599). Through these actions, the colonial government provided the legislative and institutional framework for trade union development in the country.

The industrial relations framework that was created by the colonial government promoted the emergence of enterprise-based unions, national unions, and a trade union centre. The Western Province Drivers’ Union emerged as one of the first trade unions to register under the Trade Union Ordinance in 1942 (Davison, 1954: 600). The TUC (Ghana) was established as a labour centre in 1946 (Britwum and Martens, 2008: 5). The emergence of the TUC (Ghana) has been linked to the active encouragement that colonial labour officers gave to the Railway Union to form a federation (Davison, 1954: 600). Therefore, African workers in the Gold Coast harnessed the legislative and institutional framework created by the colonialists to form and nurture their trade unions.

It has been argued that the colonial trade union policy was aimed at ensuring that the trade unions functioned as institutions merely focussing on industrial relations rather than on broader political issues (Scott 1967: 27). Such policy discourages the involvement of trade union leaders in national politics, steering unions to prioritise narrow membership interests, and to have limited relations with other groups in society. This form of business unionism was favoured because it operates within the dominant political system (Scipes, 2014), hence, constituting little threat to political establishments, the colonial regime in this case.



### **4.3 Political Unionism in Ghana (1950s - 1966)**

However, contrary to the expectations of the colonialists, by the 1950s, trade union struggles in the country had become political as workers and their unions joined the independence struggle. This marks the first trade union venture into national politics and the departure from the business unionism orientation of the unions in previous decades. Trade union members, particularly those in urban centres, strongly supported the struggle for self-government (Welch Jr, 1978: 151). Trade unions emerged at the forefront of the anti-colonial struggles and played a notable role in the achievement of the country's independence (Gerritsen, 1972: 229). The involvement of trade unions and their members in the struggle against colonialism in Ghana also occurred in most of Africa, where trade unionism essentially became an extension of African nationalism (Freund, 1984: 7). This was inspired by the argument that under a colonial system, the first duty of a trade union was to assist its members to free themselves from the shackles of imperialism (Davison, 1954: 594).

The involvement of trade unions in the independence struggle represents the beginning of political unionism in Ghana. Arguably, the colonial conditions necessitated the gravitation of trade unions towards political unionism. The rights and interests of workers could best be promoted and protected in a free and democratic political system, a promise that independence provided. Yet, after Ghana's political independence in 1957, the TUC (Ghana) maintained strong ties with the new government that was formed by the Convention Peoples Party (CPP) until the CPP was overthrown in 1966 (Akwetey and Dorkenoo, 2010: 41).

As already mentioned, political unionism is said to prioritise loyalty to political parties and subordinate workplace issues to "larger" socioeconomic and political issues (Scipes, 2014). While contributing to the struggle for independence and the proximity to the post-independence ruling party defines the focus of trade unions in the 1950s and 1960s, the political unionism of this period secured important benefits for trade unions and the workers in the country. The TUC (Ghana) benefited from a legislation that enabled it to build organisational strength, infrastructure, and centralised power and authority (Akwetey and Dorkenoo, 2010: 41). This legislation also made the TUC (Ghana) the sole representative of

workers in the country (ibid.). In 1958, the CPP government granted a £50,000 interest-free loan towards the implementation of the new trade union structure under the Industrial Relations Act of 1958 (Trachtman, 1962: 189). The government also loaned £80,000 to the TUC (Ghana) towards the building of the Hall of Trades Unions (Gerritsen, 1972: 241). The loan was later written off (ibid.) and the Hall of Trade Unions has remained to date, the headquarters of TUC (Ghana) and its affiliates. The unions also achieved financial stability through the legalisation of a compulsory checkoff system for union membership dues collection (Trachtman, 1962: 194). This checkoff system made union membership subscription part of payroll deductions. It therefore, made it easier for the trade unions to receive membership dues. The CPP government also ratified five out of the six fundamental International Labour Organization (ILO) conventions at the time. Over two-thirds (33) of the 51 ILO conventions that had been ratified by the country by 2018, were ratified by the CPP government.

In addition, political unionism gave trade union leaders significant political leverage and proximity to the ruling party. In 1960, six union officials were given ambassadorial positions and government cocktail parties involved the General Secretaries of the trade unions (Gerritsen, 1972: 241). Several leaders of the TUC (Ghana) were appointed to important positions on national policy-making bodies, including the President's Cabinet (Panford, 1997: 480). Moreover, officials of the TUC (Ghana) were elected to positions of responsibility within the CPP (Trachtman, 1962: 189). Thus, the first phase of political unionism in Ghana brought important benefits to trade unions, trade union officers, and the workers in the country.

However, the dominant narrative in the literature on trade unionism in Ghana in this era is that the involvement of union leaders in the government and the CPP came at a cost, as it subjugated trade unions to the CPP. According to Amoako (2014: 56), the CPP co-opted trade unions in the country through benign coercion. In addition, CPP adherents infiltrated the trade union movement (ibid.). The CPP's control over the trade unions was said to have been such that by the end of 1956, union leaders who had at first opposed the CPP co-operated with the party (Davison, 1957: 138-139). Akwetey and Dorkenoo (2010: 42) claim that the

TUC (Ghana) lost its organisational independence and political autonomy. The leadership of the unions was co-opted into either directly supporting or acquiescing to the implementation of government policies, including policies that union members opposed (ibid.). For example, trade union leaders failed to emphasise material “payoffs” (in the form of higher real wages and other “interests” of rank-and-file members) but favoured the creation of more wage earners over higher wages (Gerritsen, 1972: 239). This account of the political unionism in Ghana in the 1950s and 1960s is consistent with the notion that political unionism prioritises loyalty to political parties and subordinates workplace issues to “larger” political issues (Scipes, 2014).

In contrast to the above narrative, an alternative interpretation of the trade union and the CPP/government relationship in the 1950s and 1960s rejects the claims that trade unions in Ghana were completely subdued by the CPP. Gerritsen (1972) has argued against the assertion that the TUC (Ghana) was controlled and forced to serve the whims of the ruling party and, as a result, became ineffective in representing the interests of its constituents. He maintained that trade unionists used union power to influence the CPP and the government. The union leaders sought to secure trade union power within the CPP not merely as clients of the party but as advocates of socialist ideological ethos in government (ibid.: 239). In 1959, the TUC (Ghana) advocated for worker participation in state-owned industries and public corporations in line with 'the socialist transformation of industry and commerce' programme in the country (ibid.: 241). The union also championed an agenda for the massive expansion of primary education in the country (ibid.: 240). In addition, the TUC (Ghana) called for, and was involved in, the drawing up of the Social Security Scheme that was enacted in 1965 (ibid.: 241). The Secretary General of the TUC (Ghana) and some of the trade unionists became icons of the so-called “socialist boys” in the CPP (ibid.: 239). Consequently, a good deal of the responsibility for the economic policies that were pursued by the government of Ghana during the drive for socialism after independence could be attributed to the influence of the TUC (Ghana) on the CPP government (ibid.: 240). Furthermore, the influence of the TUC (Ghana) in the CPP was such that concerns were raised within the CPP about the impact of the union on the party and the government. A CPP Member of Parliament (MP) is said to have bemoaned that the CPP was in danger of

becoming a labour party (ibid.: 239). Rimmer (1961: 216) has described the Industrial Relations Act of 1958 as a concordat between trade unions and the CPP government. Such was the influence of the TUC (Ghana) on the CPP government that according to Gerritsen (1972: 236), a Minister of Labour who opposed proposals for a new trade union structure, was replaced. Trade unions were, therefore, not necessarily appendages to the CPP but active agents who exerted considerable influence on the party and the government.

#### **4.4 The Return to Business Unionism in Ghana (1966 - 1971)**

The political leverage which the TUC (Ghana) enjoyed in the immediate post-independence era changed, following a military coup d'état in 1966 that ousted the CPP government. In many important ways, the political unionism of the immediate post-independence era was replaced by significant hostilities between the state and the trade unions, and a move by the trade unions towards business unionism. The National Liberation Council (NLC) junta that overthrew the CPP government sought to purge the TUC (Ghana) of CPP elements and reduce the political leverage of the union. Consequently, the TUC (Ghana) suffered substantial setbacks and some of the trade union leaders were imprisoned by the NLC because of their close relations with the CPP (TUC, 2012b: 6). The union experienced significant organisational trauma during the NLC rule because it was perceived as a quasi-opposition party in the post-CPP era (Akwetey and Dorkenoo, 2010: 43). The NLC regime interfered in the internal politics of the TUC (Ghana) by appointing Benjamin Bentum as the new Secretary General of the union (TUC 2012b: 7).

In addition to the interference in internal trade union politics, the NLC regime also affected the labour movement through economic policies and legislation. We have seen how in the 1950s and 1960s, the trade unions in the country benefited from legislations that enabled them to enhance their organisational strength, improve their infrastructure, centralise their power (Akwetey and Dorkenoo, 2010: 41), and guarantee financial stability through compulsory checkoff system (Trachtman, 1962: 194). These gains were undermined by an amendment of the Civil Services Act (1960) by the NLC regime in 1967 (TUC, 2012b: 7).

This amendment abolished closed shop in the civil service (ibid.). This affected the Public Services Workers' Union (PSWU) adversely because it had a significant proportion of its members in the civil service (ibid.). In addition to the legal changes, the NLC disrupted the socialist economic policies and the import-substitution industrialization policies of the CPP government (Gockel and Vormawor, 2004: 5). These brought about retrenchment of some unionised workers in state-owned enterprises, minimal increases in the minimum wage, and the reduction in government expenditure (TUC, 2012b: 7). These affected union membership and increased the cost of living (ibid.). Thus, the trade union gains that were achieved by political unionism in the earlier period were threatened by the political and economic exigencies of the immediate post-CPP government era.

The socioeconomic policies of the NLC and the prevailing industrial relations atmosphere tilted trade union orientation towards business unionism, triggering significant labour militancy and unrests over workplace and bread-and-butter issues. Notable strikes, including illegal ones, were recorded during the NLC regime. According to Arthiabah and Mbiah (1995), cited in TUC (2012b: 7), 158 strikes involving 94,741 workers were recorded between 1966 and 1969. Illegal strikes went up from just seven under the CPP era (1957 to 1966) to 147 in the four years of the NLC regime from 1966 to 1971 (Panford, 1997: 482). This rise in trade union belligerence cannot be separated from the political and socioeconomic conditions in the country and the hostilities that these conditions incited between the ruling NLC junta and the trade unions.

In order to stem the tide of strikes and ensure industrial peace, the NLC government resorted to brutal methods to break industrial actions. In 1969, the regime deployed police against striking mineworkers which resulted in the shooting of some striking workers (Britwum and Martens, 2008: 8). Three miners were killed in a strike action involving 6,500 miners in March 1969 (Arthiabah and Mbiah, 1995, cited in TUC, 2012b: 7). Hence, the NLC regime (1966-1971) was characterised by a significant onslaught on the interests of workers and their unions and increased hostility between trade unions and the state.

In 1971, Ghana had a third change of government in fourteen years after political

independence. This was a restoration of multiparty democracy. This change also came with state hostility towards the trade unions. The new government that was formed by the Progress Party (PP) could not control the TUC (Ghana) and therefore sought to relegate the union to the background (Panford, 1997: 482). Politically, it was going to be difficult for the PP government to have good relationship with, or control, the TUC (Ghana). This is because the union had aligned with the CPP against the United Gold Coast Convention (UGCC), the precursor of PP, during the struggle for independence and the immediate post-independence era.

Consequently, the PP government sought to undermine the TUC (Ghana) once in power. It encouraged the establishment of a rival pro-government trade union centre in attempt to weaken the TUC (Ghana) (Akwetey and Dorkenoo, 2010: 43). Even though this attempt failed (ibid.), the PP government dissolved the TUC (Ghana) by an Act of Parliament that was passed under a certificate of urgency during major strike in 1971 (Gockel and Vormawor, 2004: 19). Therefore, although Ghana was in a democratic era, the political unionism in 1950s and 1960s wrecked the relationship between the TUC (Ghana) and the PP government (1971-1972).

#### **4.5 The Return to Political Unionism in Ghana (1972 to 1981)**

In 1972, the fortunes of the TUC (Ghana) were restored following the overthrow of the PP government by the military National Redemption Council (NRC), leading to a move by the trade unions towards political unionism. This was the second military intervention in Ghanaian politics in fifteen years since political independence. For the first time since the overthrow of the CPP government, trade unions enjoyed friendly relations with the government. The TUC (Ghana) was reinstated in 1972 and union officials enjoyed a harmonious relationship with the coup leader – Col. Ignatius Kutu Acheampong (Panford, 1997: 483). The regime repealed the Industrial Relations (Amendment) Act of 1971, Act 383, which banned the TUC (Ghana) (Gockel and Vormawor, 2004: 19). The NRC and its successor military governments (1972-1979) introduced worker-friendly reforms and

policies which improved the working conditions and job security of workers. The military regime improved social security administration and benefits, increased the minimum wage, revived public enterprise to boost job creation, and appointed trade unionists onto governing boards of state enterprises (TUC, 2012b: 8). Thus, despite that fact that the NRC and the successor military regimes were dictatorships, this era brought some benefits to trade unions, trade union officers, and the workers in Ghana.

The support of the NRC government to the trade unions and the worker-friendly policies that it implemented, endeared the unions towards political unionism. Significantly, although the TUC (Ghana) did not form a formal alliance with the military regime – as it did from 1957 to 1966 –, it supported the NRC government. The union became agreeable to, and supportive of, the NRC regime and the subsequent military juntas in return for the support that the trade unions received from the military regimes (TUC, 2012b: 8).

In 1979, the TUC (Ghana) ventured into direct party politics. It formed a labour party – the Social Democratic Front (SDF) – which won three out of the 120 parliamentary seats it contested in 1979 (Gockel and Vormawor, 2004: 19). Akwetey and Dorkenoo (2010: 40) have described the performance of the SDF in the 1979 elections as miserable. However, given the stronghold of the CPP and the UGCC/PP on the politics of Ghana and the fact that the labour party was formed barely a year before the elections, the performance of the SDF in the 1979 elections was encouraging. Yet, the trade union foray into direct partisan politics was short-lived. In 1982, a military coup d'état by the Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC) overthrew the third Republic. The PNDC abolished the 1979 constitution and dissolved the parliament. This ended the trade union adventure into direct partisan politics in Ghana.

The PNDC era (1981-1992) was characterised by cooperation and hostility between the state and trade unions. The military government sought to control the trade unions through direct interference in the leadership of the unions and the establishment of parallel worker structures at the enterprise level. The PNDC government supported the Association of Local Unions (ALU), a coalition of militant local unions based in Tema, to dislodge the leadership of the

trade unions (Britwum and Martens, 2008: 8). The ALU chased the elected leaders of the trade unions out of their offices, took over the administration of the unions, and held siege at the headquarters of the TUC (Ghana) from April 1982 to September 1983 (Gockel and Vormawor, 2004: 20). The coalition also dissolved the Executive Board of the TUC (Ghana) and established an Interim Management Committee (IMC) to oversee the affairs of the trade union centre (Britwum and Martens, 2008: 8). Even though, most of the pre-ALU era leadership were later restored through elections by the trade union structures, this period was characterised by one of the most important overt attempts by the state to subjugate the trade unions.

In addition to the direct interference in trade union politics, the military regime established Workers Defence Committees (WDCs) at workplaces. The WDCs were aimed at giving junior employees a decision-making role in the management of workplaces, helping to increase productivity, and acting as the PNDC's political wing at workplaces (Haynes, 1991: 144). However, in practice, the WDCs rivalled trade unions in the representation of workers at the enterprise level. According to Konings (2003: 451), the establishment of the WDCs posed the biggest challenge to trade union relations at the enterprise level in Ghana's labour history. The WDCs engaged in power struggles with the trade unions (Haynes, 1991: 139). In some cases, the WDCs subjected the activities of local union executives to close scrutiny or assumed workplace representation of workers (Britwum and Martens, 2008: 8) until they were abolished in late 1984 (Haynes 1991: 147). Together, these interferences weakened the trade unions in the country and paved the way for the implementation of some of the most difficult socioeconomic policies, namely the economic recovery and structural adjustment policies in the 1980s.

#### **4.6 Economic Liberalisation in Ghana**

Ghana entered the neoliberal era with the adoption of an economic recovery programme in 1983, followed by a structural adjustment programme in 1986. Socioeconomic conditions at the time, especially the deep economic crisis that Ghana faced, provided justifications for the



reforms (Anyemedu, 1993: 18-19). The country experienced severe droughts from 1975 to 1977 (Gockel and Vormawor, 2004: 4). This had massive negative effects on agricultural output in Ghana. Cocoa output, which accounted for over 60 percent of the country's foreign exchange earnings, fell by about 67 percent and the country's share of global cocoa output declined from 33 percent in 1970 to 17 percent in 1980 (ibid.: 5). In addition, the Ghanaian economy faced significant external shocks such as the oil price hikes of the 1970s, high and increasing rates of interest on external debts, and adverse shifts in terms of trade (ibid.). These brought about massive economic decline in Ghana. The country's gross domestic product (GDP) declined by 15.6 percent from 1971 to 1983 (ibid.: 7). As illustrated by Figure 1, at the start of the programmes in 1983, GDP growth rate in Ghana was -4.6 percent and the GDP per capita was US\$341.09. It is in this context that the economic reform programmes were introduced.

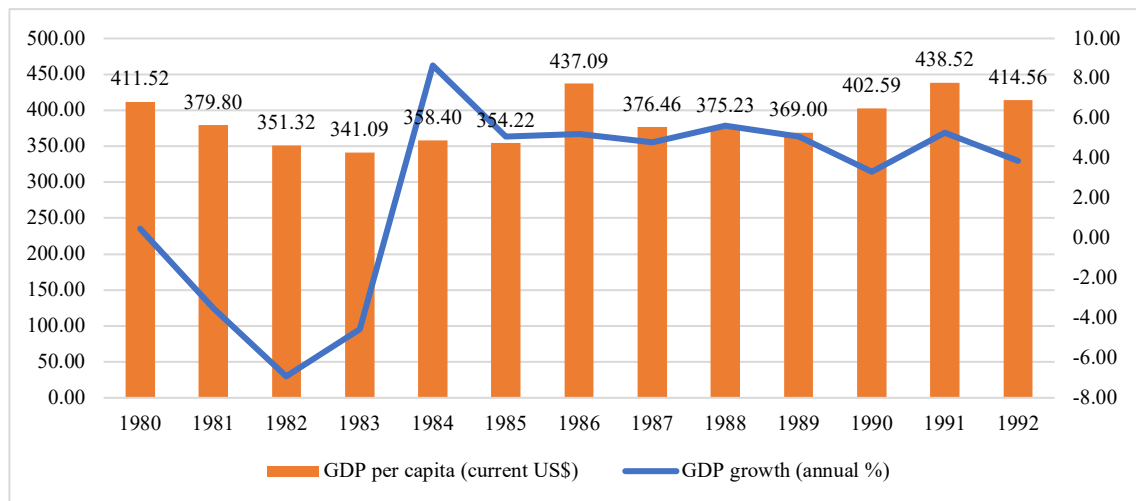
The economic recovery and adjustment programmes sought to fundamentally change the course of socioeconomic policy in the country. We have seen that the CPP government (1957-1966) and the military regimes (1971-1979) leaned towards socialism. By contrast, the economic reform agenda – which was supported, sponsored, and guided by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank – represented a departure from the predominantly state-led socioeconomic development paradigm that was adopted after independence (Mawuko-Yevugah, 2014: 67-68). The reforms introduced economic liberalisation into the country in a way which continues to shape socioeconomic development efforts in Ghana to date.

The economic recovery and stabilization programmes involved significant fiscal and monetary policy changes in the country. The recovery programme sought to realign relative prices. This was expected to support productive activities and exports, improve Ghana's socioeconomic infrastructure, and boost private-sector savings and investment (Aryeetey and Harrigan, 2000: 11-12). The policy measures of the ERP and the SAP included devaluation, price and trade liberalisation, and public enterprises reforms (Sarpong, 1997: 33). It also involved significant fiscal and monetary policy reforms such as reduction in general subsidies, tax restructuring, and government expenditure rationalization which involved

labour retrenchment (ibid.). The policy instruments that were implemented to achieve the fiscal objectives of the programmes included the introduction of cost recovery measures and reduction/removal of subsidies (Aryeetey and Harrigan, 2000).

Significantly, economic growth indicators in the country improved with the implementations of the ERP and the SAP. The country’s GDP returned to a positive growth trajectory a year after the start of the ERP. Figure 1 shows that at the start of the programmes in 1983, the GDP growth rate was -4.6 percent and the GDP per capita was US\$341.09. As illustrated by Figure 1, Ghana posted a GDP growth of 8.6 percent in 1984 and economic growth remained positive throughout the adjustment period. The country’s GDP per capita increased by about 22 percent from US\$341.09 in 1983 to US\$414.56 in 1992. From 1989 onwards, the country began attracting significant foreign direct investment (FDI). FDI inflows increased from US\$2.4 million in 1983 to US\$15 million in 1989, reaching US\$22.5 million in 1992 (World Bank, 2021).

**Figure 1: GDP and GDP per capita in Ghana (1980-1992)**



Source: Adapted from World Bank, 2020a

In addition to the above, the economic recovery and adjustment programmes coincided with a remarkable reduction in poverty rates in Ghana. Available figures from the Ghana Statistical Service (GSS) show that the incidence of poverty which was estimated at 51.7 percent in 1992 (GSS, 2007: 7) declined to 24.2 percent in 2013 (GSS, 2014b: 44). Also, the

proportion of Ghana's population in extreme poverty, defined to include those who were unable to meet their basic nutritional needs, reduced from 16.5 percent in 2006 to 8.4 percent in 2013 (*ibid.*). These figures show that poverty in the country halved.

However, in absolute terms, an unacceptably high number of the country's population remained in poverty and the benefits of economic growth were not evenly distributed. According to Baah (2010: 10), although the size of Ghana's economy more than doubled and the growth rate of the GDP averaged over 5 percent per annum since the early 1990s, this growth mostly benefited a privileged few in the country. In 2013, about 6.4 million and 2.2 million people in Ghana were poor and extremely poor, respectively (GSS, 2014b: 44). Income inequality in the country, measured by the Gini index, increased from 35.4 in 1987 to 42.8 in 2005 (World Bank, 2020a). For the poor, the recovery and adjustment programmes intensified their burden as the cost of living in the country soared due to the reduction and removal of subsidies on public services.

The public services cost recovery efforts under the economic recovery and adjustment programmes resulted in sharp increases in the fees that consumers had to pay for some public services. In 1983, there were radical price reforms in Ghana and subsidies on many government services were eliminated (Herbst, 1993: 62). This resulted in price hikes for basic goods and services. Hospital fees were introduced in 1983 and increased in 1985, postal tariffs were increased by 365 percent, and the user fees for water and electricity were hiked by 150 percent and 1000 percent, respectively (*ibid.*). In 1989, electricity tariffs were increased – ranging from 6 percent for low-income consumers to 20 percent for non-residential consumers (Keener and Banerjee, 2006: 260).

The reduction and removal of subsidies on public services affected the cost of living and access to some public services. For instance, the introduction of fees for hospital and clinic consultation and laboratory services reduced children outpatient visits to the Korle-Bu Hospital – Ghana's foremost teaching hospital – by about 25 percent in two months (Kraus, 1991: 142). Therefore, the adjustment programme had negative impacts on access to healthcare among the poor due to the removal of subsidies (Mawuko-Yevugah, 2014: 72).

In spite of their harsh effects, the PNDC government sought, through various strategies, trade union acquiescence to its economic liberalisation policies. The PNDC demanded, and to a large extent, obtained the unions to defer claims for wage increases and improvements in working conditions in support of its reform policies. The regime maintained that it was the patriotic duty of the citizens of the country to defer demands for wage increases until the economy improved (Haynes, 1991: 145). This call, and the promise of welfare improvements after the economy improved, partly explain why, for example, the Railway Union despite its militant past, did not confront the government on its neoliberal economic reforms (ibid.: 139). Therefore, the call to patriotic duty and the promise of better conditions engendered initial trade union forbearance for the economic and social policies of the PNDC government.

In addition, the trade union tolerance for the government's austerity policies can also be explained by the repression and intimidation tactics that were deployed by the regime. The PNDC government used the military, the security agencies, and the WDCs to hold trade unions in check and coerce them into acquiescence. According to Konings (2003: 454), the PNDC sometimes employed strong-arm tactics including coercion and repression in dealing with trade unions. In September 1982, six trade union leaders of the Railway Union were abducted at gunpoint from their homes in Sekondi-Takoradi (southwest of the country) by soldiers and taken 225 kilometres to Accra (Ghana's capital) for questioning, because their demands for wage increases were interpreted by the WDC as subversion (Haynes 1991: 145). Also, in 1985 the PNDC government deployed security forces at the headquarters of the TUC (Ghana) to prevent the trade union leaders from holding mass meetings to protest against government's retrenchment practices (Konings, 2003: 454). Therefore, the intimidation and repression of trade unions were also important causes of the reduced trade union militancy in the mid-1980s. This facilitated the implementation of economic liberalisation policies which had significant effects on unions and workers.

#### **4.7 Effects of Economic Liberalisation on Trade Unions**

The economic recovery and structural adjustment programmes in Ghana had a very strong impact on trade unions in the country. These programmes caused substantial retrenchments in the public sector and constrained formal private-sector job creation (Panford, 2001). About 73,000 workers were retrenched under a civil service reform programme and 100,000 workers were laid-off by the Ghana Cocoa Board, a parastatal (Anyemedu, 2000: 5). It is estimated that formal employment in the public and private sectors in Ghana declined by about 234,000, from 464,000 in 1985 to 230,000 in 1990 (Government of Ghana, 1995: 6). These figures show that formal job destruction became one of the negative fallouts of the economic reforms in the country.

The contraction in formal employment and the fact that trade unions in Ghana mostly organised in the formal sector meant sharp declines in the membership of most unions in the country. The Industrial and Commercial Workers Union (ICU) lost about 80,000 of its members through retrenchments under the SAP in the 1980s (Britwum, 2010: 98). The membership of the MDU fell from about 25,000 in 1980 to 15,950 in 2009 (ibid.). The Railway Workers' Union (RWU) had its membership reduced by 78 percent from 21,000 at formation to about 4,580 in 2000 (Britwum, 2007). The membership of the TUC (Ghana) declined by about 18 percent from about 635,000 in 1985 to almost 520,000 in 1996 (Panford, 2001: 223). Nearly one in every three union members in the country was said to have left his or her union as result of both the direct and the indirect effects of the SAP (ibid.).

The impacts of the economic recovery and the structural adjustment programmes on formal employment and trade union membership in the country have been long lasting. In 2018, there were two trade union centres in Ghana. These were the TUC (Ghana) and Ghana Federation of Labour (GFL). The TUC (Ghana) had about half a million members (TUC, 2019). The members of the TUC (Ghana) were drawn from 17 affiliate national unions that mostly organise formal sector workers and 19 informal economy associations that make up the Union of Informal Workers Associations (UNIWA) of the TUC (Ghana). It is important to note that the membership size of the TUC (Ghana) in 2018 was about 100,000 less than

the membership the union had in the mid-1980s. This shows that the TUC (Ghana) had not fully recovered from the membership losses it suffered due to the implementation of the ERP and the SAP by 2018.

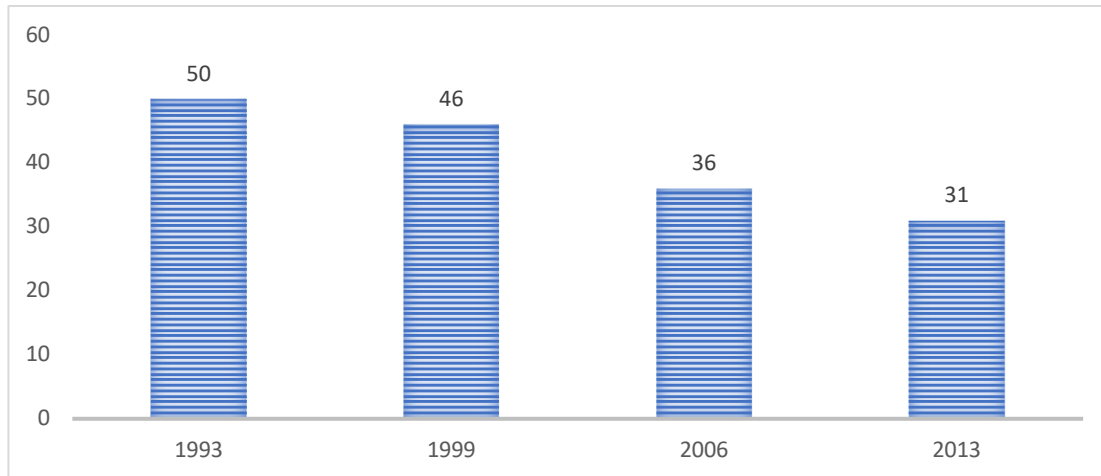
In comparison to the TUC (Ghana), the GFL is a small labour centre in Ghana. It had nine affiliate national unions with an estimated membership of 48,000 in 2018 (TUC, 2019). It is important to note that the emergence of the GFL relates to the impacts of the economic recovery and structural adjustment programmes in Ghana. In 1999, the Textile, Garment and Leather Employees' Union (TGLEU) that had broken away from one of the affiliates of the TUC (Ghana) formed the GFL to 'inject new blood and competition into union organisation to meet the challenges of the SAP' (Konings, 2003:459). Therefore, apart from reducing trade union membership, the economic liberalisation reforms in Ghana contributed to the trade union architecture in the country.

In addition to the two trade union centres and their affiliates, there were about 30 sector and enterprise-based trade unions and workers' organisations that were not affiliated to the two trade union centres in Ghana in 2018 (TUC, 2018). Key among them were the Ghana National Association of Teachers (GNAT), Civil and Local Government Staff Association of Ghana (CLOGSAG), Ghana Registered Nurses Association (GRNA), Ghana Medical Association (GMA), and the University Teachers' Association of Ghana (UTAG). The rest were the ICU, Technical Universities Teachers' Association of Ghana (TUTAG), Polytechnic Administrators Association of Ghana (PAAG), and the University Teachers Association (UTAG). In 2018, the unions that were not affiliated to the two trade union centres in Ghana had about 325,000 members, most of whom were in formal employment in the public sector (ibid.).

In 2018, all the trade unions in Ghana had about 870,000 members (ibid). This meant that only about 8 percent of the 11.2 million people who were employed in the country (GSS, 2019: 70) were trade union members. Apart from the fact that trade union membership in Ghana is very low, it is important to note that most of the trade union members in 2018 – about 80 percent – were in formal employment (TUC, 2019). Therefore, the overwhelming

majority of the workers in Ghana, especially those in the informal economy, remain outside of trade unions and do not enjoy the protections that formal employment and membership of a trade union offer.

**Figure 2: Trade union density in Ghana (1993 – 2013)**



Source: GSS 1995, and Otoo et al., 2015

Significantly, trade union density in Ghana has been declining in recent decades. Figure 2 shows that in 1993, about five in ten workers in the formal economy in the country were in organisations where trade unions existed. Trade union density in Ghana fell slightly to about 46 percent in 1999. In 2006, about 36 percent of the workers in Ghana had trade unions at their workplaces. By 2013, the proportion of Ghana's working-age population who had trade unions at their workplaces was about 31 percent. These declines in trade union coverage in Ghana occurred alongside the implementation of neoliberal economic reforms in the country.

Notably, these declines in union membership in Ghana had significant financial implications for the trade unions in the country. Most trade unions in Ghana depend on membership dues for their revenues. Therefore, a fall in membership meant a reduction in trade union revenues. Also, given that union membership dues in the country is a percentage of basic pay, the wage depression of about 10 percent per annum during the adjustment period (Panford, 2001: 223) meant that trade unions in Ghana received less union dues from the already reduced membership. Consequently, the TUC (Ghana) and its affiliates were plunged into dire

financial difficulties (ibid.). The precarious financial situation of the trades unions had significant implications for trade union administration and their ability to confront the challenges they and their members faced.

In sum, the advent of economic liberalisation in Ghana has meant significant membership loss and financial insecurity for trade unions, and a decline in the general welfare of workers in the country. In many important ways, these impacts of economic liberalisation on the interests of workers and their trade unions in Ghana corroborate the narrative on the general and severe crises of the labour movement around the world. In chapter one, we saw how neoliberalism and globalisation brought about falling union densities, decreasing real wages, and growing job insecurity around the world (Lévesque and Murray, 2010; Engeman, 2014). Similarly, in this chapter, we have seen that trade union density, real wages, and employment security – especially in the formal sector – were negatively affected by the implementation of economic liberation policies in Ghana.

#### **4.8 Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have argued that changes in the trade union orientation and outlook in Ghana have mirrored the changing political contexts. We have seen how trade unions in the country have swung between business unionism and political unionism since the early 1900s. Arguably, in some important ways, some of these changes in trade union orientation and their outcomes, detract from the application of the labour aristocracy category to the trade unions and the so-called privileged workers in Ghana. In Chapter two, we saw the argument against the application labour aristocracy to skilled workers and their trade unions in Ghana, because of their struggles against colonialism, and their oppositions to non-egalitarian patterns of distribution and corruption in the post-colonial era (Jeffries, 1975). This chapter has shown that trade unions championed massive expansion of primary education in the country. Also, we now know that a good deal of the responsibility for the progressive socioeconomic policies that were pursued in Ghana during the move towards socialism is attributable to the TUC (Ghana). These contradict some of the assumptions of the theory of



labour aristocracy, namely, the proposition that labour aristocrats are disposed towards conservatism and more unlikely to support movement towards socialism (Kerswell, 2019: 70).

It is in light of the above that this chapter corroborates the earlier narrative that rejects the description of trade unions and their members in Ghana as labour aristocrats. In significant ways, despite the fact that urban formal sector workers and their trade unions in Ghana occupy better labour market positions – in comparison to informal economy operators and rural workers – their active roles in the political and socioeconomic developments in Ghana until the advent of economic liberalisation in the 1980s, largely do not qualify them as labour aristocrats. How have trade unions and the so-called privileged workers in Ghana responded to the significant threats that the implementation of economic liberalisation policies posed to their positions and interests in the 1980s onwards? This is the focus of the next chapters.

## **CHAPTER 5: ELECTRICITY AND ELECTRICITY TARIFFS IN GHANA (1985 - 2017)**

### **5.1 Introduction**

This chapter is the first of two chapters focussing on the electricity sector in Ghana, how the electricity user fee regime changed in the period from the early 1980s to 2017, and the trade unions responses to it. In this chapter, I show how the cost recovery objectives of the economic recovery and structural adjustment programmes in Ghana manifested themselves in a significant fiscal squeeze, which brought about far-reaching changes to the institutional arrangements for the provision and regulation of electricity and substantial cuts in electricity subsidies the country. The analysis focussed on the two forms of electricity tariffs in Ghana: the gazetted tariffs or the tariffs that are determined by the electricity regulator and the actual tariffs, i.e., the tariffs that electricity consumers in the country actually pay. The chapter also highlights the politics and the controversies that have surrounded electricity subsidies in the country. These insights provide the background for our understanding of the trade union struggles on electricity subsidies in Ghana, which is the focus of chapter six.

In chapter 4, we saw that the policy priorities of the economic recovery and adjustment programmes in Ghana included “rationalising” or constraining government expenditure (Sarpong, 1997:33), cost recovery, and reduction and removal of subsidies on public services (Aryeetey and Harrigan, 2000). Such public expenditure imperatives had significant implications for the electricity sector and electricity tariffs. Notably, the World Bank made electricity tariff reforms important conditionalities for further assistance to Ghana (Amoako-Tuffour and Asamoah, 2015: 6). In fact, removal of subsidies was one of the conditionalities of the three-year Extended Credit Facility agreement between the government of Ghana and the IMF in 2015 (IMF, 2015).

Nonetheless, electricity subsidies persist in Ghana – about 10 per cent in 2018 (ECG, 2018) –, and there are significant political contentions over the role of the government of Ghana and of subsidies, in the provision of electricity in the country (Alleyne, 2013; Amoako-

Tuffour, and Asamoah, 2015). To explore these, the rest of this chapter is divided into 5 sections. The next section provides a description of the electricity sector in Ghana. Section 3 looks at electricity tariff reforms in Ghana. Then a discussion of the politics and the contentions over electricity subsidies in the country comes in section 4. Section 5 of this chapter is about the trade union position on electricity user fees and subsidies in Ghana. This is followed by the conclusion of this chapter in section 6.

## **5.2 Electricity Providers in Ghana**

Electricity generation, transmission, and distribution in Ghana are dominated by large state-owned corporations (Kumi, 2017; Amoako-Tuffour, and Asamoah, 2015; Alleyne, 2013: 26). The Volta River Authority (VRA) – a state-owned corporation – remains the main electricity producer in Ghana. It monopolised electricity generation in the country until the late 1990s, when private companies entered into electricity generation (Kumi, 2017). Yet, by 2016, private sector electricity producers controlled just about 17 percent of the installed electricity generation capacity in Ghana (ECG, 2018). The low private sector participation in electricity generation in Ghana relates to cost recovery difficulties in the sector (Alleyne, 2013: 26). The prices that consumers pay for electricity in the country have sometimes been below the cost of electricity supply (Amoako-Tuffour, and Asamoah, 2015 :15), making the electricity sector unattractive to private sector investors (Alleyne, 2013; Amoako-Tuffour, and Asamoah, 2015). Also, private sector investment in electricity generation in Ghana has been deterred by concerns about the ability of the Electricity Company of Ghana (ECG) – the main off-taker of electricity in Ghana – to pay power producers’ (Amoako-Tuffour, and Asamoah, 2015 :13). Thus, low consumer tariffs and “credible buyer” concerns have limited private sector participation in electricity generation in Ghana, thereby, making it, a VRA monopoly.

Differently from electricity generation, there are no private sector companies in electricity transmission in Ghana (GRIDCo, 2018; Ackah, et. al 2014). The Ghana Grid Company (GRIDCo) – another state-owned corporation – is the sole operator of the national electricity transmission system in the country (Ackah, et. al 2014: 268). It monopolises the transmission

of electricity from generation to electricity distribution companies and bulk electricity users in Ghana (GRIDCo, 2018: 6). The GRIDCo also controls the transmission of electricity from Ghana to some countries in West Africa (ibid.). The monopoly of the GRIDCo in the transmission of electricity gives the government control over the midstream electricity sector in Ghana.

When it comes to electricity distribution to households and non-residential electricity users in Ghana, there are two state-owned companies which control it. The ECG distributes electricity in the southern parts of Ghana. The Northern Electricity Distribution Company (NEDCo) is in charge of electricity distribution in the northern sector of the country. Therefore, through the ECG and the NEDCo, the government of Ghana also controls the downstream electricity sector in the country.

The institutional arrangements in the electricity sector in Ghana at the time of this study, emerged out of utility sector reforms by the government of Ghana. Hitherto the power sector reforms in the late 1990s, the VRA dominated electricity generation, transmission, and distribution in Ghana. However, as part of the electricity sector reforms, the Northern Electricity Department of the VRA was transformed into the NEDCo. This meant that the VRA no longer participated directly in power distribution in the country. Subsequently, in 2005, electricity transmission in Ghana was transferred from the VRA to the GRIDCo by the Volta River Development (Amendment) Act, 2005 (Act 692). Thus, the emergence of the NEDCo and the GRIDCo reduced the role of the VRA in the electricity sector of Ghana to that of electricity generation only. Therefore, one of the main outcomes of the electricity sector reforms in Ghana was the breaking of one large state monopoly into smaller – but still state-owned – entities and the emergence of some private sector participation, albeit limited, in electricity generation.

### **5.3 Electricity Tariffs in Ghana**

Unlike the institutional changes in the electricity sector in Ghana, the fiscal squeeze and the cost recovery objectives of the reforms had major impacts on electricity tariffs (Keener and Banerjee, 2005; World Bank and Government of Ghana, 2004; Herbst, 1993). While the

reforms involved many changes to the pricing regime, their common trend, as Table 1 shows, was the upward adjustments of electricity user fees<sup>1</sup>. Essentially, the reforms aimed at eliminating government interventions and subsidies in the pricing of electricity in the country (Herbst, 1993; Keener and Banerjee, 2005). This was meant to achieve full cost recovery in electricity through user fees. In 1985, the first of the electricity tariff reforms efforts in the country resulted in an increase of the gazetted electricity tariffs by 1,000 percent (Herbst, 1993: 62). A year later, the government of Ghana engaged Coopers & Lybrand to review electricity tariffs in the country (World Bank and Government of Ghana, 2004: 18). The main recommendations of Coopers & Lybrand were:

- a) the introduction of a long run marginal cost formula that increased electricity user fees as consumption went up;
- b) the classification of consumers into groups with similar costs to the system;
- c) grouping of residential consumers by levels of consumption;
- d) and the introduction of a progressive tariff system with a lifeline consumption of 50kWh applying to all consumers.

These recommendations were adopted in 1988 with the application of about 75 percent of the long run marginal cost to the gazetted tariffs (Keener and Banerjee, 2005: 3). In 1989, the government of Ghana increased gazetted electricity user fees by about 6 percent for low-income consumers and about 20 percent for non-residential consumers (World Bank and Government of Ghana, 2004: 18). In addition to these hikes, the government established a lifeline consumer category and lifeline tariffs. Electricity was considered an essential service which meant that low-income earners were not to be deprived of it due to their inability to pay for the full cost of supply (PURC, 1999: 14). Therefore, lifeline tariffs were aimed at ensuring a certain quantity of electricity at a low rate for low-income customers.

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<sup>1</sup> Until 2007, the many changes to the electricity consumption bands upon which tariffs were applied and the use of block charges in some circumstances, make long term comparison of electricity tariffs in Ghana problematic. In July 2007, Ghana revaluated its currency making  $\text{¢}10,000 = \text{GH¢}1$

**Table 1: Gazetted electricity tariffs in Ghana (1985 – 2018)**

Month/ Year	Consumption Categories							
	0 – 50 kWh		51 – 300 kWh		301 – 600 kWh		600+ kWh	
	GHp	**US\$	GHp	**US\$	kWh	**US\$	kWh	**US\$
<b>1985</b>	1000 percent increase*							
<b>1988</b>	75 percent increase*							
<b>1989</b>	6 percent increase*							
<b>1997</b>	300 percent							
<b>Sept. 1998</b>	40.00*	1.70	0.01	0.05	0.22	0.09	0.35	0.15
<b>May, 2001</b>	78.00*	1.02	0.02	0.03	0.57	0.07	0.57	0.07
<b>May, 2005</b>	19.08*	0.06	0.06	0.06	10.18	0.11	10.18	0.11
<b>May, 2006</b>	0.70	0.07	0.70	0.07	12.00	0.13	14.00	0.15
<b>Nov. 2007</b>	9.00	9.09	12.00	12.13	16.00	16.17	16.00	16.17
<b>July, 2008</b>	9.50	8.68	12.00	10.97	16.00	14.62	19.00	17.36
<b>June, 2010</b>	9.50	6.56	17.00	11.74	21.00	14.50	23.00	15.88
<b>Sept. 2012</b>	9.50	4.96	17.57	9.18	22.81	11.91	22.34	12.18
<b>Oct. 2013</b>	15.67	7.13	31.44	14.28	40.81	18.54	45.34	20.60
<b>Oct. 2014</b>	19.27	8.75	38.67	17.57	50.19	22.80	55.77	25.33
<b>July, 2015</b>	21.07	6.05	42.29	12.15	54.88	15.77	60.98	17.52
<b>July, 2016</b>	33.56	8.36	67.33	16.77	87.38	21.76	97.09	24.18
<b>July, 2017</b>	33.56	7.66	67.33	15.34	87.38	19.90	97.09	22.11
<b>July, 2018</b>	27.68	5.78	55.54	11.60	72.08	15.05	80.09	16.72

\* Flat tariffs \*\* Oanda exchange rates

Sources: PURC, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015a, 2016, 2017, and 2018; Keener and Banerjee, 2005; Edjekumhene et. at, 2001

The electricity-pricing regime in Ghana underwent further revisions in the 1990s (Keener

and Banerjee, 2006; World Bank and Government of Ghana, 2004). The government of Ghana introduced an adjusted long run marginal cost formula in the pricing of electricity, that reflected the financial requirements of the electricity companies in 1992 (Keener and Banerjee, 2006: 260). A year later, the Ghanaian authorities adopted a formula-based tariff adjustment regime that provided for regular and systematic tariff adjustment with consideration for inflation and exchange rate movements (World Bank and Government of Ghana, 2004: 19). As a matter of fact, gazetted electricity rates in the country were updated regularly in an attempt to reflect the effects of inflation on the cost of electricity from 1994 to 1997 (Keener and Banerjee, 2005: 2).

A milestone in the electricity sector reforms in Ghana occurred in 1997 when the PURC was created (Edjekumhene et. at, 2001). The PURC was established by the Public Utilities Regulatory Act 1997 (Act 538) to monitor and enforce standards in the provision of utility services, to protect consumer interests, and to set utility tariffs. Act 538 requires that the utilities regulatory commission should be made up of nine-members who represent different interest groups in the country. The law provides for a Chairperson, an Executive Secretary, and four other members who are to be selected by the government of Ghana. The rest are representatives from trade unions, industry (the Association of Ghana Industries), and domestic consumers. The trade union, industry, and consumer representatives are nominated by these groups and appointed to the commission by the government of Ghana.

The PURC emerged after a botched attempt by the Ministry of Mines and Energy (MME) to increase electricity tariffs by 300 percent in 1997 (Kojima et. al, 2014; Edjekumhene et. at, 2001). The announcement of this proposed increase was met by significant public outcry in the media which resulted in the suspension of the proposed hikes (Edjekumhene et. at, 2001: 22). Nonetheless, the 300 percent increase was reintroduced and implemented by the PURC after it emerged (Kojima et. al, 2014). According to Edjekumhene et. al (2001: 22-23), the PURC managed to implement this hike because it adopted an effective public engagement strategy, aided by the power crisis at the time which influenced the public, especially industry, to prioritise the availability of energy over its cost.

The politics of communicating and appearing responsible for electricity tariff hikes in Ghana needs emphasizing. Even though since its inception, the PURC took over the responsibility of announcing electricity and water user fee increases from the government of Ghana, the trade unions in Ghana direct their disquiets with electricity user fee hikes to the government of Ghana. In 2010, the TUC (Ghana) argued that it was the responsibility of the government of Ghana to ensure reasonable standard of living in the country and that the government must do more to mitigate the effects of utility tariff increases on the people of the country (TUC, 2010b: 125-126). Similarly, the unions accused the government of Ghana of insensitivity for a 59.2 percent increase in the gazetted electricity user fees in 2016 (TUC, 2016: 139). Therefore, the formation of the PURC did not completely disassociate the government of Ghana from the PURC and the electricity tariff hikes that it presided over in the eyes of the trade unions.

The last of the major changes in the electricity-pricing regime in Ghana occurred in 2003 when the PURC introduced an automatic tariff adjustment mechanism to complement the occasional major tariff reviews (Keener and Banerjee, 2005: 3). This scheme, in contrast to the earlier long run marginal cost formula that adjusted electricity user fees based on the levels of consumption (Keener and Banerjee, 2005: 3), was aimed at sustaining the real value of gazetted electricity tariffs (Kumi, 2017: 19). It was meant to automatically adjust electricity user fees to reflect changes in factors such as fuel price, the foreign exchange, and inflation, every quarter (ibid.). Yet, the literature indicates that the automatic tariff adjustments mechanism has sometimes been stalled by political expediency, as governments tend to avoid electricity tariff adjustments in periods leading to general elections (World Bank and Government of Ghana, 2004: 103).

Nonetheless, Table 2 shows that the electricity tariff reforms in Ghana brought about significant hikes in gazetted electricity user fee. We have already seen the many increases in the gazetted electricity rates in the country from the 1985 to 1997. In addition to these, the average gazetted nominal residential electricity tariff shot up from approximately ₵75/kWh in 1998 to about ₵800/kWh in 2003 (World Bank, 2005: 81). This constitutes over nine-fold increase of the domestic electricity user fee in five years.



In the last ten years, there have been substantial hikes in the gazetted electricity rates of households. Table 2 provides a summary of the gazetted electricity tariffs adjustments by the PURC from 2007 to 2018. It shows that from November 2007 to July 2018, the gazetted end user tariff of residential consumers within the 1kWh–50kWh consumption category went up from 9GHp/kWh to 27.68GHp/kWh, representing about 207.56 percent increase. During the same period, the gazetted electricity user fees of households that consume 51kWh to 300kWh of electricity per month shot up by about 362.83 percent; from 12GHp/kWh to 55.54GHp/kWh. The PURC increased the gazetted electricity cost of residential users in the 301kWh–600kWh consumption category from 16GHp/kWh to 72.08GHp/kWh, representing 350.50 percent increase. The rate for consumers in the upper band of the domestic end user tariff categories (601kWh and above) went up over four times from 19GHp/kWh to 80.09GHp/kWh. In addition to the hikes in the gazetted end user tariffs, Table 2 shows that the PURC increased the monthly service charge from 50GHp in November 2007 to 633.17GHp in July 2018. Thus, electricity tariff reforms in Ghana occasioned sharp increases in the gazetted tariffs of the various categories of electricity users in the country.

**Table 2: Gazetted electricity tariff adjustments in Ghana (2007-2018)**

<b>Residential Consumer Class Categories</b>	<b>Rates in Ghana Cedis (GHp100=GHC1.00)</b>			<b>Rates in US\$ (oanda exchange rates)<sup>2</sup></b>		
	<b>Nov-07</b>	<b>Jul-18</b>	<b>Change (%)</b>	<b>Nov-07</b>	<b>Jul-18</b>	<b>Change (%)</b>
0-50 (GHp/kWh)	9.00	27.68	207.56	9.04	5.76	-36.28
51-300 (GHp/kWh)	12.00	55.54	362.83	12.05	11.56	-4.07
301-600 (GHp/kWh)	16.00	72.08	350.50	16.07	15.01	-6.60
601+ (GHp/kWh)	19.00	80.09	321.53	19.09	16.67	-12.68
Monthly service charge	0.50	6.33.	1166.00	0.52	1.31	160.76

Source: PURC, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015a, 2016, 2017, and 2018

As shown by Table 2, beyond the general rise in the gazetted electricity user fees at an aggregate level, it is important to note that the rate of tariff increase for lifeline electricity consumers, i.e., those who use up to 50kWh of electricity in a month, has been slower than the increases of the other consumer categories. Gazetted electricity user fees of residential users within the 1kWh–50kWh category went up by 207.56 percent from 2007 to 2018. Even though this is a considerable increase, it is lower than the increases for the other consumer categories (321% - 363%). The difference in the growth rates of the electricity user fees of lifeline consumers and the other categories of electricity users in Ghana can be attributed to the focus of government subsidies and trade union demands on electricity tariffs. We have seen that lifeline tariffs were introduced to ensure a certain quantity of electricity at a low rate for low-income customers. In addition to this, we shall see in the next chapter that trade

<sup>2</sup> Table 2 shows that the gazetted electricity user fees in US\$ has declined for all consumer categories over the years. This is because of the depreciation of the local currency. I did not use the US\$ rates for the analysis because consumers pay their electricity bills in the local currency.

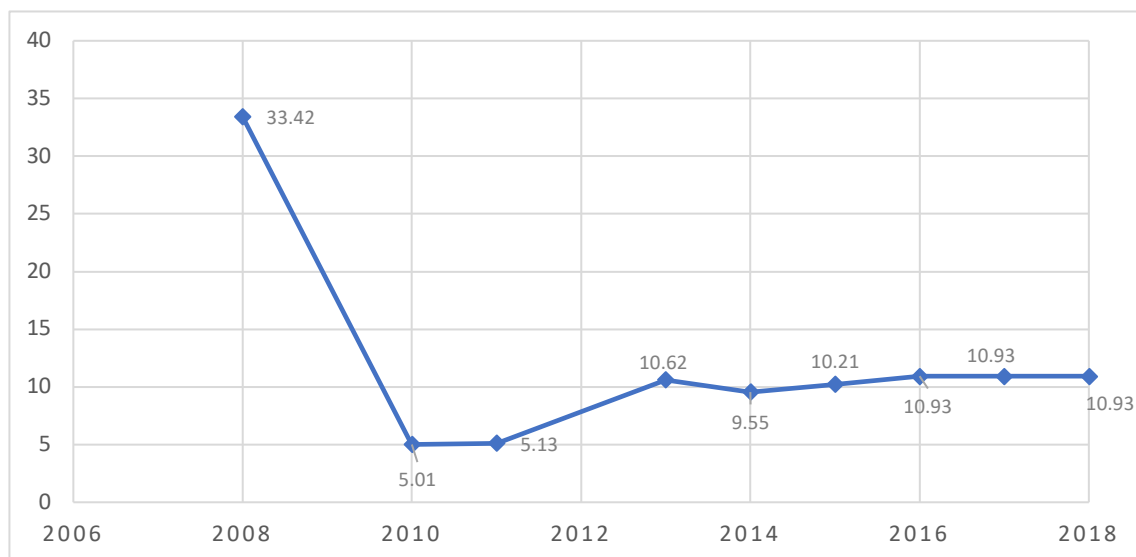
unions mostly prioritise the burden of tariff hikes on low-income consumers in their struggles on electricity tariffs. Notably, among other claims, the unions sought for ‘real relief for informal economy workers ... including seamstress, barbers, and *trotro* [informal public minibus transport] and taxi drivers’ (TUC, 2016: 142) – most of whom are in the low income bracket – during their demonstrations against a 59.2 percent hike electricity tariff in 2016.

#### **5.4 Electricity Subsidies in Ghana**

Significantly, even though there have been substantial increases in the gazetted electricity user fees, and against the fiscal squeeze and the full cost recovery agenda of the government of Ghana, some degree of subsidy has remained on electricity in Ghana (Government of Ghana, 2008; Keener and Banerjee, 2006). Not all of the electricity tariffs hikes that were announced and gazetted by the PURC became actual tariffs or were passed on to consumers. The government of Ghana has absorbed some of the electricity user fee increases as subsidies. In 2002, the government of Ghana introduced a ₵5,000 or US\$0.61 monthly subsidy for lifeline electricity consumers (Keener and Banerjee, 2006: 14). This was a flat subsidy for any electricity consumption up to 50kWh in a month. This amount was raised to ₵6080 (US\$0.70) in 2003 (ibid). The lifeline electricity subsidies was kept at about ₵5,800 (US\$0.61) per month throughout the 2000s (Government of Ghana, 2008).

Figure 3 shows that by 2008, non-lifeline electricity consumers in Ghana were receiving electricity subsidies from the Government of Ghana. This time, the electricity subsidies were applied in percentages. Figure 3 shows that in 2008, the government of Ghana absorbed 33 percent of the monthly electricity bills of average electricity consumers, i.e., those who use about 150kWh of electricity in a month. However, the amount of subsidies, in line with the objective by the government of Ghana to reduce subsidies on electricity user fees, fell to only about 5 percent in the early 2010s. However, as Figure 3 illustrates, electricity subsidies for average consumers rose to about 11 percent in 2013 and remain around that figure until 2018.

**Figure 3: Subsidies for average electricity consumers (Percent) 2008 - 2018**



Source: interviews with research participants, 2017/18; ECG 2018b

Table 3 shows that in 2018, electricity subsidies were higher for the lower consumption bands. Electricity subsidies for lifeline consumers were between 14.8 percent and 26.5 percent. Those who used 150 kilowatts per hour of electricity in a month received about 11 percent subsidies from the government of Ghana. The highest monthly electricity consumption that attracted subsidies (5.59%) in 2018 was 300 kilowatts per hour per month.

**Table 3: Residential electricity user tariffs reckoner (Effective March 2018)**

Consumption Unit (kWh)	Monthly Charge (GH¢)	Subsidy & Relief		Net Monthly Charge (GH¢)
		Amount (GH¢)	Percent	
<b>1</b>	2.49	0.87	26.51	1.53
<b>25</b>	10.94	1.77	16.18	9.17
<b>50</b>	19.75	2.93	14.84	16.82
<b>51</b>	24.65	2.39	9.70	22.26
<b>150</b>	94.64	10.34	10.93	84.3
<b>300</b>	200.69	11.22	5.59	189.47
<b>301+</b>	209.87	00.00	00.00	00.00

Source: Adapted from ECG, 2018b

Apart from domestic consumers, non-residential electricity users also receive some subsidies

from the government of Ghana. However, there are two main differences in subsidies for non-residential consumers in Ghana. First, as shown by table 4, all non-residential electricity users enjoyed some subsidies. Second, the level of subsidy for non-residential tariffs is extremely low, almost symbolic given its size, and significantly lower than the level of subsidies for domestic consumers. The highest subsidy for non-residential electricity consumers in 2018 was worth 4.1 percent of the tariff, which was about 22.4 percentage points lower than the highest subsidy granted to residential consumers (26.51%).

**Table 4: Non-residential electricity user tariffs reckoner (effective 7 April 2017)**

Unit (kWh)	Monthly Charge (GH¢)	Subsidy & Relief		Net Monthly Charge (GH¢)
		Amount (GH¢)	Percent	
1	13.58	0.05	0.37	13.53
50	71.25	2.49	3.49	68.76
300	365.49	14.94	4.09	350.55
600	742.62	22.89	3.08	719.73
10,000	19,421.27	219.35	1.13	19,201.92

Source: Adapted from ECG, 2017b

The differences between residential and non-residential levels of subsidy in electricity tariffs in Ghana can be explained by the priorities and strength of trade union struggles against electricity tariff increases for residential consumers (interview with Ajumawura, 2017; Kojima et. al, 2014). Kojima et. al (2014: 35) posit that the TUC (Ghana) has a high capacity to influence electricity user fee decisions and is more likely to oppose hikes in utility tariffs. We shall see in the next chapter that since 2010, nationwide trade union agitations over electricity user fees have exerted political pressure on the government of Ghana. In contrast to trade unions, according to an officer of the Ghana Employers' Association (GEA) who participated in this study, businesses in the country and their associations 'cannot go to the street. They [businesses] have to use diplomacy [in engaging with the government of Ghana on tariffs] (interview with Ajumawura, 2017). The government is therefore, more likely to reduce electricity subsidies in areas of least resistance, such as non-residential electricity users, as businesses associations in Ghana do not to organise nationwide protests against electricity tariffs imposed on them.

The differential level of subsidy between the two categories divides the trade unions and employers in the country (interview of Ajumawura, 2017; interview with Dr. Mensah, 2017). Understandably, business associations in the country begrudge the lower level of subsidy awarded to them. According to Ajumawura, an officer of GEA:

in most countries, industry pays less [for electricity] because of the greater contribution that industry provides to the economy. For us to be able to continue to produce to support the economy, at least they should be able to give us a fair deal as far as energy is concerned (interview of Ajumawura, 2017).

The trade unionists in this study suggest that the attempt by the government of Ghana to deal with the discontent with the electricity tariff hikes in Ghana through other measures has not been attractive to trade unions (interview with Dr. Mensah, 2017). An officer of the Ghana Medical Association (GMA) argued that ‘in spite of the higher tariffs, they [businesses] have shown that if they get stimulus package, they may be ready to accept whatever proposals for tariff adjustments. Labour [trade unions] at that point might not be interested in a stimulus package (interview with Dr. Mensah, 2017). Trade unions in Ghana have not found business stimulate package as a satisfactory strategy to ameliorate the effects of electricity user fees hikes because it does not directly lead to electricity cost reductions for households.

In addition to the above, there are other contentions over electricity subsidies in Ghana. I have already discussed how the sponsors of Ghana’s neoliberal reforms – the IMF and the World Bank – are against such subsidies. Also, utilities companies found subsidies problematic. This is due to delay in payments of such subsidies and the huge indebtedness that the government of Ghana accrues through electricity subsidies. In December 2003, the total outstanding subsidy that the government owed to the ECG was GH¢1.25 million, or US\$1.4 million (World Bank and Government of Ghana, 2004: xv-xvi). Table 5 shows that by December 2012, the government’s indebtedness to the ECG, from to lifeline subsidies, was GH¢45.86 million, or US\$24.32 million. By the end of 2013, GH¢58.15 million (US\$30.46 million), or about 15 percent of the GH¢400 million (US\$209.53 million) electricity subsidies that the government of Ghana agreed to pay to electricity companies, following a trade union struggles on electricity user fees, remained unpaid. As Table 5 shows, government of Ghana’s subsidy arrears to the ECG peaked at GH¢645.97 (US\$151.43) in

December 2016 and stood at GH¢306.62 million (US\$63.15 million) in 2018.

**Table 5: Government subsidy arrears to the ECG (2012-2018)**

<b>Year</b>	<b>(GH¢) Million</b>	<b>(US\$) Million</b>
Dec. 2012	45.86	24.32
Dec. 2013	58.15	30.46
Dec. 2014	295.60	90.94
Dec. 2015*	-	-
Dec. 2016	645.97	151.43
Dec. 2017	573.81	126.40
Dec. 2018	306.62	63.15

\*Data not available

Source: Adapted from ECG, 2012, 2013a, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017a, and 2018

These subsidy arrears generate significant deficits – differences between the ‘actual revenue collected, and the revenue required to fully recover the operating costs of production and capital depreciation’ – at the state-owned electricity companies (Alleyne, 2013). Thus, the electricity subsidy regime in Ghana harms the financial health of the ECG and the NEDCo (Amoako-Tuffour, and Asamoah, 2015 :15). Specifically, electricity subsidies debt detract from the ability of these companies to provide reliable electricity to consumers in Ghana (Kumi, 2017: 19). Financial constraints and other related factors, brought about frequent nationwide power outages and load shedding in the country in 2016 (Eshun and Amoako-Tuffour, 2016).

### **5.5 The Trade Union Position on Electricity Pricing in Ghana**

The above notwithstanding, overall, the trade union movement in Ghana advocate for electricity subsidies and government interventions in the electricity sector (interview with Hator, 2017; TUC, 2016b). This position is expressed in policy statements, and manifest itself in overt trade union actions on the pricing and provision of electricity in the country. Notably, the Energy and Power policy of the TUC (Ghana) seeks to ensure that electricity

user fee adjustments ‘do not cause social and economic hardship to Ghanaians’ (TUC, 2016b: 40).

Building on this position, trade unions in Ghana have argued against huge hikes in electricity tariffs in the country (TUC, 2016; TUC 2013b; TUC, 2010b). In 2010, the TUC (Ghana) campaigned against a 42 percent hike in the gazetted electricity tariffs. The union called for government’s intervention to cushion the ‘entire Ghanaian society, especially low-income earners, many of whom [were] surviving under the national poverty line’ (TUC, 2010b: 2). Three years later, trade unions insisted that ‘the people of Ghana could not pay [a 78.9 percent hike in electricity user fees] when government had increased public sector pay by only ten percent’ (TUC 2013b: 15). In 2016, the trade unions petitioned the President of Ghana against a 59.2 percent hike in the gazetted electricity tariffs. The unions argued that such an increase was unbearable due to the decline in real wages, jobs losses in the private sector, and the fall in the demand for the goods and services of informal economy operators (TUC, 2016: 141-142). Hence, trade union resistance to electricity tariff increases in Ghana has been based on the deleterious effects of such adjustments on real incomes and welfare. This position, according to a member of the Steering Committee of the TUC (Ghana) is tenable:

because of the state of our development has made tariff issues a social issue. As trade unions, our position has mostly been that people should be able to afford the tariff that is given. If we [the country] really want to charge the real cost or tariff, it is going to be very difficult for [the] majority of Ghanaians and workers, to pay realistic prices [for electricity]. So, our position basically has been that every worker and every citizen should be able to afford power or utility tariffs (interview with Hator, 2017).

It is in light of the above that trade unions in Ghana establish critical linkages between their core mandate, the interests of electricity consumers, and the necessity to engage with the PURC and the government of Ghana on electricity tariffs (interview with Ohene, 2017). Therefore, even though electricity user fees hikes are not a workplace issue, their impacts on wages of workers and the welfare of electricity consumers have turned electricity tariff adjustments into a trade union concern. As Ohene, an official of the TUC (Ghana) puts it:

we understand that the primary mandate of trade unions is to protect and promote the interest of workers. Anything that would have implications for the cost of living of workers, trade unions are interested [in such a thing]. If tariffs are adjusted upwards, it has implications for the cost of living of the worker. So, we demand that the tariffs



must be determined on the basis of the ability of domestic consumers to pay (interview with Ohene, 2017).

The review of the institutional arrangement for the determination of electricity tariffs and interviews with key stakeholders in the electricity sector in Ghana revealed that the position of trade unions on electricity pricing, their struggles on it, and the linkages between these and the core mandate of trade unions are generally acknowledged and accepted (interview with Ajumawura, 2017; interview with Ansah, 2017; interview with Mill, 2017). First, the government of Ghana accepts the interest of trade unions in electricity tariffs. The representation of trade unions at the PURC – the electricity regulatory body –, and the engagements between the government of Ghana and the unions on electricity user fees show that the state tolerates and understands the merits of the connections that unions make between their objectives and electricity price increases. Second, business associations, another important stakeholder in the electricity sector in Ghana, acknowledge the linkages between electricity tariff hikes and trade union objectives. Ajumawura, an officer of Ghana Employers' Association argued that:

unions generally want to promote the economic and social interests of their members through collective bargaining. If businesses are spending a lot on electricity or energy then it will affect their [trade union] aim of supporting the rank-and-file. I believe that what the trade unions are doing [struggles on tariffs] is in the right direction (interview with Ajumawura, 2017).

Third, CSOs that advocate on electricity in Ghana also recognise the connections that trade unions make between electricity prices and trade union objectives (interview with Ansah, 2017). Ansah, the Executive Director of one of the leading energy policy think tanks in Ghana, which will remain nameless to protect the anonymity of the informant, acquiesces with trade union struggles on utility tariffs because:

if you have family members who are not working or [are] poor, they all depend on your salary to pay the bills, for their sustenance. So once tariff goes up, demands on the pocket also goes up. So they [trade unions] have every legitimate right to ensure that the pressure is not as much as they [workers] can't bear (interview with Ansah, 2017).

In addition, workers in the electricity sector, who potentially benefit from electricity tariff hikes, are another group worth noting for its agreement with trade union struggles on

electricity tariffs (interview with Mills, 2017). Mills, a trade union unionist at the ECG, admits that ‘if it [electricity tariff] is increased, I would be better off. It can positively affect my pay’ (interview with Mill, 2017). However, he acknowledges that:

The TUC [Ghana] seeks [to protect] the interest of workers and the citizenry. If you have the electricity [price] going up, it affects the prices of other goods and services. If you increase electricity [tariff] ... it can even throw your salary out of gear. So I think it is in the best interests of workers and Ghanaians for them [the TUC (Ghana)] beat down tariff increases or react for a reduction (interview with Mills, 2017).

The legitimacy of, and the tolerance for, the trade union opposition to higher electricity tariff hikes in Ghana are also strengthened by the presentation of the struggles as broader consumer struggles (interview with Mensah, 2017). Mensah, a former Secretary General of the TUC (Ghana) argues that when trade unions in Ghana fight against electricity tariff increases, they do it:

not only for workers’ interests and aspirations but the entire population. There have even been sometimes when our employers have also applauded the union for [the struggles against tariff increases] because it affected them as well. We were doing so because if our jobs, our workplaces close down, it will ultimately affect workers. So, we were not limiting ourselves to the interest of workers but the voiceless and indeed the country as a whole (interview with Mensah, 2017).

This framing of the issue as a broader societal one has added legitimacy to the struggle that trade unions have wage on electricity user fees.

## **5.6 Conclusion**

This chapter has shown how cost recovery objectives and the fiscal squeeze of the economic recovery and structural adjustment programmes in Ghana brought about significant changes to the electricity sector and the electricity pricing in Ghana. We have seen how the government of Ghana sought to achieve the commercialisation of electricity and its full cost recovery by passing the cost of electricity onto consumers through end user fees. In addition, the government of Ghana has attempted to disassociate itself from electricity price hikes by devolving the responsibility of electricity tariff adjustments onto the PURC. Yet, despite such

efforts and initiatives, the government of Ghana continues to be seen as a key player in the electricity tariff regime in the country.

This can be seen in the fact that, against the imperatives of commercialisation of electricity, some degree of subsidy has remained on electricity tariffs. This has led to a number of controversies and contradictions. The World Bank and the IMF – the key sponsors of the economic liberalisation reforms in Ghana – abhor electricity subsidies because subsidies do not allow electricity user fees to reflect the cost of electricity. Similarly, electricity companies, have problems with electricity subsidies, as the government of Ghana has over the years accumulated huge debts in electricity subsidies, with detrimental implications for the operation of electricity companies.

At the heart of the refusal or inability of the government of Ghana to pass the full cost of electricity onto consumers, despite significant pressure to the effect, is by and large, the outcome of trade unions struggles. How this has happened is the focus of the next chapter.

## **CHAPTER 6: TRADE UNION STRUGGLES ON ELECTRICITY TARIFFS IN GHANA**

### **6.1 Introduction**

Having set the context of the changes in the electricity provision and its pricing in the previous chapter, this chapter looks closely at the trade union responses to these changes. It explores the electricity user fees demands by trade unions, the strategies that trade unions have used in protests against electricity tariff hikes, and the outcomes of these struggles. The chapter also highlights the internal trade union contradiction and the compromises that have associated the trade union struggles against electricity tariff increases in Ghana. Through these insights, this chapter seeks to contribute to the debate on the current state and the future of trade unions and, more specifically, to the debate on the centrality of SMU and symbolic power in trade union renewal. The insights in this chapter also offer us the opportunity to engage with the ideas on labour aristocracy and some of the underlying assumptions of mobilisation theory.

The chapter is divided into seven sections. Section two focuses on the campaigns that trade unions have undertaken against increases of electricity tariffs in Ghana. This is followed by a discussion of the implications of the representation of trade unions at the PURC on the struggles that trade unions waged against electricity tariffs increases in section three. Section four looks at the internal trade union contradictions that are generated by the struggles of trade unions against electricity tariff hikes. Sections five reflects on the kinds of external relationships that trade unions in Ghana establish in their campaigns on electricity user fees. In sections six and seven, the analysis pulls together the lessons that can be learned on SMU, symbolic power, labour aristocracy, and mobilisation from the trade union struggles on electricity tariffs in Ghana and draws the chapter to a conclusion.

## **6.2 Trade Union Struggles against Electricity Tariff Increases in Ghana**

In the last decade, trade unions mounted three major overt campaigns against the rates of electricity user fee increases in Ghana (TUC, 2016; TUC, 2013; TUC, 2010a). These happened in 2010, 2013, and 2016, and involved intense trade union struggles with the PURC and the government of Ghana on the levels of electricity user fee hikes in the country (TUC, 2016; TUC, 2013; TUC, 2010a)

### ***6.2.1 The 2010 Struggle***

In 2010, the TUC (Ghana) waged a campaign against a 42 percent hike in electricity user fees that was announced and gazetted by the PURC (TUC, 2010a). The TUC (Ghana) found this increase to be excessive and demanded for it to be applied in two equal instalments over two years – application of a 21 percent hike in 2010 and a further 21 percent increase in 2011 (ibid.). However, at the end of the campaign, electricity consumers who used up to 600kWh a month paid a one-off 28.3 percent increase instead of the 42 percent that was gazetted by the PURC (ibid.). The gap between the gazetted tariffs and the actual increase that consumers paid – about GH¢69 million (US\$47.7 million) – was covered by the government of Ghana as subsidies (ibid.). This campaign was therefore, largely successful in containing the rise of electricity costs of residential consumers and it even overachieved its goal; whereas the TUC (Ghana) had asked for a smoothing over of the 42 percent increase over two years, electricity bills rose by 28.3 percent in 2010 and 2011 (TUC, 2013).

The reduction in the electricity tariff increase in 2010 came on the back of pre-emptive struggles and reactive protests by the TUC (Ghana) (TUC, 2010b). Prior to the announcement of the 42 percent hike, the electricity companies in Ghana engaged with the TUC (Ghana) on their requests for electricity tariffs increases to the PURC. The companies had asked for a 155 percent increase in electricity tariffs (ibid.). They explained to the TUC (Ghana) that this level of increase was crucial for them to address their operational challenges, the impacts of rising cost of crude oil on the cost of electricity, and the necessity for capacity and network expansion (ibid.: 25). Arguably, the attempt by the electricity companies to get the support

of the union for their request was strategic. The TUC (Ghana) remains a major source of resistance to electricity user fees hikes in Ghana (Kojima et. al, 2014). Therefore, getting the union to support their proposals would have removed an important obstacle to their request. Yet, in spite of their justifications, the electricity companies did not obtain trade union backing for their requests.

Significantly, even though the electricity tariffs increase (42%) that the PURC announced was almost three times less than the demand of the electricity companies (155%), the TUC (Ghana) described the new tariff as “astronomical” (TUC, 2010a) and initiated a second stage struggle against it. This stage of the trade union campaign to moderate the rates of electricity price increases in 2010 started with bilateral meeting between the TUC (Ghana) and the PURC where the PURC attempted to justify the new tariff. Yet, on 3 June 2010, ‘after nearly three hours of meeting with officials of the PURC, [the union] was not convinced that there was any justification for [the] astronomical tariff increases’ (TUC, 2010b: 125).

Subsequently, the TUC (Ghana) launched a media campaign against the new tariffs. This involved press conferences, press statements, and media interviews (Myjoyonlin. 2010; Business Ghana, 2010, Modern Ghana, and Ghanaweb, 2010). The media in the country were awash with the call by the TUC (Ghana) for the PURC to review the new tariffs within one week (Myjoyonlin. 2010). The union argued that the rate of the electricity user fee increase had negative implications for workers and their families through increased cost of living and potential job losses as businesses may have to cut jobs due to the impact of high electricity cost on their operations (TUC, 2010b: 124). In addition, the TUC (Ghana) maintained that the GH¢49 million (US\$33.8 million) that was proposed by the government of Ghana to subsidise electricity in the country was inadequate because it amounted to only about GH¢2 or US\$1.38 per resident (ibid).

The media campaign did not to elicit any response from the PURC or the government of Ghana (interview with Mensah, 2017). Consequently, the TUC (Ghana) triggered nationwide agitations by its regional structures and rank-and-file union members. It directed the District Councils of Labour (DCL) to convey emergency meetings to discuss and adopt positions on

the tariffs increases. The union also called on all workers to wear red bands – a symbolic presage for grief and battle – until the new tariffs were reviewed downwards (TUC, 2010a). These directives received significant support from the regional trade union structures. The Sekondi-Takoradi Metropolitan Council of Labour in the Western region of Ghana held emergency meetings to affirm and support the actions of the union (TUC, 2010b: 62). The Kumasi Metropolitan Council of Labour in the Ashanti region and the Tamale DCL in the Northern region passed resolutions denouncing the tariff increases (TUC, 2010b). These responses escalated the struggle and demonstrated the ability of the TUC (Ghana) to organise across the country.

The literature reveals that the wearing of red bands and the trade union meetings across the country prompted reactions from the government of Ghana and the electricity companies (TUC, 2010b). The President of Ghana met the TUC (Ghana) to discuss the gazetted tariffs on 28 July 2010 (ibid). Subsequently, the Vice President of Ghana formed a technical committee – made up of a representative each from the TUC (Ghana), the PURC, the AGI, the Energy Commission, and the electricity companies – to assess the concerns over the tariff increases (ibid: 12). The involvements of the President of Ghana and his Vice, show the effectiveness of the nationwide trade union actions against the proposed increases in electricity bills. Also, the strength of the trade union agitations can be seen in the concessions that the electricity companies offered to mitigate the impacts on the tariff hikes on electricity consumers. The electricity companies gave up GH¢115 million (US\$79.5 million) or about 10 percent of the revenue that was to be generated from the gazetted tariff increase that was announced by the PURC – the 42 percent hike – to ease the burden of the increases on electricity consumers (TUC, 2010b). This concession was meant to be distributed as subsidies to bring about some reduction in the gazetted tariffs increase (42%) of the PURC.

However, the recommendations of the technical committee on how the GH¢115 million or US\$79.5 million discount, was to be reflected as subsidies among electricity users did not meet the expectations of the TUC (Ghana) (TUC, 2010b). The committee recommended that the discount – the GH¢115 million (US\$79.5 million) – was to be allocated as subsidies of 1 percent for residential consumers, 7.4 percent for non-residential consumers, 19.6 percent for

Special Load Tariff-Medium Voltage (SLT-MV) customers, and 27.2 percent for Special Load Tariff-High Voltage (SLT-HV) users (ibid). The SLT-MV and the SLT-HV tariffs apply to bulk electricity purchasers and industrial consumers. This meant that even though the focus of the trade union campaign was on the impacts of the tariff hikes on domestic consumers, the suggested distribution of the concession from the electricity companies was highly skewed in favour of industry and non-residential electricity users. Moreover, the recommendation implied that residential consumers were to pay a one-off 39 percent increase instead of the 42 percent that was gazetted by the PURC. Such an outcome – a one-off 39 percent increase –, was nowhere near the demand by the TUC (Ghana) for the application of gazetted 42 percent increase in two equal instalments over two years – application of 21 percent hike in 2010 and 21 percent increase in 2011.

Consequently, as the literature indicates, the TUC (Ghana) rejected the proposals of the technical committee, and the government's unilateral acceptance of the report of the committee, which led to the attempt to implement the recommendations of the report (TUC, 2010b). The union called for more equity in the allocation of the GH¢115 million (US\$79.5 million) as subsidies, with particular focus on low-income earners who bore the heaviest burden of the tariff adjustment (ibid.). The TUC (Ghana) demanded that the 39 percent increase in the electricity rate that would result from the application of the suggested subsidy by technical committee, should be introduced in two equal instalments over a two-year period (ibid.). This meant a demand for application of 19.5 percent increase in the electricity tariff in 2010 and a further 19.5 percent hike the next year.

In response, the government of Ghana entered into negotiations with the TUC (Ghana) and the AGI (TUC 2010b). This brought about an increase in subsidies which ended the impasse over electricity tariffs. The government committed additional GH¢20 million (US\$13.8 million) to ease the burden of tariff hikes on consumers (ibid.: 12). This increased the government's subsidy to GH¢69 million (US\$47.7 million). Consequently, the actual tariff increase or the rate of increase that consumers had to pay was reduced by 13 percentage points for residential consumers who use up to 600 kWh of electricity in a month (ibid.). This meant that domestic electricity users who consumed up to 600kWh of electricity in a month



paid an increase of 28.3 percent instead of the 42 percent increase that was gazetted by the PURC. The government of Ghana and the electricity companies absorbed the difference between the 42 percent increase that was gazetted by the PURC and what consumers actually paid (28.3%) at the end of the struggle as subsidies. Therefore, the 2010 trade union campaign on electricity tariffs ended with a modest gain by the TUC (Ghana) and a setback in the attempt by the government of Ghana to reduce subsidies on electricity in the country.

In a way, even though the TUC (Ghana) did not achieve its demand for the gazetted increases to be implemented in two instalments over two years, the result of the struggle was significant. This campaign showed the ability of the union to mobilise sub-national structures and rank-and-file members to wrestle some concessions from the government of Ghana and electricity companies. As we have seen, the resolutions of the nationwide DCL meetings and the wearing of red bands by unionists across the country triggered responses from the government of Ghana and the electricity companies in the country. These culminated in the giving up of GH¢184 million (US\$127.2 million) by the government of Ghana and electricity companies to alleviate the burden of the electricity tariff increases on consumers. Importantly, the 2010 campaign slowed the attempts of the government of Ghana to achieve full cost recovery through user fees and gave impetus for subsequent trade union actions against electricity tariff increases in Ghana.

### ***6.2.2 The 2013 Struggle***

In 2013, trade unions in Ghana waged a campaign against a 78.9 percent increase in electricity user fees that was gazetted by the PURC (TUC, 2013). Despite the fact that electricity rates in the country had not increased for over two years, the unions found the level of the increases to be too much. Therefore, they demanded for the application of the 78.9 percent increase to be phased in three equal instalments of about 26 percent over three years (ibid.). However, this struggle ended with electricity consumers having to pay a 53.9 percent increase instead the 78.9 percent that was gazetted by the PURC. The difference

between what the PURC gazetted and the actual increase that consumers paid was covered by a government subsidy of about GH¢400 million or US\$194.95 million (ibid).

The first trade union effort to moderate the electricity tariff increase in 2013 occurred before the announcement of the new tariffs (interview with Mensah, 2017; TUC, 2013). This involved meetings between the TUC (Ghana), the PURC, and the electricity companies on the proposals for tariff increase (TUC, 2013: 91). The electricity companies requested for a 166 percent increase in electricity user fees (PURC 2013: 1). Their justification, as Mensah, a former Secretary General of the TUC (Ghana) recounts, was that the ‘if they [the electricity companies] do not get the increases, it was going to affect their work’ (interview with Mensah, 2017). Despite such appeal, the TUC (Ghana) did not accept the proposals of the electricity companies.

The tariff increase that was announced by the PURC (78.9%) was vastly smaller than the demand of the electricity companies (a 166% increase). Nonetheless, the TUC (Ghana) rejected the new tariffs and initiated a second stage campaign for their reduction (Daily Graphic, 2013; TUC, 2013b; Ghana Business News, 2013). This stage started with a media campaign that involved television and radio interviews, press releases, and press conferences. The TUC (Ghana) denounced the levels of the increases and called for a reduction (Daily Graphic, 2013). It argued that electricity users in the country could not afford the increases due to the ‘economic hardships workers were going through after [an earlier increase] of fuel and transport [fares]’ (TUC, 2013b: 15). At a press conference, the Secretary General of the TUC (Ghana), expressed that ‘we [trade unions] fail to understand the rationale for such astronomical increases when government was only able to increase salaries by a mere 10 percent’ (Ghana Business News, 2013). He maintained that:

nearly all prices of goods and services [were] rising well above the income levels of most Ghanaians. [And that] this [had] erode[d] the incomes of workers and made life unbearable for all Ghanaians. And it is not difficult to see how these steep increases in utility tariffs will further burden Ghanaian workers and their families (TUC, 2013b: 15).

In addition to the concern over affordability, the TUC (Ghana) took issue with the modalities and the justification of the tariff increase (TUC, 2013b). The union contended that the 78.9 percent hike was unjustified because

the PURC, acting on the promptings of government, failed to implement what all stakeholders agreed was the best way forward [the automatic tariff adjustment scheme]. Now the PURC and government are asking Ghanaians to pay for the cost of political expediency (TUC, 2013b: 92).

This argument was meant to rebut the claim by the PURC that the 78.9 percent hike was necessary because electricity tariffs had not been adjusted in over two years. As we saw in the previous chapter, the PURC introduced an automatic tariff adjustment scheme to ensure quarterly review of electricity tariffs. This scheme, according to a former Secretary General of the TUC (Ghana), should have averted ‘the need for one-off super increases that eroded incomes and made life unbearable for most Ghanaians’ (Ghana Business News, 2020). Therefore, the TUC (Ghana) dismissed the technical justification for the 78.9 percent hike and brought political expediency in the fray.

The interviews with the trade unionists in this study revealed that in addition to putting politics at the centre of electricity pricing debate, the 2013 struggle was unique in another way (interview with Mensah, 2017; interview with Teacher Kofi, 2017). It was the first struggle on electricity tariffs that involved most of the major trade unions in Ghana (interview with Mensah, 2017). Thus, unlike the 2010 campaign which was undertaken by the TUC (Ghana) and its affiliates, the 2013 protests involved other trade unions that were not affiliated to the TUC (Ghana). These included the GNAT, the NAGRAT, the ICU, and the GMA (interview with Teacher Kofi, 2017). The rest were the JUSAG, the TUTAG, and the TUWAG (ibid.). This collaboration served two purposes. First, for the non-affiliates of the TUC (Ghana), participation in the protests provided them with the opportunity to demonstrate their commitment to issues that affect their members outside the workplace. Teacher Kofi, an officer of the GNAT summed this up in the following words:

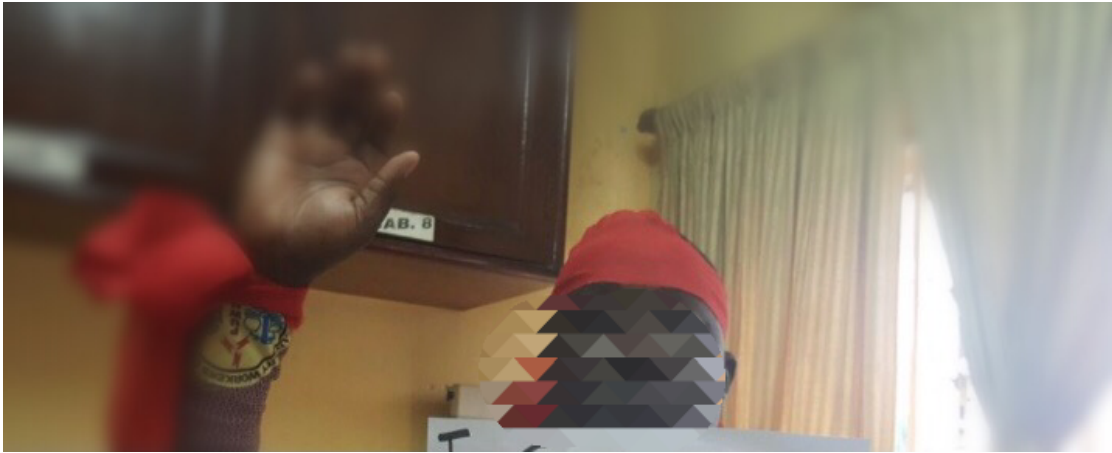
one of the objectives of trade unions is to make sure members live comfortably, that their pay cheque will be able to give them a comfortable life. So in situations when it becomes extremely difficult to meet this target because of the high cost of tariffs, then it will appear or seem that we [trade union leadership] are not in the position to fight for, I mean defend our objectives. And therefore, the ordinary people will see the

leadership [of unions] as not being effective. And that is something that we want to guard against (interview with Teacher Kofi, 2017).

Second, and most importantly, the involvement of the non-affiliates of the TUC (Ghana) escalated the campaign into a general trade union struggle. The GNAT, the NAGRAT, the ICU, the GMA, the JUSAG, the TUTAG, and TUWAG extended the numbers of trade unions and workers involved in the struggle. The membership of these unions (estimated at about 274,000) and the sectors that they cover (education, health, judiciary, commerce, and industry) brought strength to the struggle (TUC, 2018). Together with the TUC (Ghana), and its half a million members distributed across all the sectors of the Ghanaian economy, the trade unions that collaborated in the 2013 struggle had the potential to disrupt socioeconomic activities in Ghana with a strike.

Trade union documents show that another important tactic in this campaign was that the trade unions directed their regional and district structures to undertake joint and independent actions in protest against the tariff hikes (TUC, 2013b; GNAT, 2013). The unions unanimously asked their members across the country to wear red bands and fly red flags at their workplaces until the demand for the reduction of the increases was met (TUC, 2013b). In support of the joint trade union actions, the largest teachers' union in the country urged its Regional Secretaries to convene emergency regional executive meetings to adopt resolutions against the electricity tariff increase (GNAT, 2013). These joint and independent actions strengthened and enhanced the visibility of the campaign.

**Image 1: A trade union activist wearing red bands.**



Source: TUC, 2013

In addition to the pressure from the regions, the trade unions deployed threats and boycott at the national level (TUC, 2013a). They issued a ten-day ultimatum to the PURC and the government of Ghana to reduce the announced increases to ‘one-third or face the wrath of workers’ (ibid.: 90). The TUC (Ghana) boycotted the PURC. It argued that it could:

not continue to be part of decisions that [it] consider insensitive to the plight of working people of Ghana and Ghanaians in general. [And that it] will continue to boycott the PURC until our demands for the reduction of the tariffs to affordable levels is met (ibid.)

Significantly, the flying of red flags at workplaces across the country, the threat, and the boycott of the PURC prompted reactions from the government of Ghana (TUC, 2013a; TUC, 2013b). The government formed a multi-stakeholder Technical Working Group (TWG) that involved the unions to among others, consider mitigating measures that would enable consumers and industry to adjust to the new levels of tariff adjustment (TUC, 2013a: 83). The President of Ghana appealed to the trade unions to withdraw their ten-day ultimatum (TUC, 2013b). These reactions by the government of Ghana, particularly the involvement of the President of Ghana, illustrate the strength and the credibility of the 2013 trade union campaign on electricity user fees.

However, the literature shows that the initial reactions by the government of Ghana did not bring about a resolution of the stand-off over electricity tariffs (TWG Report, 2013; TUC,

2013). The trade unions accepted the invitation to the TWG, but they did not annul the ten-day ultimatum. Rather, they demanded for the suspension of the new tariffs. Also, in spite of participating in the discussions of the TWG, the trade unions rejected the group's decisions. This was because the TWG recommended a 60 percent increase of the electricity user fees to enable the electricity companies to cover the costs of electricity generation and transmission (TWG Report, 2013). This recommendation (a 60% increase) was significantly higher than the 26.3 percent increase that trade unions demanded as a first of three equal instalments from 2013 to 2015. Thus, the first attempts by the government to address the concerns over the electricity user fee hikes failed to meet the demand of the trade unions.

Consequently, the trade unions announced nationwide demonstrations and a strike (TUC, 2013). They directed their regional structures to stage demonstrations against the new tariffs before 18<sup>th</sup> November 2013 (ibid.: 83). In addition, the unions asked 'all workers in both the formal and informal sectors to stay home [on 18<sup>th</sup> November 2013] in protest against the astronomical increase in utility tariffs' (ibid.). Significantly, the trade union structures made visible preparations towards the demonstrations and the strike. The Tema District Council of Labour of the TUC (Ghana) 'distributed red flags in preparation [towards] the demonstration' (interview with Charles, 2018). The Greater Accra Regional Secretariat of the TUC (Ghana) wrote letters to employers and local unions in the region, announcing that workers in the Accra Metropolitan Area were going to embark on a demonstration on 15<sup>th</sup> November.

Aside the threat of a strike and the preparations towards the demonstrations within unions, another important strategy of this struggle was the escalation of the protests into a mass action (TUC, 2013). The trade unions called 'on all the working people of Ghana, their families and the good people of Ghana to express their dissatisfaction about the failure on the part of government to reduce utility tariffs to affordable levels' (TUC, 2013: 94) through participations in the demonstrations and strike.

Interviews with the trade unionists in this study indicate that the trade unions sought to achieve two goals by broadening the struggle into a mass protest (Nanney, focus group discussion in Tema 2018; interview with Mensah, 2017; interview with Charles, 2017). First,

for the national protests, the invitation to non-union members was necessary because according to a former Secretary General of the TUC (Ghana), the unions needed ‘public sympathy ... to strengthen the unions and make the influence of the union movement stronger (interview with Mensah, 2017). Second, at the sub-national level where the trade union action was meant to happen, it was about numbers. For instance, district-level trade unionists in Tema found the inclusion of non-union members necessary because ‘trade union[ism] is about numbers and when you are dealing with the government, you want to speak to the government and you go with a lesser number, they will not take your issues seriously’ (Nanney, focus group discussion in Tema 2018). Therefore, Charles, an executive member of the Tema DCL of the TUC (Ghana) recounts that trade union activists in Tema ‘went to the markets, went to the shops. That day, we said no shop would be opened. We appealed to the shop owners and drivers. Taxis were not going to work that day. *Trotros* from Tema to Accra were not going to work. We wanted everybody to feel the impact’ (interview with Charles, 2017). These shop owners and taxi drivers were not members of unions. Hence by engaging with them and calling on them to participate in the demonstrations and strike, the Tema DCL extended the struggle beyond the traditional trade union constituents.

The national and district trade union officers in this study revealed that a key component of the escalation of the protests into a mass action was the articulation of the protest as a consumer struggle (Nanney, focus group discussion in Tema 2018; interview with Mensah, 2017). The trade unions drew synergies between the objectives of the campaign and the concerns of the general public over the new tariffs. This way, the trade unions sought to ensure that ‘all those oppressed in society accept the objectives of the union movement and see the union movement as championing the interests of the ordinary person in society’ (interview with Mensah, 2017). Therefore, trade union activists in Tema presented the struggle on electricity tariffs as a consumer struggle because as Nanney puts it, ‘if I went to those people out there and I told them that my company is not increasing my salary, I don’t think that those people out there would have joined me [but] once this [electricity tariff hikes] affects every individual, everybody will join’ (Nanney, focus group discussion in Tema, 2018). Thus, by linking the ambitions of the trade unions to the interests of electricity users, trade unionists sought public support for their demonstrations and strike.

The literature shows that the threat of nationwide demonstrations and industrial action and preparations towards them, forced increased financial concessions from the government of Ghana to settle the impasse (Aidoo, 2014). The government entered into negotiations with the trade unions and business associations in the country. These brought an agreement of a 25 percentage points reduction of the electricity tariff increase. Hence, instead of the 78.9 percent hike, consumers paid a 53.9 percent increase (Government of Ghana Communiqué, 2013). The government of Ghana absorbed the difference between the gazetted tariff (78.9%) and the negotiated rate of increase (53.9) – about GH¢400 million (US\$209.52 million) – as subsidies to be paid to the electricity companies (ibid.). This translated into average subsidy of GH¢153.14 or US\$74.64 per household. It meant that, as Figure 3 shows, a household that used 150kWh of electricity received about 11 percent subsidy.

The 2013 trade union struggle on electricity tariffs had other notable outcomes. First, the negotiations that settled the dispute over the electricity tariff increase spurred the momentum of the government of Ghana towards the removal of subsidies on electricity. The government announced that full cost recovery through end user fees – requiring about 120 percent hike – was to be achieved from October 2013 to June 2014 (Government of Ghana Communiqué, 2013). Thus, in spite of the immediate modest gains – a 25 percentage points reduction of the electricity tariff increase – that the trade unions achieved, this struggle backfired in a sense, as it triggered a renewed impetus in the removal of subsidies on electricity by the government of Ghana.

Second, statements by business groups in Ghana show that the 2013 trade union struggle on electricity user fees enhanced the image of the trade unions among the business associations in Ghana. At the end of the struggle, the Ghana Employers Association (GEA), the Association of Ghana Industries (AGI), and the Ghana Chamber of Commerce and Industry (GCCI) commended the trade unions in the country for demanding for ‘higher subsidy from government to cushion both domestic and industrial consumers from the negative effects of the astronomic electricity tariff increase’ (GEA, AGI, GCCI press statement, 2013). The business associations lauded the trade unions for exhibiting maturity, high sense of



responsibility, mutual respect, and forthrightness in the engagements on electricity tariff in 2013 (ibid.). Thus, apart from the intended outcome, a significant by-product of the trade union protests on electricity tariff in 2013 was that it improved the attitude of Ghanaian capital towards the trade unions in the country.

In addition to the above, I argue that the 2013 trade union struggle on electricity tariffs promoted some level of trade union solidarity in the country. In 2012, there were about 72 trade unions in Ghana (TUC, 2012). In chapter four, we learnt how the implementations of the ERP and the SAP brought about some trade union fragmentation in the country and the fact that only 27 out of the 72 trade unions were affiliated to the two trade union centres in Ghana. In spite of these, the major trade unions in the country organised and strategized collectively towards a shared goal. We have seen the joint and independent actions that the major trade unions in the country undertook in the 2013 campaign that brought about some reduction in the electricity tariff hikes. This showed the ability of trade unions in Ghana to work together on a common course.

Nevertheless, the shared experience of a struggle and the way it ended, generated some disquiets within the trade unions (Daily Graphic, 2013). Media reports show that the ICU and the GMA – two of the non-affiliates of the TUC (Ghana) that participated in the protests – faulted the TUC (Ghana) for agreeing to a 25 percentage points reduction in the rate of the tariff increase (Daily Graphic 2013: 16). The ICU and the GMA were also upset by the decision of the TUC (Ghana) to call off the planned demonstrations and the strike without consultations among the trade union collaborators in the protests (ibid.). These disquiets had to be resolved by a meeting of the trade unions that ratified the agreement the TUC (Ghana) had reached with the government of Ghana and the business associations.

In addition to the above, the interviews with national and district trade unionists in this study revealed that the outcome of this struggle and the way the campaign ended were not generally accepted within the TUC (Ghana) (Misa, focus group discussion in Tema, 2018; interview with Charles, 2017). We have seen that the national officials of the TUC (Ghana) agreed to the concession from the government and called off the protests. Yet, trade union activists of

the TUC (Ghana) in Tema were disappointed by the acceptance of the 25 percentage points reduction in the electricity tariff increase by the leadership of the TUC (Ghana). These local trade union activists found the concession to be inadequate given the human efforts and the financial resources that were invested in the preparations towards the demonstrations and the strike. Their frustration with the settlement of the 2013 protests is summed up in the following words of a member of the executive committee of the Tema DCL of the TUC (Ghana):

at times TUC [(Ghana)] betrays we the workers. In Tema, everything was set. I think the action, the nationwide action was coming on [on] Tuesday. Then on Sunday around 11 pm they announced that government has reduced it [the utility tariffs] by some percentage. When you compute it, it is some insignificant percentage reduction. And TUC [(Ghana)] called off the intended nationwide demonstrations. Can you imagine, how can this be? So at times, TUC [(Ghana)] stabs us in the back. We had our fallback, that if nothing at all, if they will increase, they should increase it to this percentage but not beyond. And what they did was just insignificant. And on Sunday night, do we announce this thing on Sunday night? (interview with Charles, 2017).

The differences in the values that the national and the Tema district trade union officials attached to the outcomes of the 2013 struggle may be explained by two related factors. The first factor was the big gap between the expectations that were generated by the trade union demand and what was achieved. We have seen that the trade unions demanded for application of only 27 percent of the 78.9 percent increase in 2013 but achieved a one-off, and significantly higher, 53.9 percent increase. This partly accounted for the difference in the appreciations of the outcome of the 2013 struggle by the national and the Tema district leaders of the TUC (Ghana).

The second factor was the excitement that was generated by the preparations towards the demonstrations and the strike action among rank-and-file union members (Misa, focus group discussion in Tema, 2018). A union activist in Tema recounted that ‘we told the Secretary General [of the TUC (Ghana)] that even if he is sick, we will put him in a wheelbarrow and let him lead the demonstration’ (Misa, focus group discussion in Tema, 2018). The trade union leaders in Tema had courted support from non-union members, prepared local union activists, and ‘distributed red flags in preparation [towards] the demonstration’ (interview with Charles, 2018). Therefore, media announcement on ‘Sunday around 11pm that

government had reduced it [electricity tariffs] by some percentage and TUC [(Ghana)] had called off the intended nationwide demonstrations' (interview with Charles, 2018) was disappointing.

In light of the above it is possible to understand the mixed perceptions about the outcome of this mobilisation for trade unions, the tensions among and within them, and the disappointments which some members felt. Last but not least, the 2013 trade union struggle on electricity tariffs was important because the strategies and the outcome provided a springboard for the resistance to the next significant attempt by the government of Ghana to remove subsidies on electricity in 2016, to which the analysis now turns.

### ***6.2.3 The 2016 Struggle***

The last of the overt trade union struggles on electricity user fees in Ghana happened in 2016 (TUC, 2016). This campaign was triggered by a 59.2 percent hike in electricity user fees that was gazetted by the PURC (ibid.). Even though this struggle shares some similarities with the earlier ones, the 2016 protests differed in the intensity of the actions taken by the trade unions, as this was the first trade union protest on electricity tariffs in Ghana that required the unions to stage nationwide demonstrations to back their demands. This campaign also stands out for the more substantive success by the unions to have their demands met. In 2010, the TUC (Ghana) asked for application of only 21 percent of the announced 42 percent rise in electricity user fees and the postponement of the other half until the following year. Yet, at the end of the struggle, electricity consumers who consumed up to 600kWh in a month paid a 29 percent one-off hike. Three years later, the trade unions demanded for the implementation of the 78.9 percent increase over three years but achieved a 53.9 percent one-off rise. However, in 2016, the actual rates of increase that consumers paid at the end of the struggle were equal to, and in some cases, lower than the demand of the unions. The electricity companies requested for an average increase of 128.6 percent (PURC Press Release on approved electricity and water tariff effective 14<sup>th</sup> December 2015). In contrast, the unions insisted that they would not accept any tariff increase above 50 percent (TUC,

2016). At the end of the struggle, residential electricity users within the 1kWh-50kWh and 51kWh-300kWh consumption bands paid increases of 45 percent and 50 percent, respectively (TUC, 2016: 21) instead of the 59.2 percent increase that was announced by the PURC.

Trade union documents show that the 2016 struggle began with consultations between trade unions, electricity companies, and the PURC (TUC, 2016). The TUC (Ghana) rejected the demand of the electricity companies for a 128.6 percent hike of electricity user fees, arguing that it lacked merit because of the power crisis in the country at the time (TUC letter to the PURC, 02 November 2015). The union urged the PURC to consider the availability and reliability of electricity before considering tariff review. It maintained that 'it is only when the residents of Ghana, including workers in formal and informal sectors, were sure of reliable power that they can be convinced to pay higher tariffs' (ibid.).

Significantly, this was the first time that trade unions linked their campaign on electricity tariffs with issues of the quality of the electricity provided (TUC, 2016). At the time, Ghana ranked (3.0) below the global average (4.5) in electricity supply sufficiency and reliability (Eshun and Amoako-Tuffour, 2016). This was brought about by a prolonged drought that affected the generation capacity of the hydro dams in the country, the impact of rising crude oil prices on electricity generation from thermal plants, and policy deficiencies (ibid.). The other factors that accounted for electricity supply problems in the country were power sector mismanagement, corruption, neglect, and obsolete energy infrastructure (ibid.). These factors caused frequent nationwide power outages and load shedding in the country. Consequently, the availability and reliability of electricity became an important issue in the first stage of the trade union struggle on electricity tariff hikes in 2016.

The rate of the electricity tariff increase that was gazetted by the PURC (59.2%) was closer to the demand of the unions (50%) than to the requests of the utility companies (128.6%). Admittedly, not all of this can be attributed to the initial requests by the unions. The country was going to the polls to elect a president and parliamentarians in 2016. In the previous chapter, we learnt that ruling governments in Ghana tend to avoid huge electricity user fee

increases in election years (World Bank and Government of Ghana, 2004: 103). Therefore, political expediency might have also contributed to the differences between the position of the trade unions (50%), the demands of the electricity companies (128.6%), and the tariffs that were gazetted by the PURC (59.2%).

The literature shows that although the electricity tariff increase that was gazetted by the PURC (59.2%) was close to the trade union demand of an increase not higher than 50 percent, the unions took issue with it (TUC, 2016). Subsequently, the TUC (Ghana) initiated a second stage struggle for the reduction of the new tariffs. It escalated the struggle into a general trade union resistance. The unions maintained that they would not accept anything more a 50 percent hike in the electricity user fees (*ibid.*). This stage of the struggle involved media campaign, the threat of industrial action, negotiations, and demonstrations (Daily Graphic, 2016).

In response to the initial trade union actions, media reports and trade union documents show that the government of Ghana formed a Joint Working Group (JWG) to facilitate the settlement of the standoff (TUC, 2016; Daily Graphic, 2016). Even though the JWG included unions, its work failed to lead to a resolution of the impasse over the tariffs. The unions found the attitude of the government of Ghana towards negotiations at the JWG to be lackadaisical (TUC, 2016). Therefore, on 7<sup>th</sup> January 2016, the unions declared that nationwide demonstrations were scheduled for the 20<sup>th</sup> January 2016 (*ibid.*). Significantly, in spite of appeals by the government of Ghana to the trade unions to call off the demonstrations, on 20<sup>th</sup> January 2016, and for the first time on electricity matters, trade unions in Ghana embarked on nationwide demonstrations to back their demand for a reduction in the electricity tariff increase (Daily Graphic, 2016).

**Image 2: A section of trade union demonstrators in Accra**



Source: Daily Graphic (2016b)

The demonstrations attracted substantial support and had severe effects on socioeconomic activities in the country (Ghanaweb, 2016; Daily Graphic, 2016a; TUC, 2016: 76). International and local media reports show that thousands of placard-wielding workers in red and black attire with arm bands marched across the country demanding a reduction of the tariffs (DW, 2016; Daily Graphic, 2016b; Ghanaweb, 2016). Socioeconomic ‘activities in Accra [Ghana’s capital] were virtually at a standstill due to heavy vehicular traffic’ caused by the demonstrations (Ghanaweb, 2016). In Kumasi, the second largest city in Ghana, legal services were stopped as ‘the main gate leading to the offices [of the Kumasi] court complex was locked with padlocks. Most of the court staff [members of Judicial Staff Association of Ghana] were seen in their T-shirts ready to join the demonstration’ (Daily Graphic, 2016a). In the south-eastern region of Ghana, a ‘large crowd of organized labour [members] in the Volta Region undertook street demonstration through some principal streets of Ho as part of the protest against ... utility price [hikes] (ibid.)’. About 1,200 people participated in the trade union remonstrations in Koforidua, in the Eastern Region, (TUC, 2016: 76). In the north of the country, 700 workers in Bolgatanga in the Upper East Region of Ghana marched to the offices of the Regional Administration and presented a petition to the Deputy Regional Minister (ibid: 56). In the Western Region, about 1,000 demonstrators walked almost 15 kilometres through the principal streets of Sekondi-Takoradi with placards such as

‘governance is about development of the citizenry’ and ‘Mr President wake up’ (ibid: 73) to communicate their dissatisfaction with the gazetted tariff increase.

Trade union documents and media reports indicate that the demonstrations ended with petitions to the government of Ghana (TUC, 2016; Daily Graphic, 2016). In Accra, the unions presented a petition to the President of Ghana through the Minister for Employment and Labour Relations (TUC, 2016). In the regions, Regional Ministers and state representatives received the petitions of the protestors. These petitions reaffirmed the demand for a reduction of the electricity tariff increase, up to and not beyond, 50 percent (Daily Graphic, 2016). The unions accused the government of Ghana of insensitivity to the plight of the vulnerable and the working people of Ghana (TUC, 2016). They maintained that the rate of the tariff increase was inconsiderate and unacceptable because real wages in the public sector had declined and jobs had been lost in the formal private sector due to the prolonged energy crisis. The unions also argued that the new tariffs were untenable because of the drop in the demand for the goods and services of informal economy workers (ibid.). Thus, the petitions as well as the messages that were carried by the protestors, politicised the electricity tariff hikes and demanded a response from the government.

In a way, scale of the nationwide demonstrations and their economic and political consequences strengthened the trade union claim for a reduction of the gazetted increases, forcing the government to agree to absorb some of the gazetted increases (TUC, 2016). Instead of the 59.2 percent increase that was gazetted by the PURC, residential electricity users within the 1kWh-50 kWh and 51kWh-300 kWh consumption bands paid increases 45 percent and 50 percent, respectively (ibid.: 21). These represented a reduction of the announced tariff increase by 14.2 percentage points for consumers within the 1kWh-50kWh consumption band and by 9.2 percentage points for those in the 51kWh-300kWh category. In effect, as shown by Table 6, electricity consumers who used in the 1-300 (kWh) band, received from 5 percent to 26 percent worth of electricity subsidies from the government of Ghana.

**Table 6: Electricity tariff, levies, and government relief reckoner (2016)**

Consumption Unit (kWh)	Total Charge		Subsidy & Relief			Net Charge	
	Amount		Amount		Percent	Amount	
	GH¢	US\$	GH¢	US\$		GH¢	US\$
1	2.51	0.46	0.66	0.12	26.29	1.85	0.34
25	11.36	2.10	1.77	0.33	15.58	9.59	1.78
50	20.59	3.81	2.93	0.54	14.23	17.66	3.27
51	25.52	4.73	2.39	0.44	9.37	23.13	4.28
150	98.86	18.31	10.36	1.92	10.48	88.5	16.39
300	209.95	38.89	11.21	2.08	5.34	198.74	36.81

Source: Adapted from ECG Electricity User Tariff Reckoner Effective, 2016

The outcome of the 2016 trade union struggle on electricity tariffs was significant in two ways. First, trade unions achieved more than what they demanded for lifeline or the most vulnerable electricity consumers in the country. Lifeline residential electricity consumers are less likely to be members of unions. Therefore, the rate of lifeline electricity tariff increase that the unions achieved in the 2016 struggle illustrates the relevance of trade unions to non-unionised and low-income electricity users in Ghana. Second, in the end, the rate of the electricity tariff increase for consumers within the 51kWh-300 kWh category, to which most of the working people and trade union members in Ghana belong, was exactly what the unions demanded. So the trade union struggle gave them a 9 percentage points reduction of the gazetted tariffs by the PURC, as government subsidies.

However, given how successful the TUC (Ghana) was in having its demands met, one wonders why it did not ask for a smaller than 50 percent increase; as a matter of fact, the gains, in terms of the achieved reduction in the increase of electricity tariffs, were fairly small. Whether this is because the TUC (Ghana) was realistic in its requests, and it could not possibly ask for more, or rather because the fairly modest ambition of their demands was a missed opportunity remains to be understood.



### 6.3 Trade Union Membership of the PURC and the Struggles on Electricity Tariffs

Significantly, the interviews with trade unionists and CSO officials in this study revealed that attention to the direct results of the overt struggles has to be accompanied by an understanding of the way in which trade union membership of the PURC has affected the struggles that unions waged on electricity tariffs in the country (interview with Obenfo, 2018; interview with Mensah, 2017; interview with Afram, 2017). The TUC (Ghana) maintains that its representation at the PURC offers the opportunity to influence the decisions of the PURC and to protect the interests of workers and electricity consumers in the country. Mensah, a former Secretary General of the union argued that ‘if our people are there [at the PURC], they will champion our interests. Our voice and what we stand for, will not be heard by anybody if we are not represented’ (interview with Mensah, 2017). Similarly, Afram, a former General Secretary of one of the affiliates of the TUC (Ghana) maintains that:

representation in the PURC allows us [TUC (Ghana)] to have first-hand information about the processes on an on-going basis so that we are more familiar with the terrain and the trends in that industry. That familiarity should enable us to prepare better in negotiations with government on a broad range of issue (interview with Afram, 2017).

Although the above reasoning has some merits, the representation of the TUC (Ghana) at the PURC casts some doubt on the legitimacy and the integrity of the struggles that trade unions waged after electricity tariffs had been announced by the PURC (interview with Obenfo, 2018; interview with Afram, 2017). According to Afram, ‘people feel that we [unions] have no right to resist and struggle against utility tariffs increases because we are represented in there [PURC]. Sometimes this [argument] comes from within the trade union movement itself’ (interview with Afram, 2017). Obenfo, the campaign coordinator of one of the leading CSOs – which will remain nameless to protect the anonymity of the informant – that advocate on social and economic rights in Ghana maintains that:

somehow, I find that the unions themselves have become part of the problem. They have become complicit in the established nomenclature for the determination of tariffs. So for instance, the Trades Union Congress is represented on the PURC, which is the regulator for tariff fixing. And so when tariffs are adjusted upwards, it becomes very difficult for the unions to take a position that actually counters the PURC’s approval of those high tariffs. It would have been much, much easier if the TUC [(Ghana)] was not involved. Usually, the representation is at a very high level, is it the Secretary General? (interview with Obenfo, 2018).

As mentioned earlier, the TUC (Ghana) withdrew the trade union representative from the PURC in 2013. Mensah, a former Secretary General of the TUC (Ghana), recalls that the unions ‘got to a level where we decided in anger to withdraw our representation [at PURC]. This was because we felt if decisions are made, the contention will be that we are part of that decision’ (interview with Mensah, 2017). Therefore, the boycott of the PURC in 2013 was meant to remove the contentions over the compatibility between the overt campaigns that trade unions wage against electricity tariffs hikes that are gazetted by the PURC and the trade union representation at the PURC.

Yet, reports by the media and interview with a key informant in this study show that the decision to withdraw from the PURC generated further controversy (Ghanaweb, 2016; interview with Peters, 2017). A resident of Ghana took the union to court. The plaintiff asked the court to declare the action of the TUC (Ghana) as unconstitutional (Ghanaweb, 2016). The plaintiff also asked the court to order the union to restore its membership at the PURC (ibid.)<sup>3</sup> One of the lawyers who represented the TUC (Ghana) in court recounts that ‘at the heart of that litigation was whether we [TUC (Ghana)] can on one breath, be represented on the commission and join in the decision making, and at the same time, come back in a large group and criticise the decision that has been made’ (interview with Peters, 2017). Therefore, the trade union representation at PURC has, for some, a negative effect on the legitimacy of the overt campaigns that the unions undertake against electricity tariff hikes that are announced by the PURC.

Nonetheless, trade unions maintained that their overt struggles against the decisions of the PURC on electricity tariffs increases are justified (interview with Dr. Mensah, 2018). They point to their minority position on the PURC board as their main justification. We have seen that only one of the nine commissioners of the PURC is a trade unionist. Therefore, as an officer of the Ghana Medical Association puts it, ‘if you look at the composition of the board [PURC], our [union] vote there will be that of minority. So even though the board [PURC]

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<sup>3</sup> The TUC (Ghana) restored its representation at the PURC after the reduction of tariff hikes following the demonstrations. This brought the court case to an end.

takes a decision which technically speaking is binding on everybody, the records will also show that our [union] rep dissented (interview with Dr. Mensah, 2018). Thus, the composition of the PURC and the limits it imposes on the trade union influence over the electricity tariff decisions, require unions to ‘ensure that beyond the board [PURC], we make our voices heard’ (interview with Dr. Mensah).

#### **6.4 Internal Trade Union Contradiction of the Struggles against Electricity Tariff Increases**

Another aspect that needs analysing is the way in which trade union protests on electricity price adjustments in Ghana generate some contradictions and tensions within unions (interview with Hator, 2017; interview with Piesie, 2017; interview with Fiifi, 2017). Electricity tariff hikes and the struggles by trade unions against them mean different things to different interest groups within the trade unions. Electricity workers and their unions – the PUWU and the PSWU – benefit from electricity tariff hikes. According to Hator, an officer at the PSWU:

electricity companies generate their own income. Therefore, the conditions of the workers, and the salaries that are paid, are based on the income they generate from the power they produce. So obviously, if we [electricity consumers] are not paying for the real cost of power, it is going to have a toll on the fortunes of the company [and] affect our negotiations in terms of the level of salaries that we can take (interview with Hator, 2017).

In light of the above, trade union struggles against electricity tariff increases add to the difficulties of the trade unions that organise in the electricity sector to achieve positive collective bargaining outcomes. This generates two forms of contradictions among and within the trade unions. The first is between the TUC (Ghana) and two of its affiliate unions – the PUWU and the PSWU – that organise electricity workers. Piesie, a former Secretary General of the TUC (Ghana), pointed out that:

the PUWU [and the PSWU] look at the interest of [their] members, whereas the TUC [(Ghana)] looks at the broader picture, the wider social consequences of tariff increases. When it comes to that, [it is] very difficult for the PUWU/[PSWU] and the TUC [(Ghana)] to harmonise their positions’ (interview with Piesie, 2017).

Second, electricity workers and their unions face two contradictory positions (interview with Fiifi, 2017). The first is a parochial position that supports electricity user fees hikes because of their positive effects on wages and working condition. The other is a more altruistic position – to align with the TUC (Ghana) and the other unions – that stands against electricity price increases. These contradictory positions raise fundamental questions about the *raison d'être* of the PUWU and the PSWU. Fiifi, a PUWU executive member at the ECG sums this up in the following words:

let me say [giggles], let's say that our position will always be in conflict. Because we are in an organisation and we feel that the organisation has to make money to make our lives better in the form of better remuneration. In our CA [collective agreement], there is a clause that if the company makes profit, they will pay some bonuses to workers. Increasing tariff is an easier way, very easy way for the company to make profit. And the ability to pay of the company will also go up. Then we can easily make our way up in terms of salary negotiations. Secondly, we also have, in our salary, we have what is called utility, the company gives some units [of electricity which are] converted into cash for the worker. So if electricity [tariff] goes up, it will reflect in a higher payment of the worker. So for the staff of the ECG, I must say that it will be a conflict, if electricity [tariff] goes up, in a way the workers of the ECG benefits (interview with Fiifi, 2017).

The above shows that the reductions in the rates of electricity tariff increases that have been wrestled by trade unions have come at some cost to a section of unionised workers. Improvements in the wages and working conditions of about 9000 workers who are directly employed by the electricity companies in Ghana (interview with Otabil, 2017) have been constrained by trade union struggles. These workers are unionised by the PSWU and the PUWU and constitute about 2 percent of the total membership of the TUC (Ghana).

In addition, analysis of the sources of trade union income shows that the trade union struggles against electricity tariff increases have implications for the revenues of the utilities unions and the TUC (Ghana) (TUC 2018). The constitution of the TUC (Ghana) requires union members to pay no less than one percent of their salaries as membership dues to their national unions. Out of this, the national unions pay 30 percent to the TUC (Ghana). This means that wage increases associated with higher tariffs directly affect the contribution that electricity workers make to their unions and to the TUC (Ghana). Significantly, even though electricity

workers constituted just about 2 percent of the total membership of the TUC (Ghana), their financial contribution to the union is substantial. Unionised workers of the VRA, the GRIDCO, and the ECG contributed about GH¢1.8 million (US\$406,200) or 10.5 percent of the membership dues of the TUC (Ghana) from 2015 to 2017 (TUC 2018). Therefore, the restraints that union struggles impose on electricity user fee hikes affect the revenues of the unions that organise in the utilities and the TUC (Ghana).

Significantly, the trade-offs and conflicts of interests that come with the trade union struggles on electricity tariffs in Ghana are brought about by the delays in the payment and the non-payment of electricity subsidies that the government of Ghana takes upon itself as result of trade union struggles. As shown earlier, trade union campaigns on utility fee increases in 2010 and 2013 resulted in government subsidies of GH¢184 million (US\$127.2 million) and GH¢400 million (US\$194.95 million), respectively. In 2016, the unions forced the government of Ghana to absorb between 9.2 and 14.2 percentage points of the rate of the gazetted electricity user fee increase. Yet the government has not always met the pledges that it makes to subsidise electricity by paying the ECG. Table 5 shows that in 2018, the government of Ghana owned the ECG about GH¢306.062 million (US\$63.15 million) in subsidies.

It is in light of the above that a key informant (trade unionist) at the ECG maintained the electricity subsidy regime undermines their collective bargaining outcomes (interview with Mills, 2017). Mills, a trade unionist at the ECG, lamented that because the ‘subsidies never come [giggles], and you go for salary negotiations and they [the ECG management] tell you that the subsidies are not coming. So it is a difficult thing’ (interview with Mills, 2017). Therefore, trade unions win subsidies that are not always fully paid to the electricity companies by the government of Ghana. This affects the revenues of electricity companies and the interests of utility workers and their trade unions.

Nonetheless, the interviews with the trade unionists in this study show that the internal contradictions and the conflict of interests that occur with trade union struggles on electricity tariffs in Ghana neither derail the struggles nor wreck the relations among the unions in the

country (interview with Mills, 2017; interview with Hator, 2017; interview with Fiifi, 2017). This is because the unions settle such conflicts of interests with shared utilitarian values, by emphasising on the interests of the majority, i.e., electricity consumers in the country, over the positive effects of tariff hikes on the wages and conditions of service of electricity workers. Mills, a local union leader at the ECG, explained that they accept the trade union struggles on electricity tariffs because ‘we [the ECG workers] are just 6000 and the TUC [Ghana] is fighting for larger mass of workers. So when you look at it, you just have to be indifferent [laughs] or stay neutral’ (interview with Mills, 2017). Therefore, the ways in which the unions in Ghana settle the conflict of interests associated with their struggles on electricity tariffs compromise the interests of utility unions and their members. Yet, the utility unions and their members do not publicly resist or contradict the general trade union position on electricity user fees.

Rather, the PUWU, the PSWU, and their members adopt a passive stance towards the trade union struggles on electricity user fees in Ghana (interview with Mills, 2017). This happens even when they feel that electricity tariff hikes are necessary. Mills and his colleagues at the ECG – members of the PUWU – ‘are always indifferent [to the trade union struggles against tariff increases]. In fact, we have never openly opposed the struggles of the union’ (interview with Mills, 2017). In addition, the members of the PSWU at the VRA and the GRIDCo do not participate in the struggle on electricity tariffs. This, according to a national officer of the PSWU is:

for political reasons and strategic reasons, more of strategic reasons. We [PSWU] don’t allow our members in [company name deleted], working in the utility companies to take part in the struggles. Because that will be contradictory and that may also affect them in terms of their relationship with their employers (interview with Hator, 2017).

The attitude that electricity workers and their unions have shown towards the struggles that trade unions wage on electricity tariff increases in Ghana is brought about by their belief in the higher importance of lower electricity tariffs in the country, and the relevance of the subsidies that trade unions win through the lobbying and campaigning (interview with Fiifi, 2017). According to Fiifi, an electricity worker, ‘I am the only one in my family who works at the ECG. My other family members pay [for] electricity. So if tariffs are reduced, I am ok.

There will not be much burden on my family and other consumers’ (interview with Fiifi, 2017). Therefore, in spite of the benefits of tariffs hikes to electricity workers, they acknowledge that the subsidies that are generated by trade union struggles support low-income electricity users, including their relations and dependants.

Summing up the compromises that avert strains in the relationships among unions over the struggles on electricity tariffs, a Steering Committee member of the TUC (Ghana), maintains that ‘the PUWU and the PSWU look at the bigger picture of being family members. Sometimes they take positions that may advance the interests of their members. But this has never created a problem between these affiliates and the TUC (Ghana)’ (interview with Kwaku, 2017).

### **6.5 Trade Union Relationship with Social Movements in Utility Tariff Struggles**

The interviews with trade unionists and CSO officials in this study revealed that even though the trade union protests on electricity tariffs in Ghana signal a capacity to work on issues that go beyond the factory gate, there is a dearth of collaborations and alliance building between trade unions and CSOs in the country around electricity pricing. This is due to two main reasons (interview with Ansah, 2017; interview with Baaba, 2018; interview with Peters, 2017). The first is ideological differences on the role that should be played by the state in the provision of electricity. In 2004, the TUC (Ghana) asked the government of Ghana to ensure the ‘financial soundness and viability of the utility companies’ (TUC, 2004: 21). In 2008, the union called on the government to invest in the utilities to ensure that they get the requisite infrastructure (TUC, 2008: 172). During the 2013 trade union protests on electricity user fees in Ghana, the unions urged the government of Ghana to invest in electricity infrastructure and ensure efficient management of public utility companies in the country (TUC, 2013: 89). In addition, we know how trade unions struggles have kept government interventions in the form of subsidised pricing of electricity in the country.

The aforementioned position of trade unions on the role of government in the power sector is contrary to the views of two of the main electricity policy think tanks in Ghana (interview with Baaba, 2018; interview with Ansah, 2017). According to Ansah, the Executive Director of one of the leading energy think tanks in Ghana – which will remain nameless to protect the anonymity of the informant –, ‘if you are just thinking about how to sustain the [electricity] sector, you may not always be in the same position with labour’ (interview with Ansah, 2017). Similarly, Baaba, the Programmes Officer of another leading electricity policy think tanks in Ghana – which will remain nameless to protect the anonymity of the informant – maintains that:

we believe in libertarianism. We believe in free market ideology. We believe that the market must work. You know that in the power sector for instance, there is a lot of government interference. If we were to step in [participate in trade union struggles on electricity], our ideologies may not be accepted as they should be. Meanwhile it is the correct way that things should work in order for us to attain efficiency (interview with Baaba, 2018).

In line with the free market ideology, Baaba’s policy think tank maintains that:

Subsidies [on electricity] are supposed to be removed because they do not help with generation, they don’t help with the distribution. They have negative impact on consumers. If you want a properly functioning generation, distribution, you know subsidies sort of form a roadblock. Because at the end of the day, even though there are subsidies, the government does not really pay the subsidies (interview with Baaba, 2018).

In contrast to the above, according to an officer of the TUC (Ghana), the position of the union is that:

the market should not determine the pricing of utilities by itself. The position is that the prices must be competitive and yet it must be affordable for people to be able to utilise it. And whatever the shortfall, the gap between determining competitive prices and affordability is, we have always pushed government to pick it up. So that has been generally what our position has been (interview with Peters, 2017).

Such ideological difference has impeded alliances between trade unions and two of the main policy think tanks that advocate on electricity in Ghana.

The second, and the most important factor that has prevented collaborations between trade unions and the CSOs in this study on electricity user fees in Ghana is the existence of



significant differences in the positions of unions and of CSOs, when it comes to the desired levels of tariffs and the rate of electricity user fee adjustments (interview with Isaacs, 2018; interview with Ansah, 2017). Trade unions in Ghana consistently advocate for lower electricity tariffs and moderate rates of increases. In contrast, the CSOs that took part in this study hold varied positions on the levels of electricity user fees that should be charged in Ghana. They have at different times, advocated for downwards adjustments of electricity tariffs and higher rates of electricity user fee increases. Isaacs, an Executive Director of one of the leading energy policy tanks in Ghana – which will remain nameless to protect the anonymity of the informant – summed this up in the following words:

[name deleted] is not your typical civil society or NGO that is by all means going to say that tariff should come down. I have come to the point that I knew that tariffs were low, and they were not cost reflective. But if we feel that the citizens are also being ripped off, we would also talk about it (interview with Isaacs, 2018).

The above position does not match the persistent demand by the trade unions for lower tariffs, making an alliance between unions and CSOs around electricity pricing less likely. Scipes (2014) points that a common understanding of the challenges of economic liberalisation is necessary for effective coordination of alliance efforts towards addressing the challenges that the prevailing socioeconomic order poses. Yet, a common position on electricity pricing is lacking between trade unions and potential CSO allies. Ansah, the Executive Director of another leading energy think tank in Ghana – which will remain nameless to protect the anonymity of the informant – that took part in the study explains that his organisation has not worked with the trade unions on electricity pricing in the country because:

for a think tank, you always want to assess, like I was saying, when we were demanding that tariff goes up, that wouldn't sit well with labour [giggles]. Trade unions will not want to see you demand that tariff goes up, so ultimately you have lost that ally there. So that is where the challenge [to working together] also is sometimes (interview with Ansah, 2017).

## **6.6 Trade Union Struggles on Electricity Price and Individualised Alliances**

In place of institutional alliances and collaborations, the trade union protests on electricity user fees in Ghana have involved direct interactions between the trade unions and non-

unionised individuals (Dela, focus group discussion in Tema, 2018; interview with Charles, 2017). I refer to this form of interaction and the relationships that it generates, as an *individualised alliance*. This *individualised alliance* expresses itself in direct and unmediated engagements between trade unions and non-unionised persons. In *individualised alliances*, trade unions bypass established organisations and directly reach out to non-union members, including those in the informal economy. Such alliance and its relations are ad hoc and targeted at specific objectives.

The most active form of the *individualised alliances* between trade unions and non-union members on electricity user fees in Ghana could be observed in Tema (interview with Charles, 2018). The Tema DCL of the TUC (Ghana) recruited and involved non-unionised persons in their demonstrations and other actions against electricity tariff increases. In the 2013 protests, the Tema DCL activists ‘went to the markets, we went to the shops ... we went to appeal to the shop owners. The drivers, taxis were not going to work that day. *Trotros* from Tema to Accra were not going to work’ (interview with Charles, 2017). Similarly, when the Tema DCL went on demonstrations against electricity user fee hikes in 2016,

taxi drivers, *trotro* drivers, sellers on the roads joined the demonstrations ... I remember two days before the demonstration, we went there to sensitise the people. They are not unionised groups, but they said because of this, we will join you. And [it] will amaze you that when we started the walk, as we were moving, the numbers were just growing. It was one of the most successful demonstrations that we ever had in Tema (focus group discussion in Tema, Dela, 2018)

The trade union activists in Tema have harnessed support from non-union members for protests on electricity user fees by establishing synergies between trade union objectives and consumer concerns (interview with Charles, 2017). This strategy and the *individualised alliances* that it generates, work out well for trade unions and non-unionised electricity consumers. The *individualised alliances* enable non-unionised electricity users to express their discontent with the levels of electricity tariff increases. According to Charles, an executive member of Tema DCL, even though ‘[tariff increases] also affect the non-formal and non-unionised, you know they are not unionised, and they don’t have any leader. So, until the union comes and appeals to them to join us, they don’t have anywhere to go’ (interview with Charles, 2017). In contrast, for the trade unions, the involvement of non-

union members – particularly informal economy operators – augments union numbers and allows them to frame the campaigns as broad-based struggles. This is necessary because, according to an executive member of the Tema DCL, ‘unionism is about numbers (interview with Charles, 2017). Therefore, even though the trade unions in Ghana did not forge formal alliances with community organisations in their struggle against electricity tariff increases, they benefited from directly recruiting non-union members for the campaigns. The synergies that the unions established between trade union objectives and the concerns of electricity consumers as well as the *individualised alliances* that the unions generate are important to the power that unions generate by their struggle for a more progressive pricing of electricity.

### **6.7 Conclusions: Struggles on Electricity Tariffs, SMU, Labour Aristocracy, Symbolic Power, and Mobilisation**

This chapter explored one of the instances of the trade union responses to economic liberalisation in Ghana: trade union resistance to higher electricity tariff increases. It shows that trade unions in Ghana have displayed some presence and influence in the electricity tariff regime of the country. We have seen how trade union in Ghana managed to achieve some modest outcomes in their struggle on the levels of electricity user fees increases.

The trade union protest on electricity tariff increases in Ghana provide some contextualised insights and lessons to the debate on SMU, symbolic power, labour aristocracy, and mobilisation. The electricity tariff protests of trade unions in Ghana constitute an instance of SMU, albeit of a slightly different type. The object of the struggles – electricity pricing – is not a typical workplace issue. In addition, the struggles are articulated by the trade unions as consumer struggles. We have seen that although the struggles benefited both unionised and non-unionised electricity users, they had greater impacts on non-union members, particularly low-income earners and informal economy operators. Also, lifeline electricity consumers, who have enjoyed the highest benefits of the trade union struggle against electricity tariff increases are less likely to be in unions. These features of the trade union struggles on electricity price hikes in Ghana demonstrate some of the core SMU elements, namely, the

importance of trade union struggles beyond the factory gates over broader socioeconomic issues (Lier and Stokke, 2006; Moody, 1997b). Also, such struggles exhibit one of Seidman's key ideas on SMU, namely the importance of trade unions in policy making and trade union demands for expanded services (Seidman, 2011: 95-96).

Significantly, the empirical findings of this case study offer insights that extend the conceptualisations on the role of trade unions and civil society actors in SMU, the relationships and contestations among SMU collaborators (Lier and Stokke, 2006; Okafor, 2009) and the needs for SMU to be intimately articulated with other non-unionised workers and democratic movements (Waterman, 1993:267). In chapter two, we saw that these assumptions tend to overly abstract trade union and CSO relations and lack adequate attention to the details and functioning of SMU in practice. However, the findings of this study show that context matters in the form of collaborations and alliances that emerge in SMU. We have seen that SMU can manifest in situations where formal alliances and collaborations between trade unions and CSOs are problematic and that direct linkages and engagements between trade unions and non-unionised beneficiaries of SMU actions are possible.

I have already explained how ideological differences and inconsistencies in positions on electricity user fees have inhibited alliance building between trade unions and the CSOs in this study around electricity tariffs in Ghana. Despite this, trade unions and electricity users in the country have engaged in different ways on electricity tariffs. Unions in Ghana have attracted public support for their struggles on utility tariffs by directly linking with the general public through *individualised alliances*. This form of SMU relationship did not involve trade unions and CSOs alliances. Instead, the unions directly engaged with non-unionised individual electricity users. We have seen how, the Tema DCL of the TUC (Ghana) involves non-trade union members in their protests and demonstrations on electricity tariffs. This form of trade union and community relations resembles the postulations that SMU favours shop floor and community contacts (Waterman, 1993: 269). The difference, however, is that in the case of the trade union struggles on electricity user fees in Ghana, there are no intermediary institutions or community organisations in such union and community contacts.

The second insight of this chapter is about how the articulation of the trade union resistance against electricity tariff hikes as consumer struggles reinforces the symbolic power of trade unions in the country. In chapter two, we learnt that symbolic power conceptualises a sphere of public and symbolic contestation where actions such as street marches and discursive strategies that emphasise social and citizenship rights, and not only workers' rights, are articulated (Von Holdt and Webster, 2008: 337). This form of power is constituted in the public sphere and draws on images and ideas that resonate with community and public consciousness (ibid.). In this chapter, we have seen that the trade union protests against electricity tariff increases manifest themselves in public denouncements of tariff increases by the unions in the media and other overt union actions. These galvanise public support and goodwill towards trade unions and generate some symbolic power for unions in Ghana.

The articulation of the trade union protests on electricity tariffs as consumer struggle and participation of non-union members in them, illustrate the ability of trade unions in Ghana to rally union members and non-union members to achieve some modest concessions on electricity user fees. We have seen how in 2010, the TUC (Ghana) forced a 42 percent hike in electricity user fees to 29 percent, requiring the government of Ghana to absorb the difference between the gazetted rates and what consumers actually paid as subsidies (about GH¢184 million or US\$127.2 million). In 2013, the trade union campaign lowered the electricity tariff hike from 78.9 percent to 53.9 percent. Consequently, the government of Ghana had to absorb the difference as subsidies (about GH¢400 million or US\$194.95 million). We have seen how business associations in Ghana commended the trade unions in the country for this struggle. And in 2016, trade union protests achieved a reduction of a 59.2 percent increase of electricity user fees by between 9 and 14 percentage points. Such concessions, albeit minimal, have power implications for trade unions. The outcomes of such union struggles, even though limited in their impact, have symbolic power benefits because they exhibit that trade unions can confront the PURC and the government of Ghana and achieve some concessions. Such symbolic power is critical for trade union renewal and the achievement of union goals in the face of declining trade union density.

In addition, the trade union campaigns on electricity tariffs in Ghana challenge widely held assumptions on diminished trade union relevance and vitality. Silver points to a near consensus on a general and severe crisis of the labour movement owing to declines in strikes and other overt manifestations of labour militancy (Silver, 2003: 1). Lévesque and Murray talk about reduced influence of trade unions on economic and social policies that affect workers (Lévesque and Murray, 2010: 334). In light of this literature, even though the gains that trade unions have achieved in their protests on electricity user fees are modest, Ghanaian trade unions have managed to prevent the government of Ghana from completely removing subsidies on electricity in order to achieve full cost recovery through user prices. These findings point to a trade union movement in crisis and with limited societal influence, but not at a dead movement altogether.

Furthermore, the findings of this chapter challenge the “labour aristocracy theory’s” usefulness to describe trade unions significance in Ghana. As we have seen, thanks to these struggles of the trade unions against the removal on subsidies on electricity, the trade unions have won benefit for all electricity consumers in the country. These undermine the application of labour aristocracy to unionised workers and their trade unions in Ghana.

Lastly, the strategies that the trade unions in Ghana have deployed in their protests against the removal of subsidies on electricity tariffs present interesting food for thought to revisit the assumptions of mobilisation strategies. In chapter two, we saw the use of mobilisation theory to postulates the necessary conditions that bring about the transformation of workers into collective actors who are disposed to, and capable of, creating and sustaining collective organisation and action against employers (Kelly, 2019). We also learnt about the importance of the transition from dissatisfaction to injustice, i.e. the conviction that an action or situation is wrong or illegitimate (Holgate et. al. 2018: 607), and the attribution of injustice to employers (Darlington, 2018: 3) in mobilisation. In this sense, mobilisation theory largely focuses on workplace struggles and struggles against employers. However, in this chapter, we have seen how trade unions in Ghana converted the dissatisfaction with electricity tariffs hikes into injustice and collective interests, and blamed the government of Ghana and the PURC. These strategies contributed to the transformations of both unionised and non-

unionised electricity users into collective actors against the removal of subsidies on electricity user tariffs in Ghana. Therefore, this study teaches us that the strategies of mobilisation theory can be applied in non-workplace issues and against entities that may not have direct employment relationship with workers and their trade unions.

In sum, this chapter teaches us that trade unions in Ghana have not passively endured economic liberalisation. Rather, they have demonstrated willingness and some ability to withstand and roll back the complete commercialisation of electricity in Ghana. And even though the discounts in the electricity tariff increases that trade unions in the country have negotiated from the government of Ghana are marginal, they nevertheless show the ability of trade union to galvanise forces beyond unionised workers to achieve goals outside the trade union core concerns. Such actions are necessary steps towards restoring the mojo of trade unions. Importantly, the struggles also illustrate that the current trade union relevance or power question is not only answered at the workplace or through increased membership – which the next chapter focuses – or alliances with CSOs. It shows that trade unions can, through struggles outside the workplace and direct linkages with non-union members, assume some influence and relevance.

## **CHAPTER 7: TRADE UNIONS AND THE INFORMAL ECONOMY IN GHANA**

### **7.1 Introduction**

This chapter is about the informal economy and trade unions in Ghana. It explores the unionisation of informal economy operators as another facet of the trade union responses to economic liberalisation in Ghana. The chapter looks at why and how trade unions in Ghana organise in the informal economy. It also highlights the status of informal economy operators in trade unions, and the contradictions and the challenges that come with the inclusion of informal economy operators – most of whom are self-employed and small enterprise owners – into trade unions. These insights into how trade union in Ghana went about seeking new members in the informal economy in Ghana provides a useful narrative to debate on the importance of informal labour as a new source of trade union membership in contemporary times. Also, the findings presented in this chapter allow us to engage with some of the assumptions underlying arguments on SMU and labour aristocracy.

Since the 1990s, trade unions in Ghana have intensified organising in the informal economy (interview with Korklu, 2017; Konings, 2003; Amankwah, 1999). The TUC (Ghana) adopted a policy on organizing in the informal economy in 1996, established an Informal Economy Desk to assist its affiliates to organise in the informal economy, and began granting associate membership to informal economy associations (interview with Korklu, 2017). Some of the national unions – which hitherto focused exclusively on organising formal sector workers – began more proactive attempts to recruit informal economy operators. The Timber and Woodworkers Union (TWU) admitted informal self-employed chainsaw operators, firewood cutters, charcoal burners, and canoe carvers into the union (Amankwah, 1999: 8). The ICU assisted informal hairdressers and beauticians to form the Ghana Hairdressers and Beauticians' Association (Konings, 2003: 460).

These efforts to unionise workers in the informal economy brought their increased presence in trade unions. The TUC (Ghana) had about 81,000 informal economy members in 2018



(interview with Maame, 2018). This was about 16 percent of the membership of the union. The informal economy members of the TUC (Ghana) at the time of this study were from 19 informal economy associations that form the Union of Informal Workers Associations (UNIWA). The UNIWA organises informal economy operators in the creative arts sector, informal trade and retail workers, and domestic workers. It also covers informal metal fabricators, disabled workers in both formal and informal economies, and informal traditional caterers in Accra (ibid.).

With the aim to understand how trade unions in the country went about the unionisation of informal economy operators, this chapter is structured into five sections. Section 2 provides a discussion of the different approaches to conceptualising the informal economy. Section 3 reviews the context of the informal economy in Ghana. Section 4 zooms into organising in the informal economy. Section 5 presents the conclusions of the chapter.

## **7.2 The Informal Economy Debate**

Informal employment and informal economic activities have attracted significant conceptual and policy attention since the 1970s. Keith Hart is the first scholar to use the term “informal sector” in 1972, to describe low-income economic activities among unskilled migrants in Accra, Ghana (Chen, 2012: 2). Hart described these migrants as “sub-proletariat” and attributed their informal income-generating activities to ‘price inflation, inadequate wages, and the rise of surplus labour in the urban labour market’ (Hart, 1973: 61).

Since Hart’s ground-breaking work, conceptualisation and definitions of informality have evolved. Up until the 1980s, definitions of informal sector emphasised the economic unit of production rather than the individual worker, the kind of employment relationship, and the type of work performed by the worker (ILO, 1992: 12). In 1993, the International Conference of Labour Statisticians (ICLS) described the informal sector as units that operate with low level of organisation, little or no division of labour, and low capital. This definition maintained that where they are present, labour relations in the informal sector are mostly based on casual employment, kinship, and social relations instead of contractual

arrangements with formal guarantees (ICLS, 1993). A decade later, the ICLS extended the description of informality to include ‘all remunerative work (i.e., both self-employment and wage employment) that are not registered, regulated or protected by existing legal or regulatory frameworks, as well as non-remunerative work undertaken in an income-producing enterprise’ (ILO, 2020).

Currently, there is some consensus, at least at the definitional level, that by informal economy, one means a wide range of unregulated economic activities, including self-employment as well as paid work in small and large-scale production units (Chen, 2012). Informal self-employment includes employers in informal enterprises, own account workers in informal enterprises, contributing family workers (in informal and formal enterprises), and members of informal producers’ cooperatives (ibid.: 7). Informal wage employment covers workers who are employed without social protection contributions by formal or informal enterprises or as paid domestic workers by households (ibid.). This category includes employees of informal enterprises, casual or day labourers, temporary or part-time workers, paid domestic workers, contract workers, unregistered or undeclared workers, and industrial outworkers (ibid: 8). The definition of the informal economy also incorporates casual and/or unregulated wage work in industrialized, transition, and developing economies (ibid.: 7).

In spite of the evolutions in the definition, informal economy has remained largely synonymous with self-employment, at least in Africa (Rizzo, et. al., 2015; Bob-Milliar and Obeng-Odoom, 2011). Labour statistics and informal economy literature on the continent predominately view informal wage employment as an exception and self-employment as the rule (Rizzo, et. al., 2015: 149). This assumption has been sustained by a long-held fallacy of ‘misplaced aggregation’ which conceptually conflates entities that do not belong together and should not be aggregated into one category (ibid.: 150). Such ‘misplaced aggregation’ has made paid employment almost invisible in the informal economy. For instance, as we shall see in this chapter, in Ghana, trade unions fail to reach paid workers in the informal economy. In addition, most public interventions in the informal economy in the country have by-passed paid workers in the informal economy (Bob-Milliar and Obeng-Odoom, 2011). Thus, the narrow assumption about the composition of the informal economy has influenced

and continue to shape policies on, and conceptualisation of, the informal economy,

The informal economy is generally conceptualised in four ways: dualists, structuralists, legalist, and voluntarists perspectives (Moser, 1978; Castells and Portes, 1989; De Soto, 1989; Chen, 2012; Otoo, 2016). These perspectives differ in their assumptions about the causes of informality, its modes of operation, and the employment relations in informal production units. In addition, ideas on the relationships between the informal economy and the formal sector and the productivity levels of these segments of economies underpin the differences between the dualist, structuralist, legalist, and voluntarist conceptualisations of the informal economy.

The main thrust of the dualist perspective is that sharp distinctions exist between the formal sector and the informal economy (Chen, 2012: 4; Otoo, 2016: 14). Dualists agree that informal economy is distinct from, and not related to, the formal sector even though the informal economy provides livelihood for the poor and a safety net in times of crisis (Chen, 2012: 4). This notwithstanding, it is important to note that differences exist in dualists assumptions about the potential of the informal economy. Some of dualist models – mostly the earlier ones –, celebrate the potential of the informal economy to unleash entrepreneurship (De Soto, 1989). In contrast, others assume that informal economic activities are marginal to the formal sector owing to perceptions of the inherently low productivity and growth potential of informal units (Chen, 2012: 4; Otoo, 2016: 14). They perceive informality as an outcome of underdevelopment and therefore, as economies develop, more informal workers will be absorbed from the subsistence sector to the capitalist sector (ibid.).

The second of the conceptualisations of the informal economy is the legalist approach. This perspective emphasises on the role of regulations in creating and reinforcing the existence of the informal economy. Legalists postulates that small and unregistered firms, petty traders, petty commodity producers, and others, operate informally because the regulations that are imposed on them by the state are excessive, and as a result, inhibit their transitions from informality to formality (Otoo, 2016). Legalists also posit that regulations create and entrench

informality because they impose constraints on the growth and expansion of large-scale enterprises which affect their ability to absorb job seekers into the formal economy (ibid). The legalists argument suggests that government and trade union protections in the formal sector inhibit the growth of the formal sector and pushes many jobs into the unprotected informal sector (Mazumdar, 1976). In addition, legalists conceive the informal sector as a refuge for individuals who find adherence to laws to be prohibitive in their pursuit of legitimate economic goals (De Soto, 1989). Hence addressing the persistence and expansion of informality requires deregulation of the economy (ibid.).

The third of the broad conceptualisations of informality, structuralists perspectives, postulate that economies are segmented into different but structurally connected layers (Moser, 1978, Castells and Portes, 1989). This assumption, contrary to dualists perspectives, presents the formal economy and the informal economy as two ends of a continuum (Otoo, 2016: 9). Structuralists argue that there are fundamental linkages between the formal economy and the informal economy and emphasize that the relationship between the two sectors is dependent, exploitative, and involves the subordination of the informal economy to the supply of cheap labour and inputs to the formal economy (Otoo, 2016: 4). In this sense, the growth of informal economy activities and enterprises, cannot be separated from the restructuring strategies of formal enterprises such as subcontracting and the supply linkages between formal and informal economies (Meagher, 1995). Structuralists maintain that the subordination of the informal economy to the formal economy sector increases the profitability of large capitalist firms (Chen, 2012: 5).

The last of the general conceptualisations of the informal economy – the voluntarist perspective – espouses that informality is voluntary choice. Voluntarists maintain that informal entrepreneurs seek to avoid regulations and taxation (Chen, 2012: 5). Thus, informality is a choice that arises out of assessments of the costs and benefits of operating formally and informally (ibid). For voluntarists, informal establishments create unfair competition for formal sector firms because they evade regulation, taxes, and other costs of production (ibid). Consequently, unlike legalist who see excessive regulation as the cause of informality, voluntarists prescribes that informal firms must be brought under regulatory

control so as to increase the tax net and minimise the unfair competition they pose for formal enterprises (ibid: 6). However, according to Chen, the voluntarist approach does not pay much attention to the synergies and the connections that exist between informal establishments and formal enterprises (ibid).

Although the dualists, structuralist, legalist, and voluntarist perspectives have aspects that are useful in analysing the informal economy, in Ghana, the evidence suggests that none of these broad approaches alone provide adequate insights into the informal sector and informal employment. This is because the persistence of significant heterogeneity among informal economy units in the country, the different vulnerabilities and interests of informal economy participants, and the inconsistencies in the attitudes of Ghanaian authorities towards the informal economy, speak to different elements of the dualists, structuralists, legalist, and voluntarist conceptualisations. As I would elaborate in the next chapter, paid workers at informal traditional restaurants in Accra are not entrepreneurs who seek to avoid any regulations. They work for informal entrepreneurs and the non-enforcement of employment standards and employment protection regulations at traditional restaurants compromises their welfare and interests. Also, in the next chapter, we shall see that contrary to the voluntarist assumptions, even though traditional restaurants in Accra are defined as informal – because they do not register with the Registrar of Companies or pay social security contributions – they are vigorously regulated by the Accra City Council and tax authorities through annual permit regime, medical certification requirements, and taxation rules. Moreover, the difference that exists in the tax rules for formal sector establishments and traditional restaurants in Accra at the time of this study, illustrates the validity of the structuralist assumptions on the unequal and exploitative relationship between the informal economy and formal sector. The tax regime for formal sector firms is based on earnings. In contrast, as we shall see in the next chapter, the taxes that are imposed on traditional restaurants in Accra are quarterly tax stamps that are not based on actual earnings. This means that traditional restaurant operators pay taxes in advance of expected incomes. Hence, when they shut down over a long time or experience significant slump in patronage, these enterprises would have paid taxes on unearned incomes. This, and the differences in the situations and interests of traditional restaurant owners and their workers show the heterogeneous nature on informality.

They point to the fact that none of the four broad perspectives on the informal economy can solely be used to explain the nature of the informal economy in Ghana and the attitude of public authorities towards informality.

### **7.3 The Informal Economy in Ghana**

#### ***7.3.1 Ambivalent Attitudes and Treatments***

The literature and the interviews with the informal economy operators in this study show that the attitude of public authorities towards the informal economy in Ghana is a continuum of hostility and acquiescence (interview with Kojo, 2018; Crentsil and Owusu, 2018; Onuoha, 2014: 123). At one end of this continuum, metropolitan and municipal authorities often harass informal economy operators in decongestion exercises that are aimed at removing informal economic activities and informal settlers from unauthorised urban spaces (Onuoha, 2014: 123). Such decongestion exercises often involve the deployment of state security agencies, violent destruction of unauthorised structures, and the chasing of hawkers from streets and sidewalks in a cruel, inhuman, and degrading manner (Crentsil and Owusu, 2018). According to Kojo, an informal economy operator in Accra, ‘they [the government] picked us and dumped us somewhere. We were operating where they have now built the Pentagon House. When they were evicting us, they just beat us and drove us away (interview with Kojo, 2018). Such decongestion exercises and the hostile attitudes towards informal economy units – the inhumane and degrading treatments – portray informal economy actors and activities as undesirables.

In sharp contrast to the above, at the other end of the continuum, the attitudes toward the informal economy in Ghana consist of acquiescence, legitimisation, and even support. These manifest themselves in the regulation, taxation, and sporadic tolerance and support of informal economic units and activities by the national government and the local government authorities (Budlender, 2015; Bob-Milliar and Obeng-Odoom, 2011). In 2005, the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development halted a decongestion exercise by the Accra

city council because ‘the government [of Ghana] could not watch unconcerned while the victims were displaced [and that] it was imperative that the livelihood of traders be protected’ (Bob-Milliar and Obeng-Odoom, 2011: 272). In 2013, the government of Ghana gave cash grants to about 7,300 informal market traders whose businesses were destroyed by fire (Budlender, 2015: 1). Such actions show the tolerance towards, and the support to, the informal economy by the national government and legitimises informal economic activities in the country.

In addition to the national government, city and local councils in Accra also contribute to the legitimisation of the informal economy through their annual operation permits regulations and the collection of daily tolls (Local Government Bulletin, 2018; Budlender, 2015). In 2014, the Accra city authority collected GH¢0.50 (US\$0.17) per day from each street vendor (Budlender, 2015: 1). Traditional restaurants in Accra paid between GH¢60 (US\$12.80) to GH¢120 (US\$25.70) as business permit fees to the Accra Metropolitan Assembly (AMA) in 2018 (Local Government Bulletin, 2018: 29). These regulations, together with the support and concessions that public authorities sometimes extend to informal economic units, conflict with the decongestion exercises – such as the removal of Kojo and others from where they have now built the Pentagon House (interview with Kojo, 2018) – by the Accra city authorities.

Apart from the government of Ghana and the local authorities, trade unions in the country also play an important role in supporting and legitimising the informal economy (interview with Nketia, 2017; interview with Boateng, 2017). Organising in the informal economy extended trade union protection to informal economy operators. In 2015, an intervention by the TUC (Ghana) halted the demolishing of the traditional restaurants of its members at Tema Station. Nketia, a traditional restaurant operator, recounts that the ‘TUC [Ghana] called the Mayor [of Accra] and the Mayor said they would not reach our side with the demolishing of structures at Tema Station’ (interview with Nketia, 2017). In addition, trade union efforts solved an impasse between the Ga East Municipal authority and the Ga East Traders Association (GETA). According to a member of the GETA, ‘we thought that the taxes [fee] were too high. TUC [(Ghana)] took the matter up with the Ga East Municipal Assembly at

Abokobi and solved it for us. They even reduced the taxes [fees]' (interview with Boateng, 2017). Such trade union interventions have contributed to the tolerance and legitimacy of the informal economy. At the same time, it important to note that the tolerance for the informal economy in Ghana is also influenced by the centrality of informal economic activities in the country, on which the analysis now focuses.

#### ***7.4.2 Stylised Features of the Ghanaian Informal Economy***

Figures from the Ghana Statistical Service (GSS) show that informal economy dominates Ghana's economy and labour market. The latest available estimates show that about 88 percent of the country's workforce were in informal economy in 2013 (GSS, 2014: 23). Importantly, even though informality is pervasive in the Ghanaian economy, there are some differences in the extent of informal economy employment in urban and rural areas. Informality in Ghana is most prominent in rural areas. In 2013, about 95 percent of rural workers in Ghana were employed in the informal economy (Otoo et. al, 2015: 49). A relatively, lower proportion, about 80 percent of the workforce in urban areas were in the informal economy (ibid.). The share of informal employment in rural Ghana can be explained by the dominance of agriculture in rural employment. Ghana's agriculture is predominantly informal. It employed seven out of ten of rural workers in 2013 (GSS, 2014: 26). In contrast, only 16.8 percent of urban dwellers in the country were employed in agriculture (ibid.). Therefore, agriculture employment contributes to the differences in the shares of the informal economy in rural and urban areas in Ghana.

Apart from the urban and rural distinctions, there are differences in the concentrations of males and females in the informal economy in Ghana (Otoo et. al, 2015).. In 2013, the proportions of males and females who operated in the informal economy were 83.5 percent and 94 percent, respectively (ibid.: 50). The difference can be attributed to the educational outcomes among the sexes. In 2013, the percentages of females and males who had never been to school were 24.3 percent and 14.6 percent, respectively (GSS, 2014b: 12). Also, more males (18 %) than females (11%) had completed secondary and higher education in 2013



(ibid.). Given the importance of formal education for formal employment, these differences in educational outcomes of males and females in the country partly account for their different rates of participation in the informal economy.

Looking at the informal economy across industries, although informality is present in almost all the industries in Ghana, the largest shares of informal employment in the country are in agriculture and trade industries. As illustrated by Table 7, agriculture employed about half of informal economy workers in the country. Trade ranked second in the industrial distribution of employment in the informal economy of Ghana. Together, agriculture and trade employs over two-thirds of informal operators in the country.

**Table 7: Industrial distribution of informal economy workers – 2013**

<b>Industry</b>	<b>Box sexes</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Urban</b>	<b>Rural</b>
Agriculture	51.61	58.71	45.72	21.29	74.95
Mining	1.32	2.22	0.56	0.79	1.72
Manufacturing	9.00	7.53	10.23	12.85	6.04
Utilities	0.15	0.25	0.08	0.31	0.03
Construction	2.89	6.17	0.17	4.60	1.57
Trade	20.76	10.35	29.40	36.35	8.77
Transport	3.48	7.51	0.14	5.93	1.59
Finance	0.22	0.29	0.17	0.48	0.02
Community, personal and social services	10.56	6.97	13.55	17.40	5.30
Total	100	100	100	100	100

Source: GSS, 2014e

Table 8 shows that another feature of the informal economy in Ghana is its heterogeneity of employment status and the related control over workers means of production. Ghana's informal economy is characterised by self-employment without employees (53.8), contributing family work (25.8%), and paid employment (10.6%). As already discussed, there is ground to be sceptical about these statistics, as paid employment tends to be undercounted and self-employment overcounted.

**Table 8: Job status of informal economy workers (2013)**

<b>Status in Job</b>	<b>Both sexes</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Urban</b>	<b>Rural</b>
Paid employee	10.63	17.13	5.25	18.55	4.54
Non agric self-employed with employees	2.70	2.44	2.91	4.97	0.94
Non agric self-employed without employees	25.20	13.98	34.49	40.31	13.56
Non agric contributing family worker	3.98	2.77	4.98	6.05	2.39
Agric self-employed with employees	2.00	2.86	1.29	2.03	1.98
Agric self-employed without employees	28.78	37.68	21.39	12.37	41.42
Agric contributing family worker	22.01	17.37	25.86	9.15	31.92
Domestic employee	0.22	0.29	0.17	0.38	0.10
Casual workers	1.88	3.01	0.95	2.02	1.78
Apprentice	2.52	2.35	2.67	4.05	1.35
Other	0.08	0.11	0.04	0.14	0.03
Total	100	100	100	100	100

Source: GSS, 2014e

### ***7.3.3 Growing Informality in Ghana***

Informality has been on the rise since the advent of economic liberalisation in Ghana (Boakye, 2004; Otoo et. al, 2009; GSS, 2014). In many ways, the rise in the prevalence of the informal economy was intensified by the economic recovery and structural adjustment programmes in Ghana. These programmes occasioned substantial retrenchments in the public sector and constrained formal private sector job creation in the country (Panford, 2001). Formal sector employment in Ghana declined at an average rate of 3.7 percent per annum from 1985 to 1991 (Obeng-Odoom, 2012: 95). It has been estimated that formal public and private jobs in the country went down from 464,000 in 1985 to 230,000 in 1990 (Government of Ghana, 1995: 6).

Most of the decline in formal employment in the country occurred in the public services, i.e. in the civil service and state-owned enterprises (Anyemedu, 2000; Sarpong, 1997). About

73,000 public sector workers in the country were retrenched under civil service reforms (Anyemedu, 2000: 5). An additional 100,000 workers were laid-off by the state-owned Ghana Cocoa Board (ibid.). The job cuts in the Civil Service and at the Ghana Cocoa Board alone – about 173,000 – accounted for about 74 percent of the 234,000 formal jobs that were destroyed from 1985 to 1990. The destruction of these public sector jobs was brought about by the public enterprise reforms and government expenditure rationalization measures such as the labour retrenchment under the economic recovery and structural adjustment programmes (Sarpong, 1997: 33).

In addition to the direct job losses, the trade liberalisation policy that was implemented under the economic recovery and structural adjustment programmes constrained formal employment creation in other ways, and this contributed to the surge of the informal economy in Ghana (Baah, et. al., 2009; Boakye, 2004; Anyemedu, 2000). The implementation of this policy meant that most local manufacturers in the country were exposed to competition from imported goods they could not cope with (Anyemedu, 2000: 5). Notably, sharp rises in imports from China squeezed out some domestic manufacturers in Ghana and constrained their ability to create employment in the country (Baah, et. al., 2009: 88). Therefore, the trade liberalisation policy that was implemented as part of the economic reforms affected the growth and expansion of local industries and limited formal job creation in Ghana (Boakye, 2004).

The direct job cuts in the formal sector and the constraints which the implementation of economic reform policies imposed on formal employment growth in Ghana spurred informal economic activities in two main ways (GSS, 2014; Otoo et. al, 2009; Boakye, 2004). First, most of those who lost their jobs in the public sector had to eke a living in the informal economy (Boakye, 2004: 8) because of lack of job opportunities in the formal private sector (Otoo et. al, 2009: 1). Second, the inability of the formal private sector to generate jobs in required quantities pushed a large proportion of Ghana's population into the informal economy (GSS, 2014: 23). These are the trends that explain the growth in the proportion of Ghana's workforce in the informal economy from about 80 percent in 1999 (Otoo et. al, 2009: 1) to 88 percent in 2013 (Otoo et. al, 2015: 48).

The impacts of the economic recovery and structural adjustment programmes on employment in Ghana also played out in most of the developing countries that adopted such reform policies. In many of the third world countries that implemented such structural adjustment programmes, public sector retrenchments reduced the traditional role of the public sector as a major employer (ILO, 2003: 2). In addition, the structural adjustment policies hindered job creation in the formal private sector in these countries. These resulted in unprecedented growth in the informal economy in many of the countries that adopted such policies (ibid).

#### **7.4 Organising in the Informal Economy**

The decline in the share of the formal sector in employment affected trade union membership and organising in Ghana (Panford, 2001; Gockel and Vormawor, 2004; Britwum, 2007; Britwum, 2010). Given that trade unions in the country traditionally organised formal workers, job cuts in the formal sector resulted in sharp decline in union membership. In 1993, the Railway Workers' Union (RWU) lost 1,332 members to retrenchments (Britwum, 2007: 140). About 80,000 of the members of the ICU vanished during the implementation of the structural adjustment programmes (Britwum, 2010: 98). The membership of the TUC (Ghana) fell from about 635,000 in 1985 to about 520,000 in 1996 (Panford, 2001: 223). Therefore, the decline in formal employment in Ghana meant that 1) the trade unions in the country lost members and 2) they could no longer focus solely on the formal sector for memberships. These led to a renewed effort toward organising in the informal economy in Ghana.

##### ***7.4.1 A Renewed Focus***

The renewed focus on informal economy organising entailed the formulation of a policy on the informal economy and the development of structures for organising in the informal economy (interview with Maame, 2018; interview with Korklu, 2017). In 1996, the TUC (Ghana) adopted a policy on informal economy organising and subsequently established an

Informal Economy Desk to assist its affiliates to organise informal workers (interview with Korklu, 2017). According to a national officer of the UNIWA, the union also began granting associate membership to informal economy associations (interview with Maame, 2018). The TUC (Ghana) formed the UNIWA in 2015 to provide a common platform for the representation of informal economy operators and their associations in the structures of the union (ibid.).

In addition to the TUC (Ghana), some of the national unions that had traditionally focused on organising formal workers ventured into the informal economy (Amankwah, 1999; Britwum and Martens, 2008; Britwum, 2010). The General Agricultural Workers' Union (GAWU) extended union coverage to rural small-scale farmers. This move was inspired by the shift of plantation agriculture to out-grower and small-grower schemes (Britwum and Martens, 2008: 16). The Timber and Woodworkers Union (TWU) organised self-employed chainsaw operators, firewood cutters, charcoal burners, and canoe carvers into the National Sawyers Association (Amankwah, 1999: 8). The ICU assisted hairdressers and barbers in the country to form the Ghana Hairdressers and Beauticians Association (Konings, 2003: 460). This effort by ICU, followed its loss of about 80,000 members through retrenchments under the SAP in the 1980s (Britwum, 2010: 98).

Significantly, even though the economic reforms from the 1980s onwards in Ghana prompted a renewed emphasis on organising informal economy operators, trade unions in Ghana have a long history of relationship with the informal economy (Adu-Amankwah, 1999; Britwum and Martens, 2008; TUC, 2012b). Informal economy operators and their associations influenced the beginnings of unionism in Ghana (Adu-Amankwah, 1999: 7). In chapter four, we saw that informal artisans in the country organised themselves into associations and protested against the poor working conditions they faced in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (TUC, 2012b: 2). In addition, the Ghana Private Road Transport Union (GPRTU), an association of informal road transport vehicle owners, owner-drivers, and hired drivers (Adu-Amankwah, 1999: 7) has been an affiliate of the TUC (Ghana) since 1967 (Britwum and Martens, 2008: 15).

However, despite the existence of these historical antecedents, the unionisation of informal economy operators prior to the adoption of structural adjustment programmes in Ghana was limited. This was due to the possibilities of organising in the formal sector and, as I explain below, the difficulties that the trade unions faced in organising in the informal economy. Consequently, only when the structural adjustment programmes led to a significant loss of union membership, did the trade unions in the country have to devise new initiatives and strategies to reach out to informal economy operators.

#### ***7.4.2 Organising Strategies***

Trade unions in Ghana developed two strategies to organise informal economy operators (interview with Korklu, 2018; Konings, 2003). The first, and most common, strategy is the affiliation of existing informal economy associations to trade unions (interview with Korklu, 2018). The manifestations of this approach include the affiliations of three associations of traditional caterers – the United Caterers of Ghana (UCG), the Indigenous Caterers Association of Ghana (ICAG), and the Ga East Traders Association (GETA) – to the TUC (Ghana). Trade unions in Ghana have applied this strategy when there were existing informal economy associations that were willing to join the unions. In the absence of this condition, the unions adopt a second approach – which is facilitation of the formation of new associations of informal economy operators by the unions (ibid.). This involves the development of constitutions and structures, leadership elections, and supporting the registration of the associations. An example of this strategy was the involvement of the ICU in the formation of the Ghana Hairdressers and Beautician Association (Konings, 2003: 460). Together, the affiliation of existing informal economy associations to trade unions and the union-facilitated formation of new informal economy associations enabled the trade unions in Ghana to establish relationships with informal economy operators in the country.

Subsequently, trade unions in Ghana have used two main approaches to facilitate the promotion of the interests of informal economy operators within unions. (interview with Korklu, 2018; interview with Maame, 2018; Konings, 2003; Amankwah, 1999: 8). Key

informant interviews with Korklu – a trade unionist at the TUC (Ghana) – and Maame – an officer of the UNIWA –, revealed that the first strategy is the integration of informal economy operators into trade union structures. The TUC (Ghana) has granted the UNIWA representation at its Steering Committee, General Council, and the Delegates Congress. This ensures the participation informal economy associations in the decision-making processes of the TUC (Ghana). Similarly, the TWU’s National Sawyers Association has two representatives at the National Executive Council of the union (Amankwah, 1999: 8) and the Hairdressers and Beauticians’ Association of the ICU has three representatives at National Executive Council of the union (Konings, 2003). The representation of informal economy associations in trade union structures were designed to facilitate the participations of informal economy operators in trade union activities. Yet, as I shall explain later, the impact of this strategy is limited, since the extent to which it translates into informal economy voice in trade union decision-making and politics has limitations.

The second approach that trade unions in Ghana have used to sustain the interests of their informal economy members is organising them around their needs and interests (Interview with Ibrahim, 2017; Ryklief, 2013; Adu-Amankwah, 1999). This strategy involves the extension of trade union services and benefits to informal economy operators. The GAWU runs a revolving loan scheme for its informal economy members (Adu-Amankwah, 1999: 8). It also facilitates access to other forms of institutional credit among the informal economy operators (ibid.). In addition, the GAWU enrolls its informal economy members onto the National ‘Health Insurance Scheme. [GAWU] pays for the cost and renews it. The union also provides training on income-generating activities’ (Interview with Ibrahim, 2017). The TWU also trains its members in the informal economy in business management, bookkeeping, and grievance handling, and promote access to credit among them (Ryklief, 2013:16). This organising approach attracts informal economy operators to trade unions because it presents unions as potential partners for the expression of informal economy grievances and the promotion of informal employment rights (Rizzo, 2017: 106). Organising informal economy operators around their concerns and needs is therefore, an essential strategy in extending trade union coverage into the informal economy (ibid.).

### *7.4.3 Trade Union Coverage in the Informal Economy*

Data on trends in trade union membership and the interviews in this study show that the organising strategies and the services that trades unions in Ghana provide to their informal economy members have improved trade union coverage in the informal economy (TUC, 2019). While about two decades ago the GPRTU was the only informal economy affiliate of the TUC (Ghana), by 2018 the TUC (Ghana) had 19 associate members in the informal economy (ibid.). These associations add to the numbers and spread of the union. The TUC (Ghana) had some presence in the informal traditional food services sector, in the creative arts, and in the informal trade and retail sectors at the time of this study (interview with Korklu, 2018). In addition, the union includes among its members, domestic workers, metal fabricators, and disabled workers. These different informal economy groups contributed about 81,000 members to the union in 2018 (interview with Maame, 2018).

The extent of the unionisation of informal labour in Ghana is significant to the TUC (Ghana) in two ways. First, members of the UNIWA represents a 70 percent replacement of the 115,000 members that the TUC (Ghana) lost since the beginning of economic liberalisation. This shows that the inclusion of informal labour into trade unions helped in reversing the dwindling union membership (Gockel and Vormawor, 2004). Second, the unionisation of informal labour in Ghana is imperative for the legitimacy of the claim, by the TUC (Ghana), to represent workers in the country (Boakye, 2004: 8). This is important to the strength of the union movement because informal labour adds to the diversity of the workers and sectors that the union represents. Informal economy presence in trade unions matters when it comes to the mobilisation of workers for protests and other non-militant trade union activities. Korklu, a trade unionist from the TUC (Ghana), argued that the:

numbers [of informal economy], and the strength that derive from their membership in unions has also boosted the image of the trade union [as] having more members. So when we decide to have demonstrations or whatever, the government is scared that we can actually bring the whole country to a halt (interview with Korklu, 2017).

Therefore, organising informal labour is an important trade union response to the losses that unions suffered from the implementation of economic liberalisation policies in the country.



Despite the above reasoning, relative to the size of the informal economy in Ghana, the presence of trade unions in the informal economy is still limited. Trade unions do not cover most informal economy units and workers in the country. In 2013, nine in ten of informal operators or persons in informal employment in Ghana did not have trade unions at their workplaces (GSS, 2014e).

#### ***7.4.4 Varied Commitments***

The limited success in reaching out to informal economy operators certainly has a lot to do with the difficulties in organising in the informal economy, but it also relates to the mixed attitude – of both commitment and indifference – that trade unions in Ghana have exhibited towards the inclusion of informal labour (interview with Korklu, 2017). Trade union outlook towards informal economy organising has been influenced by the significance of informal employment within a sector and the threat that informalisation poses to union density in the sector. These conditions have engendered dissimilarities in the approaches to, and the treatment of, the informal economy among trade unions in Ghana. The TUC (Ghana) needed informal economy members to replace about 70 percent of the members it lost as the result of the implementation of the economic recovery and structural adjustment programmes in Ghana. Therefore, the TUC (Ghana), as we saw earlier, have demonstrated a substantial interest and commitment towards organising in the informal economy.

In contrast to the TUC (Ghana), an interview with a key informant from the trade unions revealed that some affiliates of the TUC (Ghana), particularly those that organise in highly formalised sectors, have exhibited low commitment and disinterest in organising informal labour (interview with Korklu, 2017). A former Informal Economy Desk officer of the TUC (Ghana), decried that ‘the attitude of some national unions has been quite lukewarm in the sense that not all of them are really interested in organising in the informal economy’ (interview with Korklu, 2017). In a way, it can be argued that given the share of formal employment in the education, health, and the financial sectors in Ghana, it is still viable for the unions that organise in these sectors to continue to focus on their traditional source of

union members (formal workers). For such unions, the rising informalisation of employment in Ghana does not pose strong questions to the legitimacy of their claims to represent workers in the sectors they operate. Therefore, unlike the TUC (Ghana) which needs to show informal economy membership as a way to reinforce the legitimacy of its claim to represent workers in Ghana, the unions in the banking and the public services sectors do not need informal economy members to show that they represent the workers in their sectors.

#### ***7.4.5 The Status of Informal Economy in Unions***

Understanding the relations between trade unions and informal labour also requires appreciation of the limited status of informal economy members in the TUC (Ghana). The union gives different rights and responsibilities to its members in the formal and informal sectors (interview with Korklu, 2017; interview with Maame, 2018). The constitution of the TUC (Ghana) obliges all formal sector union members to pay not less than one percent of their monthly wages as union dues to their national unions. The national unions then remit 30 percent of the one percent that each union member pays to the TUC (Ghana). In contrast, the constitution of the TUC (Ghana) requires informal economy associations, not the individual informal economy operators, to pay quarterly subscription fees to the union. In 2018, informal economy associations of the TUC (Ghana) were required to pay GH¢50 (US\$10.70) per quarter (interview with Maame, 2018). This implies that if all the 19 informal economy associate members of the TUC (Ghana) met their financial obligation, the TUC (Ghana) could receive only GH¢3,800 or US\$813.54 from its 81,000 members in the informal economy. This is just about 1 percent of the GH¢329,913.19 (US\$80,466.81) that only 6000 union members in the utility sector paid to the TUC (Ghana) in 2017 (TUC, 2018). This difference in the financial responsibilities of formal and informal economy members to the TUC (Ghana) has implications for the rights that the union accords to formal sector workers and their unions and informal economy operators and their associations.

Significantly, the different levels of financial contribution go hand in hand with different levels of rights. Formal economy workers and their unions enjoy all the rights and privileges

that are available in the TUC (Ghana) (interview with Maame, 2018). These include the rights to propose motions, vote on motions, and to vote and be voted for in trade union elections. In comparison, informal economy workers and their associations have reduced rights in the TUC (Ghana) (ibid.). As associate members, even though informal economy members are allowed representation at the decision-making structures of the union, the constitution of the TUC (Ghana) precludes them from proposing motions, voting, and being voted for. These restrictions limit the voice of informal economy operators and their associations in decision-making and politics of the TUC (Ghana).

Interviews with trade unionists and officials the UNIWA who took part in this study revealed that there is no consensus between informal economy operators and trade unionists on the reasons for, and legitimacy of, the associate membership statute of informal economy associations in the union (interview with Manu, 2017; interview with Boateng, 2017 interview with Mensah, 2017). Trade unionists tend to justify the limited rights that informal economy operators and their associations enjoy in the TUC (Ghana) by arguing that informal economy operators cannot meet the responsibilities that come with full membership. Manu, a former Secretary General of the TUC (Ghana) maintains that ‘to be a full member, you have to perform some duties. I think a union is justified in having certain minimum conditions that everybody must follow to be full member. So if they [informal economy members] don’t fulfil that, then obviously they are not full members’ (interview with Manu, 2017). Mensah, another former Secretary General of the TUC (Ghana) extends this argument by stating that the associate status of informal economy workers in the union is ‘a good thing. It is still necessary that they continue to be [associates]. Because if you make them full members, if they want full rights, the full rights go with some commitments and we thought they were not in the position to meet those requirements’ (interview with Mensah, 2017). Hence, for trade union officials, the reduced financial obligations or the inability of informal economy operators and their associations to meet the full costs of union membership must limit their voice in the decisions and politics of the unions.

Against the reasoning of trade union leaders, there is some discomfort and suspicion among informal economy members of the TUC (Ghana) about the constraints that associate

membership impose on their rights to move motions, to vote, and be voted for (interview with Boateng, 2017; interview with Maame, 2017). According to Boateng, a national officer of the UNIWA:

it is not good that we [informal economy operators] do not have voting rights at the TUC (Ghana). We joined the union so that they will address our issues. So when the union has to elect leaders, we [informal economy members] need to have the chance to elect leaders that we feel will represent us well (interview with Boateng, 2017).

Maame, a national executive member of the UNIWA, also deplors the associate membership of informal economy operators. She suspects that its persistence is due to trade union politics. According to her:

they [formal unions] think that because we have the numbers, some of them have expressed it clearly to my hearing that because we have the numbers, if they allow us into it, give us voting rights, we will take over the positions, leadership positions and others (interview with Maame, 2017).

In 2018, the UNIWA had 81,000 members (TUC, 2019). This made it one of the biggest unions of the TUC (Ghana) with the potential for a significant claim for power and voice in the affairs of the union.

However, a critical look at the rules on political participation at the TUC (Ghana) suggests that the limited financial contribution of informal economy associations to the TUC (Ghana) severely undermines the possibility that informal economy associates will dominate the politics of the union. This situation can be seen as a consequence of the economic precarity of such associations, but, more cynically perhaps, as an excuse to keep informal workers marginal in the politics of TUC (Ghana). Financial contribution to the TUC (Ghana) – not membership size – is what determines representation of affiliates at the Quadrennial Delegates Congress of the TUC (Ghana), where the union's leaders are elected, and the policies and the constitution are adopted. Yet, Maame, a national executive member of the UNIWA, revealed that the financial contribution of informal economy operators to the TUC (Ghana) is 'zero, we [informal economy operators] do not pay union dues. We have never paid dues to the TUC (Ghana)' (interview with Maame, 2017). This may be explained by two main reasons. The first is the impracticality of "checkoff system" in the informal economy (Boakye, 2004: 9). In the formal economy, trade unions in Ghana practice the

“checkoff system” that includes union membership dues in payroll deductions. In contrast, the informal economy members of the trade unions at the time of this study were mostly own-account operators who do not operate payrolls. This means that “checkoff” is impossible in the informal economy. Second, trade unions in the country have not devised effective alternative ways to collect membership dues from informal economy members. Consequently, the TUC (Ghana) and the other trade unions that organise in the informal economy hardly receive any membership subscription from their informal economy members. Therefore, even if informal economy operators were to be granted the rights to propose motions, vote in trade union elections, and to be voted for, the impact of the exercise of these rights would be limited by the level of their financial contributions to the trade unions.

To illustrate the above point, let us look at the GPRTU in the politics of TUC (Ghana). We know that the GPRTU is an informal economy union that has been an affiliate of the TUC (Ghana) since 1967 (Britwum and Martens, 2008: 15). It is also among the unions with the highest membership in the TUC (Ghana). These notwithstanding, the GPRTU has limited representation at the Quadrennial Delegates Congress of TUC (Ghana). In 2016, in spite of having about 120,000 members (TUC, 2018), the GPRTU had only ten delegates and three observers out of the 1000 delegates and 300 observers that attended the Quadrennial Delegates Congress (TUC, 2016a: 19). Yet, the Public Services Workers Union (PSWU) – a predominantly formal economy union – with about 24,000 members, had 150 delegates and 45 observers at the 2016 Quadrennial Delegates Congress (ibid.). The difference in the representations of the GPRTU and the PSWU at the 2016 Quadrennial Delegates Congress was determined by the financial contributions of the two unions to the TUC (Ghana). From, 2013 to 2015, the GPRTU contributed only GH¢5,492.93 (US\$1,428.25) to the union (TUC, 2018). This was just about 0.04 percent of the total revenue of the TUC (Ghana). In contrast, the PSWU contributed GH¢2.33 million (US\$605,322), about 17 percent of the income of the union (TUC, 2018). This shows that until informal economy operators and their trade unions find effective ways to ensure that informal economy operators contribute financially to trade unions, even if the limitations on associate membership are removed, the rules on

participation in Quadrennial Delegates Congress would limit informal economy voice in trade union decision-making and politics.

#### ***7.4.6 Informal Economy Organising Challenges***

In addition to the associate status conundrum, informal economy unionisation is bedevilled by two other significant challenges (interview with Maame, 2017; interview with Korklu, 2017; interview with Ibrahim, 2017). First, trade union efforts at organising in the informal economy in Ghana have been limited by financial costs and benefits considerations. We have seen that organising informal economy operators and sustaining their interests in trade unions require provision of union services and benefits. These services and benefits come at a financial cost to the trade unions. Yet, as I have just explained, membership dues collection in the informal economy has been bedevilled by “checkoff” impracticality and the inability of trade unions to devise alternative means of membership dues collection. This has limited trade union efforts in the informal economy. Maame, an officer of the UNIWA bemoaned that,

some General Secretaries told me that we [their unions] have some informal economy members under our fold, come and take them because they [informal members] don't contribute anything. So you come, we are willing to release them to you. They are just a burden (interview with Maame, 2017).

Similarly, according to Korklu, an officer of the TUC (Ghana):

most of the unions feel that they would not gain much [financially] from informal economy associates. [Because] most of their funding comes from the formal sector, they see it as a waste of money going to organise in an area that you would not gain much from (interview with Korklu, 2017).

Therefore, the financial loss associated with informal economy unionisation creates lethargy among some of the trade unions in Ghana and limits their venture into the informal economy, despite and against the strategic importance of organising in the informal economy for trade unions. This signals a somewhat opportunistic approach to the issue of organising in the informal economy among some trade unions in the country.

Second, the unionisation of informal economy operators and the formation of the UNIWA by the TUC (Ghana) generate some tensions over the right to represent informal economy operators (interview with Maame, 2017; interview with Ibrahim, 2017). It is important to note that the TUC (Ghana) started direct organising in the informal economy partly due to jurisdictional ambiguity (Britwum and Martens, 2008: 15). This ambiguity manifested itself in the lack of clarity and consensus on which unions must organise and represent which group of informal economy operators. Significantly, key informants in this study revealed that, this ambiguity has persisted and constituted a source of uneasiness between the GAWU and the UNIWA. We have already seen that there is high incidence of informality in Ghana's agricultural industry. The GAWU therefore, finds informal labour as a critical constituent in dealing with the decline in its membership and the associated questions about the legitimacy of its claim to represent agricultural workers in the country. Consequently, the entry of the UNIWA into the informal agricultural industry constitutes a competition and conflict for the GAWU. As a result of this, an officer of the UNIWA points out that the relationship between the GAWU and the UNIWA:

is not so cordial. I remember when we started [when the UNIWA was formed], the GAWU invited us once to one of their programmes and the way they treated our members, we were not happy about it. Maybe [the GAWU is] not really interested in us. Or they think that why do I associate myself with a competitor (interview with Maame, 2017).

Similarly, Ibrahim, a national officer of the GAWU described the relationship between his union and UNIWA as:

is a conflict relationship. It is just a conflict because the thing is, I do not see why the UNIWA should be, should be almost a like union. I just do not see it. How can our members be members of the UNIWA or how can the members of the UNIWA be members of the GAWU? It is a complete conflict, and it does not promote harmony. I do not even see the need for the TUC (Ghana) to put them [informal economy associations] together. The TUC (Ghana) should rather enhance the capacity of the GAWU to be able to manage them well. Even at the last Delegates Congress, there was something in draft policies of the TUC (Ghana), which I disagreed seriously. Because in that particular [draft] policy, one of the objectives was to bring all informal economy workers under the UNIWA. And as a strategy, all national unions were to bring their informal economy workers to the UNIWA. I protested. I said that cannot be. I protested. Even in the last quadrennial, there was an attempt to get it constitutionalised so that the UNIWA will become a full-fledged national union, but we disagreed (interview with Ibrahim, 2017).

In the light of the above, I argue that there are different attitudes towards, and significant politics in, organising in the informal economy. These, as we have seen, have been shaped by the importance of informal labour to the legitimacy of the claims of trade unions to represent workers in the sectors they operate. Significantly, the varied importance of informal labour to different trade unions has meant that the unionisation of informal economy operators has generated promises and tensions within and among trade unions in Ghana.

## **7.5 Conclusion**

This chapter shows that abstractions on the importance of informal economy operators workers as new sources of trade union membership in contemporary times need to be taken with a pinch of salt. In chapter 1, we saw the arguments that have been made for the need for trade unions to look beyond their traditional constituents. As the evidence presented in this chapter shows, the inclusion of informal economy associations into the TUC (Ghana) is an instance of how changes in work organisation and employment relations brought about intensified search for new sources of trade union members. The trade unions in Ghana have, through renewed efforts, sought to include informal labour as a way of dealing with the impact of rising informalisation of employment on trade union legitimacy and the membership declines they suffered from the implementation of economic recovery and structural adjustment programmes in the country. Such renewed informal economy organising brought some improvement in trade union presence in the informal economy. Significantly, the TUC (Ghana) has replaced about 70 percent of the members it lost in the formal sector from 1985 to 1996 with informal economy operators, thus helping in reversing the dwindling union membership and enhancing the legitimacy of the claim by the TUC (Ghana) to represent workers in the country.

This chapter also shows that the unionisation of informal economy operators by the TUC (Ghana) comes with peculiar challenges. We have seen the difficulties in membership dues collection in the informal economy, the different attitudes – commitment, opportunism, and



indifference – that trade unions in the country have showed towards informal labour, the internal trade union tensions that come with the unionisation of informal economy operators, and how the limitations of the associate membership status creates suspicion among the informal economy operators of the TUC (Ghana). These are valuable lessons on the relationships that trade unions must established with informal workers and social movements.

In chapter two, we saw that SMU literature provides useful entry points for the analysis of the relationship between trade unions and informal economy operators. Trade union organising in the informal economy in Ghana represents an instance of SMU because, as we have seen in this chapter, until 1996, trade union reach of informal economy operators was severely limited. Most importantly, informal economy operators largely remained outside of the trade unions. We now know that most of the informal economy operators who are members of the trade unions in Ghana are not “typical workers”. Therefore, the intensified unionisation in the informal economy in Ghana constitutes a trade union attempt to establish SMU relationships with informal working people such as petty-commodities producers and homeworkers (Waterman, 1993: 266-267).

In this chapter, we learn that the nature of the relationship that trade unions establish with informal workers and other social movements matters. We have seen the contestation between informal economy operators and the TUC (Ghana) over the associate membership status of the former in the union. This insight provides a grounded account to the narratives on the form of trade union relationship with non-traditional union members, especially the debate on the role that trade unions must play in SMU relationships and alliances (Moody, 1997b; and Scipe, 2014). On the one hand, Moody argues that trade unions should lead and provide vision and content in their alliance with other social movements (Moody, 1997b). On the other hand, Scipe maintains that SMU should be based on equal relationship (Scipe, 2014). In this case study, we have seen that informal economy operators and formal sector workers have different rights and responsibilities in the TUC (Ghana) – and that informal economy operators and their associations have a lower status in the union. This has nourished some misgivings and discontent among informal economy operators. Similarly, in chapter two, we saw how hierarchy in the way some actors were ranked, wrecked the collaboration

between the South African Municipal Workers Union (SAMWU), township activists, and NGOs in an anti-privatisation campaign in Cape Town (Lier and Stokke 2006: 812). These teach us that even though SMU is a vital trade union strategy for renewal, it should be based on equal relationship in order to promote harmony between trade unions, informal workers and other social movements.

In sum, the extent of trade union coverage in the informal economy in Ghana at the time of this study was fraught a notable contradiction. This chapter has shown that almost all of the trade union members in the informal economy are self-employed and small enterprise owners. In essence, paid workers in informal enterprises in the country are excluded from trade union coverage. Such form of unionisation is at odds with trade unionism as we know it. This also means that the strong divide between a small group of unionised and privileged workers and a mass of precarious and ununionized informal workers, as emphasized by proponents of the labour aristocracy theory, holds true in this context. What does such contradiction mean for industrial relations and mobilisation in the informal economy? Answering these questions is important to our understanding of what trade union presence in the informal economy means for paid workers and their employers. This is the focus of the next chapter, through a close look at the unionisation of traditional food caterers in Accra.

## CHAPTER 8: ORGANISING TRADITIONAL CATERERS OF ACCRA

### 8.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I examine the unionisation of traditional caterers in Accra – operators of informal restaurants that provide street and indigenous foods –, to explore the dynamics and the effects of trade union presence in the informal economy. Traditional restaurants, also known as *chop bars*, employ a large workforce, which I estimate 9,000, made up of about 4,300 workers employed by *chop bar* owners who are not trade union members (FAO, 2016: 7) and about 4,740 workers who work at traditional restaurants owned by trade union members (interview with Daavi, 2017). There exists a stratification between restaurant owners and workers (interview with Daavi, 2017). Hence, studying the presence of the TUC (Ghana) at *chop bars* was a useful way to explore what trade unionism means for traditional caterers and their workers. In addition, this chapter looked at some of the paradoxes and compromises that have come with the inclusion self-employed and small enterprise owners – instead of paid workers – into the TUC (Ghana), through the review of the impacts of trade unionism on mobilisation and industrial relations at the *chop bars* in Accra. Through these insights, this chapter seek to contribute to our understanding of how the powers of workers and trade unions may be yielded and utilised in the informal economy.

Trade unionists and traditional restaurant operators in this study revealed that the TUC (Ghana) had a significant presence at the *chop bars* in Accra at the time of this study (interviews with Korklu, 2018; interview with Maame, 2018). The union had three informal economy associations that organised traditional caterers in 2018 (interviews with Korklu, 2018). These were the United Caterers of Ghana (UCG) and the Indigenous Caterers Association of Ghana (ICAG). In addition, the Ga East Traders Association (GETA) – another associate member of the TUC (Ghana) – also had some members at the *chop bars* in Accra (ibid.). Together, the three associations organised about 1,190 traditional caterers in 2018 (interview with Maame, 2018).

Despite the above, the extent of trade union coverage at traditional restaurants in Accra is limited in two main ways (interview with Daavi, 2017; FAO, 2016: 8). First, most of the traditional or informal food vendors or workers in Accra remain outside trade unions. In 2016, only about 5 percent of the street food vendors who were surveyed by the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) were members of a trade union or an association (FAO, 2016: 8). Second, the findings of this study indicate that only *chop bar* owners were members of the associations of traditional caterers of the TUC (Ghana) in 2018 (interview with Daavi, 2017) . Hence, the many workers at the *chop bars* owned by members of the TUC (Ghana) – I estimate the number at about 4,760 – were not members of the UCG, the ICAG, and the GETA. This state of affairs, i.e., the prevalence of paid employment at *chop bars* and the affiliation of only *chop bar* owners to the TUC (Ghana) certainly has some implications for industrial relations at the traditional restaurants, and determines which interest group – traditional restaurant owners or the paid workers – benefits from the trade union presence at the *chop bars* in Accra.

In order to examine the above, this chapter is divided in seven sections. The next section provides a description of traditional restaurants in Accra. Section 3 analyses the profile of *chop bars* workers. This is followed by a discussion of the employment relations and the working conditions at traditional restaurants in sections 4 and 5, respectively. Section 6 focuses on unionisation in the traditional catering sector. It analyses what traditional caterers' expectations from trade unions are, and the activities of trade unions around *chop bar* operations. Section 7 concludes this chapter by reflecting on the power implications of trade unionism at the *chop bars*.

## **8.2 Traditional Catering Services in Accra**

### ***8.2.1 Scope of Operation and Classifications***

Traditional restaurants and food vending units are visible features of Accra (FAO, 2016). A survey by the FAO in 2016 found about 3,300 street food vendors operating within 90 square

kilometres of the 200 square kilometres of Accra (FAO, 2016: 5). In 2018, the 1,190 *chop bar* owners who were members of the TUC (Ghana) operated across the Accra Metropolitan Assembly (AMA), the La Nkwantanang-Madina Municipal Assembly (LaNMMA), and the Ga East Municipal Assembly (GEMA) areas in the Greater Accra region. Together, these areas are about 356.58 square kilometres, made up of about 200 kilometres square of the AMA (ibid.: 3), 70.88 square kilometres of the LaNMMA (GSS, 2014d: 1), and the 85.7 square kilometres of the GEMA (GSS, 2014c: 1). This means a *chop bar* that was operated member of the TUC (Ghana) could be found at every 0.29 square kilometres in these three local government areas in Greater Accra region in 2018. However, traditional restaurants and food-vending units mostly cluster at bus terminals, market centres, and other open spaces in the city where people congregate. Significant differences exist among traditional food providers in Accra. Their operations and establishments range from itinerant food units to large food stands (interview with Daavi, 2017).

**Image 3: A chop bar in Accra**



Source: Fieldwork 2018

The Accra City Council classifies traditional food vendors and establishments into CAT A–Grade 1 and CAT B–Grade 2 (Local Government Bulletin, 2018: 29). This classification is based on the physical infrastructure and the scale of operations of traditional restaurants. CAT A–Grade 1 *chop bars* are large-scale units with structures that seat over sixteen patrons. Those classified under CAT B–Grade 2 are smaller *chop bars* that operate on table-tops – micro scale – or in small structures that seat less than sixteen patrons. The Accra metropolitan

authority uses this classification to determine the operational permit fees and the annual permit renewal charges that it imposes on traditional restaurants in the city. In 2018, the annual business permit fees for traditional restaurant operators were GH¢120 (US\$25.70) for CAT A–Grade 1 *chop bars* and GH¢60 (US\$12.80) for CAT B–Grade 2 traditional restaurants (ibid.).

The problem with this classification of *chop bars* by the Accra City Council is that it is broad and lumps together, traditional food vendors and establishments of different sizes. This means that the AMA applies the same regulatory rules and treatment to traditional restaurants of different sizes and scope. This classification places traditional food vendors who operate on table-tops and *chop bars* that employ about six workers in the same category – CAT B–Grade 2 – and applies the same levies to them, while their operational realities and economics are quite different.

In contrast, the Ghana Revenue Authority (GRA) classifies traditional food vendors and establishments into small-scale, medium-scale, and large-scale establishments (interview with GRA official, 2018). This taxonomy determines the taxes that the revenue authority imposes on traditional restaurants. In 2018, the tax authority charged small-scale *chop bars* between GH¢10 (US\$2.14) and GH¢20 (US\$4.28) per quarter (interview with GRA official, 2018). Medium-scale *chop bars* paid between GH¢25 (US\$5.40) and GH¢30 (US\$6.40) and the large-scale establishments paid GH¢35 (US\$7.50) to GH¢45 (US\$9.60) every quarter (ibid). Hence traditional food vendors who operate on a table-tops – classified as small-scale – do not pay the same taxes as *chop bars* that employ about six workers (medium-scale establishments).

### ***8.2.2 Regulation of Chop Bars: Operational Permits and Taxation***

These *chop bar* classifications by the AMA and the GRA have underpinned the regulation of traditional catering establishments in Accra (interview with Nii, 2018). The city council and the tax authority draw on them to license and legitimise *chop bars* operations in the city.

The licensing and the operational permit scheme for traditional restaurants requires business commencement permit, annual permit renewal, and fee payments. The scheme also obliges *chop bars* owners in the city to pay quarterly taxes and to undergo annual medical health certification. Nii, an officer of the AMA indicates that ‘before you start operating [a traditional restaurant] you need a medical certificate. And they [have to] do it yearly. Someone may not be sick today but in a year’s time, something can be there. They have to do it before we will renew their licence’ (interview with Nii, 2018). This licensing and operational permit scheme for *chop bars* in Accra serves two main purposes. First, it functions as a source of revenue for the city and government authorities. Second, the scheme promotes food safety, as street food vendors in Accra who undergone medical certification tend to comply with hygiene and safety standards (FAO, 2016: 20).

The metropolitan and municipal authorities in Accra vigorously enforce these regulations (interview with Gina, 2018; interview with Nii, 2018). A *chop bar* owner lamented that ‘when they [the assembly officials] come and you tell them to reduce it [the permit fee], they will not listen. If you don’t pay after a while, they will lock up your place’ (interview with Gina, 2018). An officer of the AMA argued that *chop bars* have to

pay [permit fees] because we give you licence to operate so if you refuse to pay, we can close you down. If you refuse to pay, we can close you down ... even though it is not easy collecting it [permit fee], whatever that they will do, we will collect it. We have a grace period. After that time, the taskforce will go round, they will force you. If you don’t pay, we will lock the place and you will pay with a penalty (interview with Nii, 2018).

Beside the issue of the rigorous enforcement, the tax regime for traditional restaurants in Accra is regressive in some ways. This is because the quarterly taxes that *chop bars* pay are based solely on the classifications of traditional restaurants. This means that operational revenues do not matter in the taxes that traditional restaurants have to pay. The downside of this is that temporary shut-downs and slumps in patronage and their effects on earnings are not reflected in the taxes that *chop bars* operators pay to the GRA. In addition, a tax regime that does not take actual earnings into account, which - as Table 9 shows - are low, has negative effects on the businesses and subsistence of *chop bar* operators.

**Table 9: Expenditure and revenue of chop bar owners in the study**

Expenditure		Revenue		Net	
GHC	US\$	GHC	US\$	GHC	US\$
900	192.72	1100	235.55	200	42.83
760	162.74	985	210.92	225	48.18
750	160.60	1000	214.13	250	53.53
727	155.67	1000	214.13	273	58.46
700	149.89	1000	214.13	300	64.24
750	160.60	1050	224.84	300	64.24
800	171.31	1100	235.55	300	64.24
990	211.99	1300	278.37	310	66.38
680	145.61	1000	214.13	320	68.52
658	140.90	1000	214.13	342	73.23
857	183.51	1200	256.96	343	73.45
750	160.60	1095	234.48	345	73.88
550	117.77	895	191.65	345	73.88
1000	214.13	1350	289.08	350	74.95
530	113.49	900	192.72	370	79.23
650	139.19	1024	219.27	374	80.09
550	117.77	925	198.07	375	80.30
400	85.65	775	165.95	375	80.30
640	137.04	1020	218.42	380	81.37
720	154.18	1100	235.55	380	81.37
600	128.48	980	209.85	380	81.37
770	164.88	1150	246.25	380	81.37
740	158.46	1130	241.97	390	83.51
700	149.89	1090	233.40	390	83.51
500	107.07	890	190.58	390	83.51
650	139.19	1040	222.70	390	83.51
500	107.07	895	191.65	395	84.58
600	128.48	995	213.06	395	84.58
1200	256.96	1600	342.61	400	85.65

N = 29

Source: interviews with Elorm, 2017 Ama, 2017 Ayish, 2017; Efo, 2017; Amoakoah, 2017; Mawuenya, 2017; Addobea, 2017; Serwaa, 2017; Gifty, 2017;



Priscilla, 2017; Hajia, 2017; Jenny, 2017; Akuvi, 2017; Aba, 2017; Dedei, 2017; Akwele, 2017; Margie, 2017; Akuba, 2017; Acquah, 2017; Daavi, 2017; Adaku, 2017; Humu, 2017; Esi, 2017; Dada, 2017; Barimah, 2017; Vicky, 2017; Adwoa, 2017; Kromo, 2017; Kai, 2017

### 8.2.3 Chop Bar Earnings

Table 10 presents a summary analysis of the earnings that were reported by 29 of the 35 *chop bar* owners who took part in this study. It shows that the lowest daily earning was GH¢200.00 (US\$50.60) and the highest was GH¢400.00 (US\$101.20). The average daily earning was estimated at GH¢343.67 (US\$86.94).

**Table 10: Daily *chop bar* earnings**

Amounts (GH¢) <sup>4</sup>	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative percent
200.0	1	3.45	3.45
200.01 - 249.99	1	3.45	6.90
250.01 - 299.99	2	6.90	13.79
300.00 - 349.99	9	31.03	44.83
350.00 - 399.99	15	51.72	96.55
400.0	1	3.45	100.00
N	29	-	-

Source: interviews with Ayish, 2017; Cece, 2017; Efo, 2017; Owusuaa, 2017; Amoakoah, 2017; Mawuenya, 2017; Addobea, 2017; Serwaa, 2017; Gifty, 2017; Priscilla, 2017; Hajia, 2017; Jenny, 2017; Akuvi, 2017; Aba, 2017; Dedei, 2017; Akwele, 2017; Margie, 2017; Akuba, 2017; Acquah, 2017; Daavi, 2017; Adaku, 2017; Humu, 2017; Esi, 2017; Dada, 2017; Barimah, 2017; Vicky, 2017; Adwoa, 2017; Kromo, 2017; Kai, 2017

In order to appreciate what these earnings figures mean for the livelihoods of the *chop bar* owners in this study, one must take into account the fact that most of them (88.6%), as Table 11 shows, operate small-scale subsistence economic units. In 2016, the FAO found that about

<sup>4</sup> Calculated from reported expenditures and revenues by participants during interviews.

four people depended on the earnings from a single small-scale street food venture (FAO, 2016: 13). Similarly, in this study, *chop bar* costs and revenues, and household expenditures such as electricity, water, meals, accommodation, and others are interlinked. Kromo owns and operates a small-scale *chop bar* that gives her around the reported average daily earning – GH¢343.67 (US\$86.94). Yet, she is able to ‘save only GH¢250 [US\$53.50] every month after [she] has paid [her] workers, taxes, and taken care of [her] house’ (interview with Kromo, 2018). Therefore, when attention is paid to the importance of *chop bars* earnings to the livelihoods of these women, one is likely to come to the conclusion that earnings in these enterprises are low.

**Table 11: Classification of the chop bars in the study**

Category	Frequency	Percent
Small-scale	31	88.6
Medium-scale	4	11.4
N	35	100

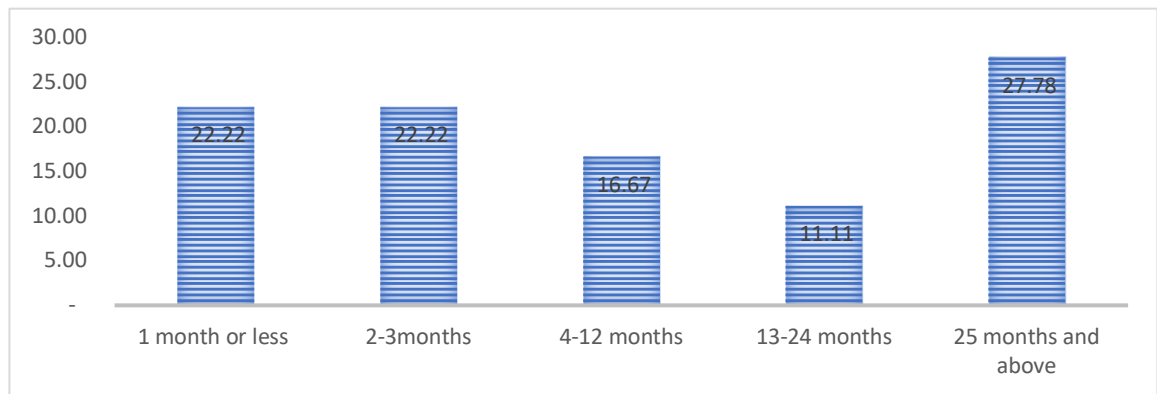
Source: interviews with Ama, 2017; Ayish, 2017; Cece, 2017; Efo, 2017; Owusuaa, 2017; Amoakoah, 2017; Gina, 2018; Mawuenya, 2017; Addobea, 2017; Serwaa, 2017; Gifty, 2017; Priscilla, 2017; Hajia, 2017; Jenny, 2017; Akuvi, 2017; Aba, 2017; Akua, 2017; Dedei, 2017; Atswei, 2017; Akwele, 2017; Margie, 2017; Akuba, 2017; May, 2017; Elorm, 2017; Acquah, 2017; Daavi, 2017; Adaku, 2017; Humu, 2017; Esi, 2017; Dada, 2017; Barimah, 2017; Vicky, 2017; Adwoa, 2017; Kromo, 2017; Kai, 2017

#### **8.2.4 High Labour Attrition at Chop Bars**

The *chop bar* operators and their workers in this study revealed that another feature of traditional restaurants is high labour turnover (interview Enyonam, 2018; interview with Esi, 2017). Among the 31 *chop bar* workers who responded to the question on employment tenure, as Figure 4 shows, about half of them had worked for three months or less at their *chop bars* prior to their participation in the study. Almost a quarter of the workers had been in their present jobs for just about a month or less. Also, six in ten of them had been at their current *chop bars* for less than a year. According to Esi, a *chop bar* owner, ‘the workers are unable to stay. Some of them come for one month [or] two months [and] they get tired and

leave. Then another person would come for employment’ (interview with Esi, 2017). Similarly, Enyonam, a traditional restaurant worker recalled that ‘since I came here, a lot of workers have come and left’ (interview Enyonam, 2018). At *Good Food Chop Bar* – which had been operating for about five years at the time of my fieldwork –, all the four workers I met had been in employment for no longer than five months prior to my visit.

**Figure: 4 Employment tenure at the *chop bars* in this study (percent)**



N = 31

Source: interviews with Kai, 2017; Cece, 2017; Efo, 2017; Owusuaa, 2017; Amoakoah, 2017; Gina, 2018; Mawuenya, 2017; Addobea, 2017; Serwaa, 2017; Gifty, 2017; Priscilla, 2017; Hajia, 2017; Jenny, 2017; Akuvi, 2017; Aba, 2017; Akua, 2017; Dedei, 2017; Atswei, 2017; Akwele, 2017; Margie, 2017; Akuba, 2017; May, 2017; Elorm, 2017; Acquah, 2017; Daavi, 2017; Adaku, 2017; Humu, 2017; Esi, 2017; Dada, 2017; Barimah, 2017; Vicky, 2017;

The high labour turnover at the *chop bars* in this study stems from two factors (interview with Akwele, 2018; interview with Efo, 2018; interview with Akuvi, 2018). The first is employment terminations by the *chop bar* owners. Employment terminations are triggered by what the employers in this study present as varied misdemeanour including “sexual misconduct”. Akwele, a traditional restaurant owner sent one of her ‘girls home because she was having affairs with the guys here’ (interview with Akwele, 2018). Efo, another *chop bar* owner bragged that ‘when they misbehave, I sack them’ (interview with Efo, 2018). It is worth underlining here that such terminations happen, partly because of the existence of asymmetrical power relations between *chop bar* owners and their workers. This power imbalance results from the lack of trade union representation of *chop bar* workers, the dearth

of self-organised combines of the workers, and the non-enforcement of employment protection regulations in the informal economy. In addition, the frequent occurrence of employment terminations by *chop bar* owners is also due to the over-supply of labour in the sector. Akuvi, a *chop bar* owner, stated that when ‘we are looking for workers, it is not difficult. Someone can come today and leave tomorrow. Another person will also come and look for a job at the same time that the other person refused to come’ (interview with Akuvi, 2018). Hence, traditional restaurant owners in this study can easily terminate employment because they do not incur significant or any labour replacement costs.

The second reason for the high labour attrition in the traditional catering sector is resignations by the workers themselves (interview with Enyonam, 2018). This is triggered by three factors. First, traditional restaurant workers in this study explained that they resign from their jobs because of the decent work deficits they face at the *chop bars*. According to Enyonam, a traditional restaurant worker, ‘some people [*chop bar* workers], leave their jobs because the pay is not enough, and they only eat in the evening when work is over. If you don’t get food to eat and the pay is small, you leave. You leave for a better place’ (interview with Enyonam, 2018). As I would show later, wages at traditional restaurants are low and sometimes below the national minimum wage and upper poverty line. In most cases, apart from free accommodation in *chop bars* and free meals, traditional restaurant workers do not get any other employment benefit. They therefore, leave *chop bar* jobs in search of employment with better conditions.

The next factor that contributes to resignations among the traditional restaurant workers in this study is the low cost of leaving jobs. *Chop bar* workers do not face unemployment when they decide to change jobs. This is because self-employment opportunities – hawking and head-porterage – abound at the bus terminals and the market centres where most *chop bars* operate. Such economic activities require minimal capital and have no entry barriers. Enyonam, a *chop bar worker* stated that ‘there are a lot of jobs here [Agbobloshie market]. If you [referring to me] come here, you will get a job in a *chop bar* or something else to do’ (interview with Enyonam, 2018). Therefore, the ease of the transition to self-employment

and other menial jobs at the operational areas of *chop bars* contribute to employee resignations.

The interviews with the *chop bar* workers revealed that the third factor that explains the resignations among the traditional restaurants workers in this study is that most of them are “target” workers (interview with Rosey, 2018; interview with Mansa, 2018; interview with Obaa, 2018). “Target” workers take up jobs for specific purpose and leave after they achieve their objective (TUC, 2012: 1). Almost all the workers in this study took up *chop bars* jobs with a clear short-term target to raise funds to establish their own businesses, to learn a trade, or to continue their formal education. Rosey, for example, worked at a *chop bar* because she was ‘looking for money to buy a sewing machine to go and learn sewing. It will take me about a year and half to buy the sewing machine. When I buy it, I will go back to my hometown’ (interview with Rosey, 2018). Mansa, another *chop bar* worker, plans to ‘go back to [her] trading business once [she] gets money’ (interview with Mansa, 2018). Similarly, Obaa’s *chop bar* job is transient because she passed her secondary school exams ‘in 2017 and is looking at getting back to school’ (interview with Obaa, 2018). Thus, the nature of the motivation behind *chop bar* employment for “target” workers helps to explain the high labour turnover found in the sector, as workers leave their jobs once they meet their objectives.

The high incidence of labour turnover in the traditional catering services sector affects the attitude of the *chop bar* owners toward the workers (interview with Akuvi, 2017). Most of the *chop bar* owners in this study viewed the employment relationships with their workers as temporary. As a result, they neither made significant investments in the relationship nor provided all the necessary work outfits for the workers. Akuvi, a *chop bar* owner, had procured branded ‘t-shirts which [she] could give to [her] workers. But when you do that, they leave the work and go with it. In the last one month, two people have left. They have worn the t-shirts and you cannot take it back (interview with Akuvi, 2017). Thus, labour attrition at traditional restaurants influences the attitude of *chop bar* owners towards their legal and contractual obligations to the workers.

### **8.2.5 Employment Contract.**

Significantly, the *chop bar* workers did not have written employment contracts with the *chop bar* owners (interview with Daavi, 2017). Although the traditional restaurant owners and their workers had verbal agreements that covered job description and remuneration, such agreements breach the labour law in Ghana. The law requires that ‘the employment of a worker by an employer for a period of six months or more or for a number of working days equivalent to six months or more within a year shall be secured by a written contract of employment’ (see section 12 of Act 651, 2003). In spite of this legal provision, none of the *chop bar* workers in this study who had been in employment for six months or more had signed a written contract of employment.

The shortcoming of these verbal contracts is that they are difficult to enforce. We have already seen in this chapter that asymmetrical power relations exist between *chop bar* owners and the workers. This has prevented traditional restaurant workers from insisting on the enforcement of the conditions agreed in the verbal agreements. As I shall show later, the *chop bar* workers in this study are unable to seek remedies for the violations of the terms of employment, precisely because they do not have any written contract to back their claim. Therefore, the absence of written contracts of employment breaches the labour laws of Ghana and compromises the interests of the traditional restaurant workers in this study.

### **8.3 Traditional Catering Workers**

Table 12 shows, paid employment is an important feature of the traditional restaurants in this study. A total of 161 workers were employed by the 34 *chop bar* owners in this study. About eight in ten of the *chop bars* employ at least one worker. The average number of paid workers at the traditional restaurants in this study was four. This implies that the 1,190 members of the three *chop bar* owners who are members of the TUC (Ghana) employed around 4,760 workers. In addition, the other street food vendors – about 3,300 of which 95 percent of them, were not trade union members – employ almost 4,300 workers (FAO, 2016: 7). Hence, the

total number of paid workers in Accra’s traditional food sector is about 9,000, showing the significance of paid employment in the sector. These workers provide essential and varied labour services such as cooking, cleaning, and waiting.

**Table 12: Paid employment at the *chop bar* in the study**

No. of Employees	Frequency	Total number of workers	Percent of Frequency	Cumulative percent
no workers	6	6	17.65	17.65
1 worker	2	2	5.88	23.53
2 workers	5	10	14.71	38.24
3 workers	2	6	5.88	44.12
4 workers	6	24	17.65	61.76
5 workers	2	10	5.88	67.65
6 workers	3	18	8.82	76.47
8 workers	5	40	14.71	91.18
15 workers	3	45	8.82	100
N	34	161	100	

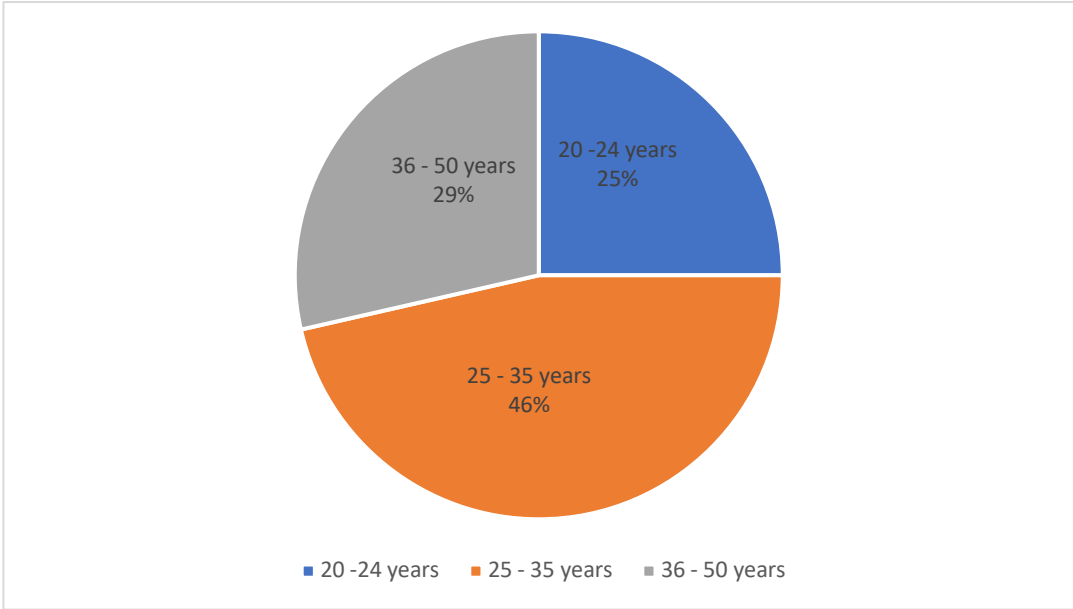
Source: interviews with Ama, 2017; Ayish, 2017; Cece, 2017; Efo, 2017; Owusuaa, 2017; Amoakoah, 2017; Gina, 2018; Mawuenya, 2017; Addobea, 2017; Serwaa, 2017; Gifty, 2017; Priscilla, 2017; Hajia, 2017; Jenny, 2017; Akuvi, 2017; Aba, 2017; Akua, 2017; Dedei, 2017; Atswei, 2017; Akwele, 2017; Margie, 2017; Akuba, 2017; Elorm, 2017; Acquah, 2017; Daavi, 2017; Adaku, 2017; Humu, 2017; Esi, 2017; Dada, 2017; Barimah, 2017; Vicky, 2017; Adwoa, 2017; Kromo, 2017; Kai, 2017

The labour market in the traditional catering sector is segmented by gender, as it is often the case in the informal economy (interview with Daavi, 2017). Nine out of every ten workers at the *chop bars* in this study were females (ibid.). The concentration of female labour at the traditional restaurants in this study is consistent with the female monopoly in street food vending in Accra (FAO, 2016: 6). This phenomenon can be attributed to the gendered division of household roles in Ghana which ascribes food preparation and presentation, cleaning, and other household chores to females. Consequently, these home-keeping skills

get transmitted to females through the socialisation process. Therefore, food vending attracts females because it enables them to operate their enterprises by relying on traditional and homes skills such as cooking (FAO, 2016: 6). In other words, the dominance of, or the preference for, female workers at traditional restaurants may be explained by the greater likelihood that female workers would come into *chop bars* employment with the requisite skills, compared with male workers.

Figure 5 shows that another notable characteristic of the *chop bar* workers in this study is their young age. The ages of the workers range from 20 years to 50 years. The average age was 31 years. Two out of every three of the *chop bar* workers in this study was under 35 years.

**Figure 5: Ages distribution of *chop bar* workers in this study**



N = 28

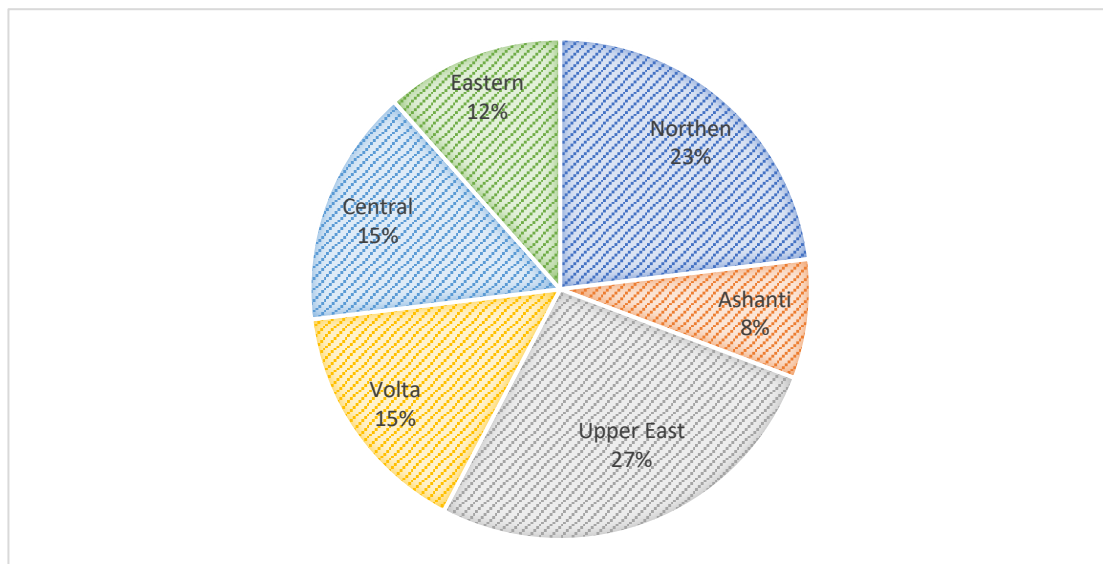
Source: interviews with Suzzy, 2028; Abiba, 2018; Afia, 2018; Anna, 2018; Anaba; 2018; Mimi, 2018; Bene, 2018; Tawiah, 2018; Connie, 2018; Efe, 2018; Sowah, 2018; Erica, 2018; Esinam, 2018; Boahemaa, 2018; Afriyie, 2018; Boye, 2018; Hawa, 2018; Joana, 2018; Torgbe, 2018; Hajara, 2018; Mamuna, 2018; Akos, 2018; Otuwaa, 2018; Rose,2018; Lamatu, 2018; Sackey, 2018; Thess, 2018; Enyonam, 2018



The young age and the career aspirations of the *chop bar* workers help us to understand the high labour attrition at traditional restaurants. As we saw earlier, most of the *chop bars* workers are “target” workers. These young “target” workers see traditional restaurant work as short-term means to achieve their desired long-term labour market outcomes. Therefore, these young “target” workers dominate *chop bars* because they take up such jobs to accumulate funds to enable them to train or acquire the resources for transition into other jobs and businesses.

Interestingly, Figure 6 shows that most of the traditional restaurant workers in this study are migrants. Eight in ten of the traditional restaurant workers in this study migrated from other parts of Ghana to Accra. Figure 6 shows that the participants of the study migrated from six regions in Ghana – there were ten administrative regions in Ghana at the time of my field work –, with most of them, about 27 percent, coming from the Upper East region.

**Figure 6: Regional distribution**



N = 26

Source: interviews with Anaba, 2018; Mimi, 2018; Anna, 2018; Bene, 2018; Tawiah, 2018; Connie, 2018; Efe, 2018; Sowah, 2018; Erica, 2018; Esinam, 2018; Boahemaa, 2018; Afriyie, 2018; Boye, 2018; Hawa, 2018; Joana, 2018; Torgbe, 2018; Hajara, 2018; Mamuna, 2018; Akos, 2018; Otuwaa, 2018; Rose, 2018; Lamatu, 2018; Sackey, 2018; Thess, 2018; Enyonam, 2018; Abena, 2018;

The average period of residence in Accra among the participants of this study was three years and two months. However, as Table 13 shows, seven out of every ten of the migrant *chop bar* workers in this study had been in the city just about a year or less prior to my interviews. This shows that new migrants dominate the traditional restaurants in this study. This phenomenon relates to the high labour turnover that we have seen at the traditional restaurants in this study.

**Table 13: Length of residence in Accra**

Months	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative percent
less than 1 month	4	16	16
1 - 3 months	5	20	36
4 - 6 months	2	8	44
7 - 9 months	4	16	60
10 - 12 months	4	16	76
13 months and above	6	24	100
N	25	-	-

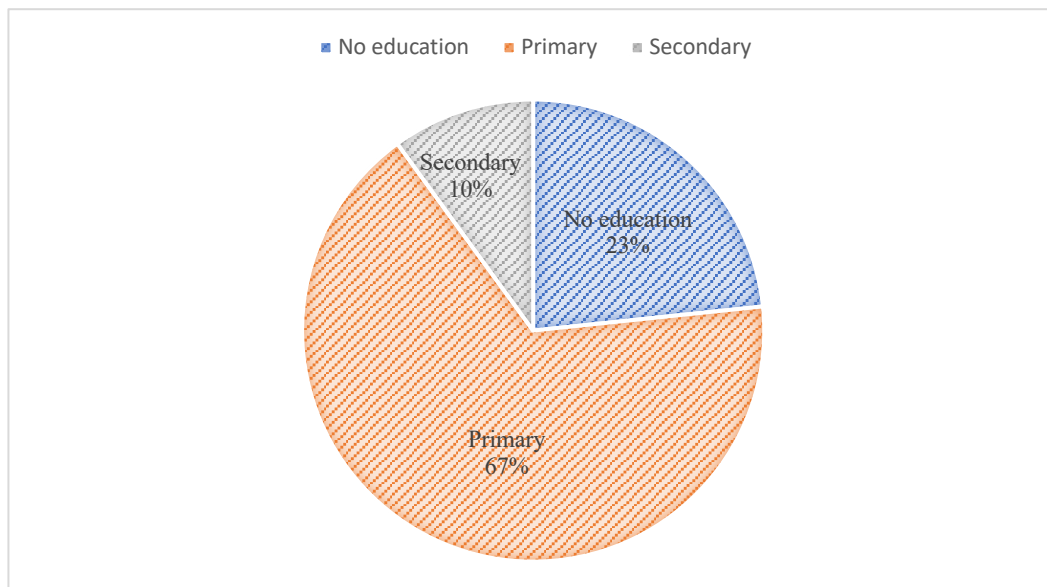
Source: interviews with Mimi, 2018; Anna, 2018; Bene, 2018; Tawiah, 2018; Connie, 2018; Efe, 2018; Sowah, 2018; Erica, 2018; Esinam, 2018; Boahemaa, 2018; Afriyie, 2018; Boye, 2018; Hawa, 2018; Joana, 2018; Torgbe, 2018; Hajara, 2018; Mamuna, 2018; Akos, 2018; Otuwaa, 2018; Rose, 2018; Lamatu, 2018; Sackey, 2018; Thess, 2018; Enyonam, 2018; Abena, 2018;

The concentration of migrant labour at the *chop bars* in this study corroborates existing ideas on migration and the urban informal economy in Africa. The urban informal economy has been linked to the excess labour that is generated by the failure of rural migrants to find jobs in the urban formal sector: the labour markets in the urban centres of the continent do not expand quickly enough to absorb the new migrants (ILO, 1992; FAO, 2016). This state of affairs also applies to Ghana. The Accra Metropolitan Area is the prime destination for most internal migrants in Ghana (Antwi et. al, 2014: 101). Yet, the city does not have enough formal jobs to absorb these migrants. It is estimated that 98 percent of the new labour market entrants in the country have to find job in the informal economy each year (Otoo et. al, 2009:

1). This is due to the inability of the formal sector to generate jobs in required quantities (GSS, 2014: 23). Consequently, informal employment becomes a condition sine qua non for the survival of migrants ‘and street food vending ... represents one of the easiest and viable jobs’ in Accra (FAO, 2016: 1). This is because it requires little start-up capital and no formal education (ibid).

Figure 7 indicates that the *chop bar* workers in this study have low formal education. Only one in ten of the 30 *chop bar* workers in this study who reported their education had completed secondary school or twelve years of formal education. As many as 67 percent of them had only primary or 6 years of formal education. As result this, and consistent with the findings of existing literature (ILO, 1992; FAO, 2016), the workers in this study had to take up informal *chop bar* jobs since their education and skills levels preclude them from accessing the formal labour market in Accra.

**Figure 7: Educational attainment of the *chop bar* workers in the study**



N = 30

Source: interviews with Mimi, 2018; Anna, 2018; Bene, 2018; Tawiah, 2018; Connie, 2018; Efe, 2018; Sowah, 2018; Erica, 2018; Esinam, 2018; Boahemaa, 2018; Afriyie, 2018; Boye, 2018; Hawa, 2018; Joana, 2018; Torgbe, 2018; Odjao, 2018; Hajara, 2018; Mamuna, 2018; Mansa, 2018; Akos, 2018; Otuwaa, 2018; Rahi, 2018; Rose, 2018; Lamatu, 2018; Sackey, 2018; Thess, 2018; Enyonam, 2018; Abena, 2018; Anaba, 2018; Suzzy, 2018.

In order to explain the employment options and choices of the workers in this study, and how long they work at *chop bars*, one must pay attention to the importance of *chop bar* incomes to the efforts of these workers to improve their educational outcomes and skills levels. The findings of this study show that among the traditional restaurant workers who had no formal education and those who had some years of primary education, the objective for working at *chop bars* is to save money to pay for informal vocational apprenticeship. Bene, a traditional restaurant worker who dropped out of primary school took up a *chop bar* job because she ‘want[s] to get money to pay for apprenticeship. [She] wants to learn how to sew [to be a seamstress] after a while’ (interview with Bene, 2018). The interviews also revealed that those workers who had completed secondary school worked at the *chop bars* in order to make money to further their education. Boye, a *chop bar* worker, stated that ‘I completed Benkum SHS [Senior High School]. I want to save some money to continue my education. I may be here for two years before I leave’ (interview with Boye, 2018). Therefore, employment in traditional restaurants is seen by the *chop bar* workers as a temporary measure to accumulate funds to finance informal vocational training or post-secondary formal education, depending on their levels of education prior to employment in the sector.

The interviews with the traditional restaurant workers revealed that another feature of *chop bar* employment in this study is the important role of kinship relations in job search (interview with Tawiah, 2018; interview with Akos, 2018; interview with Hawa, 2018). Nine out of ten of the workers in this study found their jobs through kinship connections. Tawiah, a *chop bar* worker, had ‘the [job] arrangement done for me by my relative before coming [to Accra]. So I came straight to this job (interview with Tawiah, 2018). Similarly, Akos ‘had a brother here [at where she currently works] who told me to come here because there is a job here. So when I came, he took me to the madam. The madam accepted me, and I started working here’ (interview with Akos, 2018). In some cases, *chop bar* workers come into employment as replacements for relations who were leaving jobs. Hawa’s ‘sister was working here [current workplace]. I told her I needed a job and she told tome to come. She was leaving so she called me to come and replace her’ (interview with Hawa, 2018).

The vital role that kinship plays in job search among the workers in this study is in line with existing ideas on the importance of kinship relations and social networks in job search among migrants and in the informal economy. What we have observed at the *chop bars* in Accra is similar to what happens at the Aba shoe and garment clusters in Nigeria, where small-scale producers use personal ties to gain access to the skills, the resources, and the markets they need to operate their businesses (Meagher, 2010). These informal economy operators used several social relations – kinship and hometown networks, friendship, and neighbourhood connections – in economic organisation (ibid.). Hence, social networks are an important employment search strategy among migrant workers and more broadly, in the informal economy (Frijters et. al., 2003; Meagher, 2010).

Nonetheless, the literature shows that using kinship and social networks in job search comes with an important shortcoming. Such networks provide access to a small range of potential job opportunities (Frijters et. al., 2003: 5). Consequently, this job search strategy reduces opportunities for suitable job offers to migrants. This is because kinship and social networks of migrants are usually limited (ibid.). Therefore, one cannot separate the *chop bar* employment among the workers in this study from the fact that they used kinship connection as the main job search strategy.

In addition to job search support, accounts by the traditional restaurant workers show that some of the migrant *chop bar* workers in this study draw on kinship and ethnic relations for support and welfare in hometown associations (interview with Hawa, 2018; interview with Mamuna, 2018; interview Enyonam, 2018; interview with Abiba, 2018). Memberships of these associations are determined by place of origin. Hometown associations function as mobilisation mechanisms for support among migrants (Bosiakoh, 2012: 150). These associations were common at the operational areas of the *chop bars* in this study. Hawa, a *chop bar* worker is ‘a Tumbru [and] the people of Tumbru have an association here [where I work]’ (interview with Hawa, 2018). There was also ‘an association for the people from Bolga’ for Mamuna (interview with Mamuna, 2018). Enyonam’s hometown association helps members ‘when something happens to you, we have some support we give to you. We attend events and support marriage ceremonies. When a member gives birth, we help her.

We also help during funerals’ (interview Enyonam, 2018). Similarly, Abiba pointed that the ‘association for the people from my hometown provides support in times of difficulties’ (interview with Abiba, 2018).

Interestingly, despite the benefits of these associations, only one in ten of the *chop bar* workers in this study was a member of their hometown associations (interview with Mamuna, 2018; interview with Abiba, 2018). The workers attribute this to two main factors. The first is the labour turnover at the *chop bars*. Mamuna, a *chop bar* worker was not a member of her hometown association ‘because we come and leave the job often. So only those who stay for long are members. As for us, we leave within a short time’ (interview with Mamuna, 2018). The second factor is a clash of *chop bar* working hours with the meeting times of some of the hometown associations. Abiba, a *chop bar* worker was not a member of her hometown association ‘because of this work. We work every Sunday and they [the hometown association] have their meetings on Sundays’ (interview with Abiba, 2018).

In addition to the ideas emerging from the accounts of the workers, I argue that the low rate of hometown association membership among the workers in this study cannot be separated from the inability of these associations to deal with the decent work deficits at the traditional restaurants. Apart from the welfare support, hometown associations are not involved in industrial relations at the *chop bars*. Yet, as we shall see shortly, the difficulties of the traditional restaurant workers in this study relate with their work. Therefore, the non-involvement of hometown associations in *chop bar* industrial relations add to the disincentive to join these associations by the workers in this study.

#### **8.4 Industrial Relations at *Chop Bars***

Interactions with the *chop bar* workers in this study on employment relations at the traditional restaurants led one them to refer to a mother-child like relation (interview with Obaa, 2018). Obaa, a *chop bar* worker, stated that ‘my “madam” [employer] has taken me as her child. Even when people come here, they think she is my mother’ (interview with Obaa, 2018). The

downside of such employment relationship is that it overly subordinates the *chop bar* workers to their employers. Such subordination, according to Obaa, has implications for her rights and dignity because when she offends her “madam”, ‘she [“madam”] reprimands me. But if she offends me, I cannot do anything because she is my mother’ (interview with Obaa, 2018). Therefore, the mother-child relationships which the *chop bar* workers in this study refer to, is premised on power imbalance between the workers and their employers, rather than on the love and care that tend to be associated with it.

In addition, the dearth of workers’ representation and the non-enforcement of labour laws and standards at the *chop bars* in this study have also strengthened the power asymmetry between the workers and their employers. Consequently, industrial relations at these workplaces are one-sided. The *chop bar* owners unilaterally set employment rules and adjudicate work disputes.

As some of the *chop bar* workers in this study suggested, the above conditions compel workers to live in undesirable working conditions or leave their jobs (interview with Hajara, 2018; interview with Rosey, 2018). According to Hajara, a traditional restaurant worker, she had to tolerate violations of her rights at her workplace because ‘when I am with someone [an employer], I don’t like changing. I want to stay for long’ (interview with Hajara, 2018). In contrast, Rosey pointed out that she ‘would leave and go for another job when the conditions get too bad’ (interview with Rosey, 2018). Therefore, the power imbalance between the *chop bar* owners and the workers leaves the latter with very little room to manoeuvre beyond leaving work or enduring its working conditions.

Furthermore, the *chop bar* workers in this study refer to informal, and again quite one-sided, processes of “mediation” at the workplaces in order to smooth over employment relations that have become strained (interview with Hajara, 2018; interview with Rosey, 2018). The two-stage “mediation” process has a first stage that involves direct apologies by the workers to their employers. According to Bene, a *chop bar* worker, ‘when we offend our mother, we go and apologise to her’ (interview with Bene, 2018). This initial effort is escalated into a second stage that involves a third party when the ‘apology does not go well. There is an

elderly woman who sells oranges here. We go to her to come and plead for us' (interview with Enyonam, 2018). The involvement of this elderly women is in line with the cultural norms on disputes resolution in Ghana (Crook, 2012). Her approach is conciliatory and focused on restoring the employer-employee relationship. It is important to note that whether the repairs of the strained relations are attained at the first stage or through the involvement of a third party, the mechanisms through which work disputes are resolved at the traditional restaurants in this study are created and reinforced by the power imbalance between the employers and employees at the *chop bars*. In that sense, the very use of the word "mediation" might be misleading, as there seems very little that *chop bar* owners need to accommodate in these processes.

Interviews with the *chop bar* workers in this study revealed that another pernicious outcome of the power asymmetry between them and the owners of the traditional restaurants is the unilateral determination of wages and employment conditions by the *chop bar* owners (interview with Akos, 2018; interview with Mamuna, 2018). This happens because the power imbalance at the *chop bars* deters negotiations between individual workers and their employers. Moreover, the absence of workers' organisations prevents collective bargaining. In some instances, apart from work rules and job description, workers even begin work without knowledge of their wages and benefits. Akos, a *chop bar* worker recounts that:

I was not told how much I will be paid when I started. She [my employer] said I should come at the end of the week for my pay. On Friday, she told us to come on Saturday morning for our pay. When I went, she gave me GH¢80 [US17.10] and I realised that the weekly pay would be GH¢80 [US17.10] (interview with Akos, 2018).

Similarly, Mamuna, a *chop bar* worker bemoaned that 'when you come here it [your wage] is based on the job you do. She [the employer] will not tell you how much she will pay you. If you work to her satisfaction, then she will pay you accordingly' (interview with Mamuna, 2018). Significantly, even those *chop bar* workers in this study who knew their pay and employment benefits before they started work had no inputs in the determination of their employment conditions. Such lack of information on employment conditions and the absence of negotiations constitute a significant decent work deficit that emanates from the persistence of power asymmetry at the *chop bars* in this study.



Moreover, how wages and employment conditions change over time at the *chop bars* in this study also illustrates the loop-sided power relations at the traditional restaurants (interview with Esinam, 2018; interview with Enyonam, 2018). The first, and the most common, way in which wages improve is through the initiative of the *chop bar* owners. Esinam has worked at her current *chop bar* in the last two years. She recounted that ‘at first, she [my employer] used to give us GH¢20 [US\$4.27] a day. But now I am paid GH¢30 [US\$6.40] per day. She realised that it [the pay] was not good so she increased it herself’ (interview with Esinam, 2018). This phenomenon is an outcome of the same power asymmetry that explain workers’ lack of information on employment conditions and the dearth of negotiations at the commencement of work.

The second way by which wages increase at the traditional restaurants in this study is for the workers to plead their case for wage adjustment through their “leaders” (interview with Enyonam, 2018). Although there are no workers’ associations at the *chop bars*, there are recognised workers’ “leaders”. These are mostly senior workers – because of their longevity in employment – at the traditional restaurants. These “leaders” have closer relationships with the “madams” and serve as intermediaries between their colleagues and the “madams”. However, these “leaders” do not hold formal negotiations on employment conditions. Rather, they communicate workers’ concerns over wages and working conditions to their “madams”. The decision to alter the wages, and the quantum of the increase, solely lies with the owners of these *chop bars*. Enyonam started work at her *chop bar* on a daily wage of GH¢25 (US\$5.34) which was later increased by GH¢5 (US\$1.07) to GH¢30 (US\$6.41). According to her, when she and her colleagues felt ‘that the pay was not good, we expressed it to our “leader here”. We told her to tell our “madam” about it. We pleaded. It was not a confrontation. We pleaded [through our leader] that the money she [our madam] was giving us was not enough so she should add something to it’ (interview with Enyonam, 2018). In this case, although the workers initiated the process, they had no inputs in the outcomes. Therefore, wage adjustment at the *chop bars* in this study is essentially an employer prerogative. Employers might accept workers’ request for a higher salary out of convenience, to avoid a high labour turn over, or out of agreement with the need to pay fairer wages.

## 8.5 Wages and Working Conditions at *Chop Bars*

We have so far reviewed the lack of worker input in the determination of wages and working conditions at *chop bars*. Unsurprisingly, this feeds into other decent work deficits such as low wages, abuse of the rights of workers, and a lack of social protection, as the chapter goes on to review by drawing on the accounts of the participants and observations in this study.

### 8.5.1 *Chop Bar Wages*

Table 14 shows that wages at the traditional restaurants in this study are low. Daily wages at the *chop bars* ranged from GH¢6.67 (US\$1.43) to GH¢30 (US\$6.40) in 2018. This was about GH¢0.83 (US\$0.18) to GH¢3.75 (US\$0.80) per hour. The average wage was GH¢1.69 (US\$0.36) per hour or GH¢13.53 (US\$2.90) in a day. Yet, most of the workers – about sixty percent – earned below the average daily wage.

Table 14 illustrates that 5 out of the 31 – about 16 percent – of the *chop bar* workers who reported their daily earnings were paid GH¢6.67 (US\$1.43) to GH¢7.49 (US\$1.60) in 2018. This meant that they earned below the upper poverty line in Ghana (GH¢7.90 or US\$1.69). Their daily wages were between GH¢0.49 (US\$0.11) and GH¢1.23 (US\$0.26) less than the upper poverty line in Ghana (GH¢7.90 or US\$1.69). The working-poor among the *chop bar* workers in this study earned between 6.2 percent and 16.7 percent less than what was required to move them out of poverty. The presence of poverty-wages at the *chop bars* is consistent with the observation by Ghana Statistical Service that significant number of informal economy workers are trapped in poverty because they do not earn enough to lift themselves and their families out of poverty (GSS, 2014: 23).

The incomes of the working-poor in this study were below the national minimum wage in Ghana. In 2018, national minimum wage in Ghana was GH¢9.68 (US\$2.10) for a day's work or GH¢1.21 (US\$0.58) per hour. The labour law in Ghana prohibits all employers in Ghana from paying wages below the stipulated minimum. Yet, as we have seen, 5 out of the 31 –

about 16 percent – *chop bar* workers in this study who reported their daily wages earned GH¢6.67 (US\$1.43) to GH¢7.49 (US\$1.60). This meant that their incomes were between GH¢2.27 (US\$0.47) and GH¢3.01 (US\$0.64) or 23.5 percent to 31 percent, less than the daily national minimum wage. The *chop bar* owners who paid below the national minimum wage were able to do so without any sanctions because of the failure of the state to enforce employment standards in the informal economy.

**Table 14: Daily wages at *chop bars***

Amounts (GH¢)	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative percent
6.67	4	12.9	12.9
6.68-6.90	0	0.00	12.9
7.00 - 7.49	1	3.23	16.13
7.50 – 7.90	0	0.00	16.13
8.00 - 8.90	0	0.00	16.13
9.00 - 9.90	1	3.23	19.36
10.00 - 10.90	4	12.9	32.26
11.00 - 11.90	5	16.13	48.39
12.00 - 12.90	3	9.68	58.07
13.00 - 13.90	0	0.00	58.07
14.00 - 15.90	0	0.00	58.07
15.00 - 15.90	7	22.58	80.65
16.00 - 16.90	0	0.00	80.65
17.00 - 17.90	0	0.00	80.65
18.00 - 18.00	2	6.45	87.1
19.00 - 19.00	0	0.00	87.1
20.00 - 29.00	3	9.68	96.78
30	1	3.23	100.01
N	31	100	

Source: interviews with Abiba, 2018; Afia, 2018; Anna, 2018; Bene, 2018; Tawiah, 2018; Connie, 2018; Efe, 2018; Sowah, 2018; Erica, 2018; Esinam, 2018; Boahemaa, 2018; Afriyie, 2018; Boye, 2018; Hawa, 2018; Joana, 2018; Torgbe, 2018; Odjao,

2018; Hajara, 2018; Mamuna, 2018; Mansa, 2018; Akos, 2018; Otuwaa, 2018; Rahi, 2018; Rose, 2018; Lamatu, 2018; Sackey, 2018; Thess, 2018; Enyonam, 2018; Abena, 2018; Anaba, 2018; Suzzy, 2018.

Table 14 also shows that significant inequalities exist in the wage distribution at the *chop bars* in this study. About 60 percent of the workers who reported their daily wages earned below the average wage. Moreover, the lowest wage (GH¢6.67 or US\$1.43) was GH¢23.33 (US\$5.00) or about 350 percent less than the highest pay. This means that it took the least wage earner about four days to earn a day's wage of the highest earner. The participants in this study maintain that such disparities are explained by seniority and job functions at the *chop bars*. Those who earned the least recently joined their establishments or performed cleaning tasks, such as washing dishes and sweeping (interview with Esinam, 2018). The highest wage earners were the senior workers at the *chop bars* and those who perform the most arduous or skilful tasks such as preparation of *banku*, a Ghanaian delicacy made from corn (interview with Akuvi, 2017).

### **8.5.2 Employment Benefits**

Apart from wages, the *chop bar* owners and workers in this study broached that two employment benefits exist at their traditional restaurants (interview with Bene, 2018; interview with Rosey, 2018; interview with Enyonam, 2018). The first of these benefits is free meals. The *chop bars* provided at least one meal a day for their workers. Bene, a *chop bar* worker 'eats three times [in a day]. In the morning, in the afternoon and in the evening' (interview with Bene, 2018) at her work. Rosey's employer gives her 'food twice a day' (interview with Rosey, 2018) and Enyonam 'eats once a day at work' (interview with Enyonam, 2018). These free meals are important because they supplement the low pay at the traditional restaurants.

The second benefit at that the *chop bars* in this study is free accommodation (interviews with Sowah, 2018; interview with Afia, 2018). About half of the *chop bar* workers in this study resided permanently or temporarily at their workplaces. Among the migrant workers who

had no alternative accommodation in Accra, the *chop bars* were ‘home. Females have their room and we [males] also have ours. The females are at the right side [pointing]’ (interviews with Sowah, 2018). In contrast, those who had homes in the city stayed at their workplaces during the week and went home at the weekends when there is no work. Afia, a *chop bar* worker mentioned that ‘I stay at Anyaa [about 26km from her *chop bar*] so I sleep here. I only go home during the weekend when we are not working’ (interview with Afia, 2018). This free accommodation saves *chop bar* workers from rent and transportation costs. Therefore, if this and the free meals were monetised, the lowest wage at the *chop bars* may be pushed above the national minimum wage and poverty line.

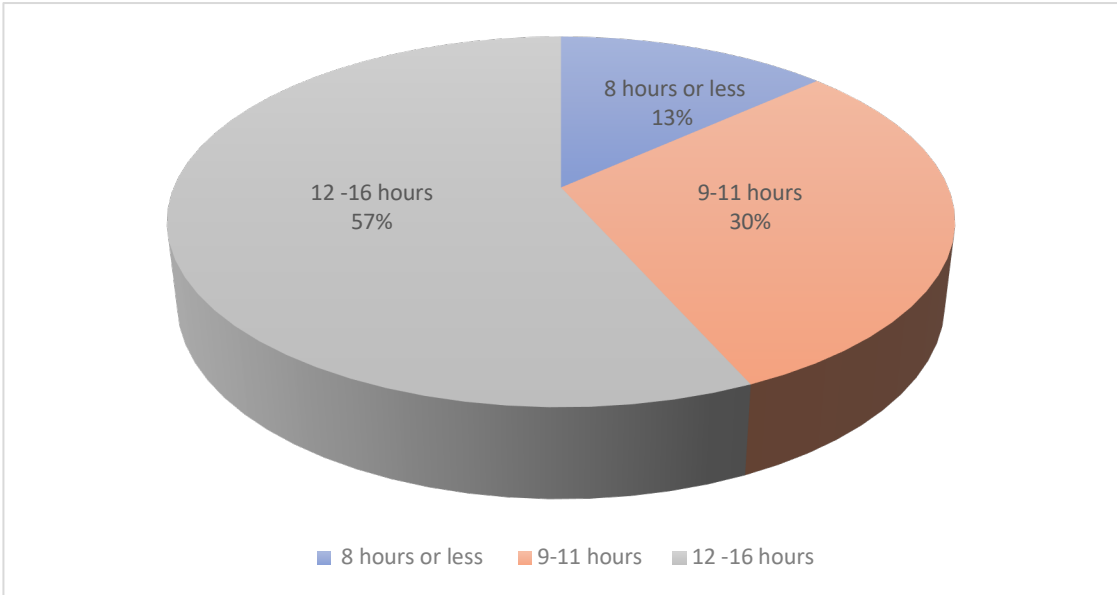
Nonetheless, these benefits cannot justify the non-compliance with the minimum wage legislation and the incidence of working-poverty at some *chop bars* in this study. This is because first, the traditional restaurants that pay wages above the national minimum wage and the upper poverty line also provide similar employment benefits. Second, *chop bar* accommodation is hardly decent. In most cases, they are poorly ventilated, and the workers share their sleeping spaces with cooking equipment and foodstuffs. Finally, the presence of these workers at the traditional restaurants serves as night security. This saves *chop bar* owners from paying for security. This means that the workers who reside at *chop bars* provide “unpaid security services” beyond the required working hours.

### **8.5.3 Hours of Work**

Aside the “unpaid security service” hours, the actual working hours at the *chop bars* in this study were longer than the standard working hours in Ghana (interview with Amoakoah, 2017; interview with Akos, 2018). This phenomenon is consistent with the situation at many informal workplaces around the world (ILO, 2013). Ghana’s Labour Act (Act 651, 2003) provides for eight hours of work a day or 40 hours in a week. Yet, the average daily working hours at the *chop bars* in this study was eleven and half hours. This is similar to the 12-hour daily work among street food vendors in Accra (FAO, 2016: 8). Figure 8 shows that about 57 percent of the *chop bars* in this study operated above the average: between 12 to 16 hours

a day for five days. According to Amoakoah, a *chop bar* owner, ‘work starts around 5 am [and] closing time depends on the market. Sometimes they [the workers] close at 4:30 pm or 5 or 5:30 pm. It is not a fixed time, it depends on the market’ (interview with Amoakoah, 2017). Akos, a *chop bar* worker ‘starts work at 4:30 am and closes at 7 pm. We do not work on Sundays and Saturdays’ (Interview with Akos, 2018). Only 13 percent of the traditional restaurants in this study operated within the standard working hours in Ghana. These *chop bars* have shorter hours of work because they operate according to consumer orders.

**Figure 8: Working hours.**



N = 30

Source: interviews with; Mimi, 2018; Yaa, 2018; Suzzy, 2018; Bene, 2018; Tawiah, 2018; Connie, 2018; Efe, 2018; Sowah, 2018; Erica, 2018; Esinam, 2018; Boahemaa, 2018; Afriyie, 2018; Boye, 2018; Hawa, 2018; Joana, 2018; Torgbe, 2018; Odjao, 2018; Hajara, 2018; Mamuna, 2018; Mansa, 2018; Akos, 2018; Otuwaa, 2018; Rahi, 2018; Rose, 2018; Lamatu, 2018; Sackey, 2018; Thess, 2018; Enyonam, 2018; Abena, 2018; Anaba, 2018

Figure 8 shows that the working hours of about 87 percent the *chop bars* in this study do not comply with the working time regulations in Ghana. The Labour Act (Act 651, 2003) of Ghana provides that beyond the standard 8 hours, extra hours worked must be regarded as overtime, and paid for. The law also provides that overtime must be voluntary except in cases

where the enterprise requires overtime work in order to be viable or during emergencies where overtime work is necessary to avoid threat to life and property. Arguably, traditional restaurants do not require compulsory overtime in order to be viable. Yet, the extra hours that the workers in this study put in are not voluntary. Most importantly, the *chop bar* workers in this study reported that they are not paid overtime wages.

Therefore, if the non-payment of overtime wages is considered, the scale of non-compliance with minimum wage regulations appear much higher. As we saw earlier, two out of ten of the *chop bar* workers in this study earned below the national minimum wage and the poverty line. However, some of the workers who earned above the national minimum wage and poverty line worked longer than the standard hours. For instance, the daily wage (GH¢14.00 or US\$3.00) of Bene, a *chop bar* worker in this study, was higher than the national minimum wage and the average pay among the *chop bar* workers in this study. Yet, she gets this wage for starting work ‘at 4:30am and closing at 8 pm’ (interview with Bene, 2018). This means that Bene received GH¢0.90 (US\$0.19) per hour instead of the legislated GH¢1.21 (US\$0.58) per hour. Hence, apart from being a breach of the working time rules in Ghana, the long working time at the traditional restaurants in this study masks the scale of the non-compliance with the national minimum wage legislation in Ghana and the extent to which *chop bar* wages are poverty-wages.

#### ***8.5.4 Violation of Mandatory Benefits***

In addition to the above decent work deficits, the *chop bar* owners in this study violate the rights of their workers to the statutory maternity leave, annual leave, and social security (interview with Korklu, 2017; interview with Maame, 2017; interview with Amoakoah, 2017; interview with Amoakoah, 2017). The National Pensions Act (Act 766) of Ghana obliges employers to deduct 5.5 percent of the basic salary of their workers and pay it with the employer’s contribution of 13 percent of the basic pay towards social security. The labour law in the country provides for a minimum of 15 days of paid annual leave for all workers and three months of maternity leave for female workers. In spite of these legal provisions,

the *chop bars* in this study do not pay social security contributions. They also do not adhere to the annual leave and maternity leave rules in the country. These violations are pervasive because the workers lack representation and the state does not enforce labour standards in the informal economy.

### **8.5.5 Job Security**

Another decent work deficit that came up in the interviews with the traditional restaurant owners and their workers in this study is job insecurity (interview with Amoakoah, 2017; interview with Mamuna, 2018). As we saw earlier, some of the labour attrition at the traditional restaurants come from employment terminations by the *chop bar* owners. The ready-supply of labour and the lack of enforcement of employment protection regulations create conditions that enable the *chop bars* owners to sack their workers without incurring any compensation and worker replacement costs. Amoakoah, a *chop bar* owner boasted that ‘these girls are just workers and I can sack them at any time’ (interview with Amoakoah, 2017), as she does not have to pay any compensation for dismissals and can easily replace dismissed workers. Mamuna, a *chop bar* worker, recalls: ‘I was working at a *chop bar* at the stadium. I got sick so I stayed home for about two weeks. When I recovered, I went back but she [her employer] told me that she has employed another person. So I had to look for another job’ (interview with Mamuna, 2018). Mamuna’s employer refused to pay her during those two weeks and terminated her appointment without any compensation.

Having reviewed the employment relations and the variegated decent work deficits that the *chop bars* workers face, it is useful to reflect on how these realities contradict some of the underlying assumptions of the legalist and voluntarist perspectives on informality. We have shown that voluntarists scholars maintain that individuals, and crucially, self-employed workers, resort to informality when the costs of abiding by laws in pursuit of legitimate economic objectives exceed the benefits. Legalists assume that addressing the persistence and expansion of the informal economy requires the deregulation of the economy (De Soto, 1989). However, the findings of this study show how the lack of enforcement of employment



regulations enabled the *chop bar* owners to abuse employment rights of their workers. The payment of wages that are below the national minimum wage in Ghana, the non-payment of social security contributions, and the denial of the statutory rights of the *chop bar* workers in this study cannot be separated from the fact that the state does not enforce employment rules in at the traditional restaurants.

Thus, informality is not always a search to evade unnecessary regulations as voluntarists suggest. Such argument ignores important differences that exist in employment status, control over means of production, and vulnerabilities in the informal economy. We have seen that traditional restaurant work is a survival mechanism and a means towards an attempt to secure better future employment. The *chop bar* workers in this study did not choose informal employment in order avoid the burdens of regulations in pursuit of their legitimate economic objectives. Rather, the non-enforcement of employment regulation and the extent of trade union coverage at the *chop bars* – which will be discussed shortly – placed the workers in precarious situations. This shows the limitations of applying the legalists and voluntarists assumptions in explaining informality in sectors in which paid employment is significant. Whether these workers can be represented, to which the analysis now turn, is the critical issue instead.

## **8.6 Unionisation at Traditional Restaurants**

Organising at traditional restaurants involves the affiliation of associations of *chop bar* owners to the TUC (Ghana) (interview with Korklu, 2017; interview with Maame, 2017). In 2018, the union had three associations of traditional restaurant operators. These were the UCG, the ICAG, and the GETA (ibid.). The UCG organises traditional food vendors at the Agbobloshie market and lorry terminal, the ICAG covers *chop bar* operators across the Accra metropolis, and the GETA organises *chop bar* owners at the La Nkwantanang-Madina and the Ga East municipalities in Accra (ibid.). Membership of these associations is exclusive to traditional restaurant owners. Therefore, their inclusion into the TUC (Ghana) has

repercussions for the traditional character of the union, as an organisation of workers. The implications of this will be discussed later in the chapter.

The extent of the trade union coverage at the *chop bars* in this study has been shaped by the power dynamics at these *chop bars* (interview with Amoakoah, 2017; interview with Korklu, 2017). We have seen that industrial relations at *chop bars* are characterised by worker quiescence and asymmetrical power relations between the employers and their workers. In order to sustain such uneven relationships, the *chop bar* operators in this study have endeavoured to keep their workers out of their associations. Amoakoah, a *chop bar* owner mentioned that ‘these girls are just workers ... so they are not part of the association [UCG]’ (interview with Amoakoah, 2017). Korklu, an officer the TUC (Ghana) recounts that the union ‘tried [unionising the workers] of the caterers but it did not work. They [*chop bar* owners] were not prepared to get their workers involved’ (interview with Korklu, 2017). These *chop bar* owners prevented encounters between their workers and the trade union by refusing to allow the workers to attend meetings the union organised for those in the sector (ibid.) Therefore, the *chop bar* owners in this study tolerate unionisation only to the extent that it promotes their interests and expectations.

The members of the TUC (Ghana) at the traditional restaurants who took part in this study maintained that they expect two main things from the union. The first is for the TUC (Ghana) to support their engagements with public authorities in Accra (interview with Margie, 2017; interview with Jenny, 2017, interview with Maame, 2017). This is important because urban informal economy activities are governed by regulations issued by urban planners and local governments (Chen, 2013: 70). Consequently, informal economy operators need to bargain with such authorities in order to pursue their livelihood without harassment such as the confiscation of goods and evictions (ibid.). In Accra, the decisions and actions of city councils and the GRA directly affect *chop bar* operations in the city. We have seen that these public authorities set and enforce business permit regulations, health certification rules, and collect fees and taxes from the *chop bars* that operate in the city. They sometimes deplore harsh measures (Crentsil and Owusu, 2018) to remove informal economic activities in urban

spaces (Onuoha, 2014: 123). Therefore, according to Margie, a *chop bar* owner, her association

joined the union so that if something is disturbing us [eviction notices, operational permit fees, and taxes], we could tell them [TUC (Ghana)] to communicate it to the government. This is what we expect from the union, to tell the government about our needs and what we expect government to do for us. That is how we can get benefit from the union (interview with Margie, 2017).

In addition to representation, the *chop bar* owners in this study revealed that they expect their unionisation to lead to access to formal credit for business improvement (interview with Jenny, 2017). This is essential because informal economy operators experience significant challenges in accessing credit from banks, due to perceived risk associated with informal economy lending (Aliber, 2002). As Jenny, a *chop bar* owner, puts it, ‘one of the problems we face is finance. We need money to work. We need low-interest loans to run our businesses’ (interview with Jenny, 2017). The traditional restaurant operators in this study know that ‘the TUC [Ghana] cannot give us money but they [TUC (Ghana)] can contact banks to get us low-interest loans’ (ibid.).

In a way, the financial intermediation services and the kind of representation that traditional restaurant operators expect from the TUC (Ghana) meant that the union could not use the traditional trade union strategies and services to meet the needs of the *chop bar* operators. Collective bargaining and the usual forms of industrial relations practice would not work because traditional restaurant operators are enterprise owners. Therefore, the TUC (Ghana) had to find new ways to meet the expectations of its members at the *chop bars* in Accra.

A key informant from the trade unions in this study revealed that the first way by which the TUC (Ghana) has sought to meet the expectation of *chop bar* owners is through capacity development support (interview with Korklu, 2017). Such support has mostly been financed by the Netherlands Trade Union Confederation (FNV), the Danish Trade Union Council for International Development Co-operation (LO/FTF), and the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) of Germany (interview with Korklu, 2017). This raises long term sustainability questions about the capacity development programmes. In the previous chapter, we saw that the TUC (Ghana) does not receive any financial contributions from informal economy operators.

Therefore, the capacity development programme may be compromised when donor funds dry up.

Nonetheless, the accounts by the traditional restaurant owners in this study suggest that the capacity development approach remains an important trade union benefit to the *chop bar* owners of the TUC (Ghana) (interview with Ayisha, 2017; interview with Mawuenya, 2017; interview with Adaku, 2017). The programme seeks to promote operational efficiency and increase the profitability of *chop bars*. It involves training on food preparation, food presentation, business management, and rights at work. It also focuses on empowering *chop bar* owners to engage with government agencies and local authorities. Ayisha, a *chop bar* owner expressed that the TUC (Ghana) ‘has taught us [*chop bar* owners] a lot of things. We went to school for about three months, they taught us food hygiene and customer relations. Some of the resource persons were from the [Ghana] Fire Service’ (interview with Ayisha, 2017). According to Mawuenya, another *chop bar* owner, the TUC (Ghana) ‘educated us on how to conduct our business and handle our money, how to handle both the income and outflow’ (interview with Mawuenya, 2017). The union have drawn on the expertise from the National Vocational Training Institute (NVTI), city councils, and other public authorities for these programmes (interview with Korklu, 2017). This approach has ensured that *chop bar* operators learn the regulatory expectations of these public authorities.

Significantly, the *chop bar* owners in this study maintained that the capacity development programmes have enabled them to manage their businesses better (interview with Ayisha, 2018; interview with Daavi, 2017). Adaku, a *chop bar* owner mentioned that since she ‘joined the TUC [(Ghana)], it has helped me in several ways. Now I know the need to arrange my things properly and take care of my things. Now I know how to estimate my profit and use my resource properly’ (interview with Adaku, 2017). According to Ayisha, another *chop bar* owner, ‘since we joined the TUC [(Ghana)] we have gained a lot of benefits. Now we know that we have to pay ourselves’ (interview with Ayisha, 2018). Also, Daavi, a *chop bar* owner, pointed out that:

the training programme of the TUC (Ghana) has empowered us. It has shown us how to talk to people, how to treat the customer in such a way that she would come again.

So it has enabled us to handle our customers to make them happy to always come back (interview with Daavi, 2017).

While the increased confidence that Daavi refers to, is an important asset, statements such as the one above cannot be taken on face value. The good language and treatment of customers, significant as they might be, there are other factors, such as cut-throat competition from other *chop bars*, that may affect the sustainability of these economic units.

We have seen that one of focus of the capacity development programmes has been training on rights at work. Yet, this study has shown that significant decent work deficits persist at the traditional restaurants in this study. This suggests that not all the aspects of the business practices of the *chop bar* owners in this study have been positively impacted by the capacity development programmes of the TUC (Ghana). This also points the technical nature of such programmes, based as they are, on the naïve assumption that in the context of unregulated employment relations, a training programme on workers' rights might be enough to change the status quo in the relationship between *chop bar* owners and workers.

On a more positive note, accounts by the *chop bar* operators in this study show that the capacity development programmes have brought some improvements in the engagements between them and the public authorities in Accra (interview with Dada, 2017; interview with Acquah, 2017; interview with Boateng, 2017). The trainings of the TUC (Ghana) have exposed the *chop bar* owners to their economic rights, the duties of public authorities, and how to seek redress. Dada, a *chop bar* owner pointed out that the trainings they have received from the TUC (Ghana),

enabled us to know our rights as citizens. At first, they [city authorities] used to harass us. We did not have the confidence to challenge such treatment. But through the education programmes organised by the TUC [Ghana], we have built our confidence. Now we know our rights (interview with Dada, 2017).

In order to promote the exercise of these rights, the union provides *chop bar* owners with 'the opportunity to talk to the AMA [Accra Metropolitan Assembly] and the Ghana Revenue Authority [GRA], to ask a lot of questions. The TUC (Ghana) has created a forum where we [*chop bar* owners] ask questions, we talk to the authorities' (interview with Acquah, 2017).

Boateng, an executive member of the GETA maintained that ‘since we joined the union, they [the assembly] invite us to town hall meetings, or when they are fixing fees’ (interview with Boateng, 2017). Therefore, even though at the time of this study there was no evidence of practical gains, the participation of informal economy operators in town hall meetings can be said to be an important step towards their inclusion in the decision-making processes of city authorities.

Trade unionists and traditional restaurant operators in this study revealed that the second trade union approach to meeting the expectations of *chop bar* owners is business support services (interview with Dada, 2017; interview with Korklu, 2017; interview with Maame, 2017). These include financial credit facilitation, extension of social protection coverage, and representation. It is important to note that this approach, unlike the first one, is not financed by donor support. In addition, the provision of these services does not come at significant costs to the TUC (Ghana). Therefore, there are no long term sustainability concerns with the financial credit facilitation, the extension of social protection coverage, and the representation that the union provides to its *chop bar* owners in Accra.

As we saw earlier, one of the challenges that traditional restaurant operators face is lack of capital for business development and expansion. However, the traditional restaurant operators in this study maintained that their connection to the TUC (Ghana) has improved their access to formal financial credit. Boateng, a member of the GETA, recounts that ‘some time ago, we tried to access credit from a bank. The TUC (Ghana) went to the bank and recommended that they know us so the bank should go ahead and give us the credit’ (interview with Boateng, 2017). This loan operated as a group on-lending scheme where the bank lends the money to the group ‘which in turn on-lends that money to its members’ (Aliber 2015: 48) and placed the responsibility for loan repayment on the GETA. This benefit that the traditional restaurant owners of the TUC (Ghana) enjoy is similar to the credit intermediation services that the GAWU, the TWU, and the GPRTU provide to their members in the informal economy (Adu-Amankwah, 1999; Britwum and Martens, 2008; and Ryklief, 2013). They show that unionisation can boost the creditworthiness of informal economy operators and their associations.

In addition, accounts by the *chop bar* operators in this study show that another significant service that the TUC (Ghana) offers them is formal social security coverage (interview with Maame, 2017; interview with Daavi, 2017). The union assisted the UNIWA to establish the TUC-UNIWA Informal Workers Pension Scheme (interview with Maame, 2017). This is a voluntary formal social insurance scheme that enable informal economy members of the union to contribute towards social protection. The scheme is financed by membership contributions. In addition, the UNIWA operates a welfare scheme (ibid.). This is also a voluntary and contributory scheme that provides social and economic support to members. Together, the TUC-UNIWA Informal Workers Pension Scheme and the welfare fund provide opportunities for social protection cover for traditional caterers. Daavi, a *chop bar* owner, stated that:

we are really happy that they [TUC (Ghana)] introduced a pension scheme. Because as a self-employed, I knew that pensions are normally for government workers [formal sector workers]. But by the grace of God, they [the TUC (Ghana) and the UNIWA] have brought something for those of us in self-employment, a pension to support our future. I am happy about that. It is a benefit to me (interview with Daavi, 2017).

This excitement is understandable because one of the decent work deficits that informal economy operators in Ghana face is the lack of social protection. In 2013, only 5 percent of the informal economy operators in the country were entitled to any form of formal social security (GSS, 2014e). Most informal economy workers in the country do not have access to formal ways to contribute towards social security in order to accrue pension rights. Therefore, the TUC-UNIWA Informal Workers Pension Scheme and the UNIWA welfare fund are essential trade union benefits that seek to ameliorate one of the decent work deficits that *chop bar* owners face, the lack of social protection. Yet, regrettably, such decent work deficit remains for workers at the *chop bars*, due to TUC (Ghana) failure to reach them.

The traditional restaurant operators in this study broached that the third form of support the TUC (Ghana) provides to them is representation (interview with Kojo, 2018; interview with Boateng, 2017; interview with Nketia, 2017). This involves assisting *chop bar* owners in their dealings with public authorities and directly engaging with government agencies and

local authorities on behalf of traditional restaurant operators. This approach is important because the decisions and actions of the Accra city and tax authorities directly affect *chop bar* operations in Accra. Significantly, trade union representation has protected the interests of chop bar owners against some of the decisions of public authorities. According to Kojo, ‘since we joined the union, when the AMA wants to evict us or government wants to move us from where we are located, we talk. When one mentions the name of the union, they go back and rethink. At first it was not like that’ (interview with Kojo, 2018). Yet prior to the affiliation of traditional restaurant operators to the TUC (Ghana) ‘if they [AMA] threatened to evict you today, they would evict you today’ (interview with Kojo, 2018). Boateng, a member of the GETA, recounts their ‘dispute with the municipal council over taxes [fees]. We thought the taxes [fee] were too high. The TUC [Ghana] took the matter up with the Ga East Municipal Assembly at Abokobi and solved it for us. They even reduced the taxes [fees]’ (interview with Boateng, 2017).

At the Tema Station in the Accra metropolis, trade union efforts stopped a planned demolition of *chop bars* (interview with Nketia, 2017). In 2015, as Nketia, a *chop bar* owner, recalls, traditional restaurants in the area she operates were earmarked to be destroyed by the city authority:

They were demolishing some parts of the Tema Station. They said there were going to construct a hospital. So they were destroying the structures of those of us on this lane. We complained to our madam here [the leader of the association]. She picked a phone and called the TUC [Ghana]. The TUC [Ghana] also called the Mayor [of Accra] and the Mayor said they would not reach our side with the demolishing. So that is one benefit that I got from TUC [Ghana]. If I were not a member of the union, they would have demolished my structure. That is one of the benefits I got from TUC [Ghana] (interview with Nketia, 2017).

Similarly, at the Agbobloshie market, an intervention by the TUC (Ghana) halted moves by the Accra City authority to stop the members of the UCG from operating their *chop bars* (interview with Dada, 2017). Dada, a *chop bar* owner at Agbobloshie recounts that:

when there were fire outbreaks in the markets, the [the AMA] said that they were going to stop all food vendors at Agbobloshie from operating. They said no one should light fire to cook in the market. We wrote to the TUC [Ghana] and the TUC [Ghana] helped us to write a letter to the AMA. The TUC [Ghana] also followed it with a letter [to the AMA]. Because of that, they [the AMA] did not stop us. Since



then, they have not harassed us. That was a good thing the TUC [Ghana] did for us (interview with Dada, 2017).

In addition to the above, the accounts by the *chop bar* owners in this study suggest that unionisation has improved the relationship that existed between them and public officials in Accra (interview with Boateng, 2017; interview with Nketia, 2017; interview with Dada, 2017). This has enhanced the voice of traditional restaurant owners in the decisions of city authorities that affect them. Boateng, an officer of the GETA, pointed out that ‘before we [GETA] joined the union, the assembly dealt with us with force. They did not respect us as workers. But since we joined the Trade Union Congress, they [local authorities] are now careful in dealing with us (interview with Boateng, 2017). We have already seen how the TUC (Ghana) has brought about interactions between public authorities and traditional restaurant operators in Accra. The improvements that have occurred in the relationship between the *chop bar* owners of the TUC (Ghana) and public authorities in Accra show how unionisation can confer legitimacy and power to informal economy operators.

### **7.7 Conclusions: Trade Unionism, Power, and Mobilisation at *Chop Bars***

The presence of the TUC (Ghana) in the traditional food services sector in Accra provides an instance of trade unions attempts to recruit members amongst new constituencies. Its implications for the power and the interests of traditional restaurant operators and their workers, and the trade union movement itself are important. An influential argument on contemporary unionism emphasizes the declining influence of unions, often linked to the diminished capacity of trade unions to protect and enhance the working conditions of their members and their reduced effects on economic and social policies that affect workers (Lévesque and Murray, 2010: 334).

Reflecting on powers of workers and trade unions from this study of the unionisation of traditional restaurant operators in Accra must start from the obvious observation that its impacts vary on the different categories of actors in the sector. Notably, casual workers at the traditional restaurants have been excluded from the associations of *chop bar* owners and

by trade union coverage. Consequently, not all of the interests that are present in the employment relations at traditional restaurants are furthered by the presence of the union. The capacity development trainings, the representation, and other forms of trade union support have promoted the interests of *chop bar* owners. Yet, the presence of the TUC (Ghana) in *chop bars* does not give any power or benefits to the workers. Thus, this case study shows that trade union power may not necessarily flow to, or benefit, the most vulnerable. Addressing this incapacity to reach the weakest in the informal economy remain a pressing issue for the trade union movement in Ghana.

The TUC was more successful to engage with the owners of *chop bars*. Wright's (2000) and Silver's (2003) ideas on structural power and associational power are useful to understand the relationship between the owners of *chop bars* and the trade unions. The traditional caterers in this study have low structural power, as they are not located 'in a key industrial sector' (Wright, 2000: 962). The food services they provide do not lend themselves to strikes or to threats of withdrawing *chop bar* services. These factors detract from the structural power of the *chop bar* operators in this study. In chapter two, we saw that associational power is mobilised by pooling the primary – the structural – powers of workers together (Dörre and Schmalz, 2018: 3). This means that associations that are made up of members who have weak structural power may yield limited associational power. Therefore, it is not surprising that the lack of structural power of the traditional caterers was also matched by weak associational power of their collective organisations, as the organisations that the *chop bar* owners formed – the UCG, the ICAG, and the GETA – did not possess significant political clout. In addition, we have seen how the La Nkwantanang-Madina Municipality in Accra disregarded the GETA until the association joined the TUC (Ghana). These show that in isolation or without the TUC (Ghana), the associations of *chop bar* owners – the UCG, the ICAG, and the GETA – did not have enough associational power to influence the decisions and actions of the metropolitan and municipal authorities and the tax collectors in Accra.

Significantly, this study teaches us that the associational powers of the UCG, the ICAG, and the GETA improved through affiliation to the TUC (Ghana). The partnership between *chop bar* operators and the TUC (Ghana) increased their capacity to promote their interests,

earning them some important concessions from metropolitan and municipal authorities in Accra. We have seen how the presence of the TUC (Ghana) in the traditional catering sector improved the relationship between public authorities and *chop bar* operators, ending the harassments and the abuse that these women used to face from government agencies and city authorities. These considerations, when taken together, suggest that that collective organisations made up of members who have structural power deficiencies may yield insufficient associational power. However, the effects of their associational power limitations can be mitigated by connection to another source of power.

We have also reviewed the business support that the TUC (Ghana) provided to the *chop bar* owners. The picture there is mixed. On the one hand, access to credit and training is perceived as important by some of its beneficiaries. On the other hand, these supply-side interventions, with no attention to the demand-side of the market, are likely to be of very limited impact, due to what Amsden termed, memorably, their “employment dementia” (Amsden, 2010). By this, Amsden meant the incapacity of so many “employment” programmes to factor in demand-side issue into them (ibid.).

In sum, the picture emerging from this case study is mixed. Trade unions fail to reach the weakest in the informal economy. They do reach *chop bar* owners. So far, the inclusion of traditional restaurant owners and other informal economy operators has not significantly altered the character of the TUC (Ghana) as a workers’ organisation, due to the limited voting rights that these members have. This, nonetheless, has increased the membership of the union.

For traditional restaurant workers in this study, to some extent, the lack of organisation can be explained by the lack of leadership. Kelly pointed out the important role that shop steward leadership play in the conversion of dissatisfaction into injustice and the transformation of collective interest into collective action (Kelly, 1998: 29-30). We have seen the decent work deficits which the *chop bar* workers in this study face and their responses – resignations and tolerance – to them. Arguably, these responses cannot be separated from their lack of leadership that articulate such dissatisfaction as injustice, blame the *chop bar* owners for the

injustice, and mobilise the workers for collective action. In addition, the fact that the traditional restaurant workers in this study lack structural power and associational power has implications for their responses to the decent work deficits they face. In chapter two, we reviewed the significance of opportunity, i.e., balance of power and the costs of repression, in mobilisation (Tilly 1978; Kelly, 1998). This chapter supports the assumption that opportunity is critical to the way workers respond to conditions at work.

Last, but not least, and thinking about TUC (Ghana)'s relationship with both *chop bar* owners and their workers, in this chapter we learned that the TUC (Ghana) relates with traditional restaurant owners, i.e., those who occupy the upper strata at the *chop bars*, and not the paid workers, who, as we have seen, are the most vulnerable at the traditional restaurants. Thus, trade union coverage and protection at the *chop bars*, at the times of this study, depicts a significant contradiction – one in which a workers' organisation associates with petty employers while neglecting the precarious conditions of their natural allies, the *chop bar* workers. Consequently, the benefits of the mobilisation by the TUC (Ghana) at in the *chop bars* in this study have been limited to the petty entrepreneurs. This constitutes a significant paradox in the sense that as the TUC (Ghana) advocates for decent work for workers, its members at *chop bars in Accra* – who are petty enterprise owners – abuse the rights of their workers to decent work. Until this imbalance is addressed, the incapacity of the TUC (Ghana) to reach out the most vulnerable informal workers in the sector, and more broadly in the informal economy, speaks to the weakness of the Ghanaian trade union movement.

## **CHAPTER 9: PORTS AND PORTS CASUAL LABOUR REGIMES IN GHANA**

### **9.1 Introduction**

This chapter is about how economic reforms from 2000 onwards affected the ports and the casual labour regimes at the ports in Ghana. It explores how regulatory changes, relating to economic liberalisation in the port sector, affected its labour market. The chapter also looks at how reorganisations of casual employment relationship at the port in Ghana led to new a form of trade union relationship with casual workers. These insights set the stage for our understanding of how the changes in port casual labour regimes impacted on trade unions, and on the interests and powers of casual workers at the ports in Ghana. These are the focus of the chapter that follows.

In 2000, the Ghana Ports and Harbours Authority (GPHA) started a process to transform ports in Ghana (GPHA, 2019). This involved a policy to increase private sector participation in port operations. Consequently, stevedoring and cleaning services at the ports were privatised (Britwum, 2010: 153). This changed the employment relationship between dock labour employers and casual workers at the ports. About 3,000 casual stevedores and cleaners were retrenched by the GPHA (ibid.). Subsequently, dock labour employers at the ports in Ghana moved from direct employment of casual workers to outsourcing.

This culminated in the emergence of the Ghana Dock Labour Company (GDLC) as the casual labour pool for ports in Ghana. The GDLC absorbed the casual workers who were retrenched by the GPHA and enjoyed monopoly in the supply of casual labour to the ports until 2014 (Aryee, 2011; GDLC, 2014). The transition to the GDLC regime had two important implications. First, it meant that the casual workers at the ports did not have a direct employment relationship with dock labour employers. Second, this transition saw the Maritime and Dockworkers Union (MDU) playing a dual function, for the first time, at the ports. The MDU became, on the one hand, an employer of casual workers through its 20 percent equity in the GDLC; and on the other hand, the union also functioned as the sole representative of the casual workers at the ports due to operation of a close shop system at

the GDLC (Britwum, 2010).

In 2014, the monopoly of the GDLC in the supply of casual labour to the ports in Ghana was broken. The Get Labour Company Ltd (Get Labour thereafter) and the Trust Marine & Labour Services Ltd (Trust Labour thereafter) were licensed by the GPHA to supply casual workers to Tema port in 2014 (GDLC, 2014). A year later, the South East Company and Support Services Ltd (SCSSL) started operating at Takoradi port (GDLC, 2015). The emergence of these companies brought about a competition regime in which four casual dock labour providers, namely, the GDLC, the Get Labour, the Trust Labour, and the SCSSL, competed to attract casual labour requisitions from dock labour employers at the ports in Ghana.

The foregoing shows the fundamental changes that occurred in the way casual work was organised at the ports in Ghana. In order to examine these changes, the rest of this chapter is divided into five sections. This introductory section is followed by a description of ports in Ghana in section 2. Section 3 is about port administration and port reforms in the country. Section 4 focuses on the changes that occurred in the casual labour regime at the ports. I conclude this chapter in section 5.

## **9.2 Ports in Ghana**

Ghana has two main ports. These are Tema port and Takoradi port.

### ***9.2.1 Tema Port***

Tema port is located 30 km east of Accra. It is the largest and busiest port in Ghana. Table 15 shows that Tema port handled 135.14 million metric tonnes or about 67 percent of the maritime cargo that passed through the seaports of Ghana from 2009 to 2019. It is important to note that the significance of Tema port goes beyond the handling of maritime cargo for Ghana. This port is a vital transit port for the maritime freight of Burkina Faso, Mali, and

Niger. Table 16 illustrates that Tema port handled about 8.44 million metric tonnes or 97 percent of the 9.20 million metric tonnes of the transit seaborne cargo that passed through Ghana from 2009 to 2019. The cargo volumes and the size of transit freight therefore make Tema port a critical hub for the seaborne trade of Ghana and the neighbouring landlocked countries.

**Table 15: Cargo traffic in tonnes (2009-2019)**

Year	Tema		Takoradi		Total
	Tonnes	Percent	Tonnes	Percent	Tonnes
2009	7,406,490	68.72	3,371,980	31.28	10,778,470
2010	8,696,951	68.43	4,012,159	31.57	12,709,110
2011	10,748,943	68.48	4,948,533	31.52	15,697,476
2012	11,468,962	68.35	5,310,697	31.65	16,779,659
2013	12,180,615	69.08	5,452,025	30.92	17,632,640
2014	11,126,355	70.08	4,749,913	29.92	15,876,268
2015	12,145,496	72.10	4,699,166	27.90	16,844,662
2016	13,414,784	68.94	6,045,050	31.06	19,459,834
2017	14,045,787	63.59	8,040,839	36.41	22,086,626
2018	16,594,685	65.05	8,917,604	34.95	25,512,289
2019	17,316,276	62.51	10,384,067	37.49	27,700,343
Total	135,145,344	67.21	65,932,033	32.79	201,077,377

Source: GPHA, 2019

**Table 16: Transit cargo traffic in tonnes (2009-2019)**

Years	Tema		Takoradi		Total
	Tonnes	Percent	Tonnes	Percent	Tonnes
2009	509,124	97.23	14,485	2.77	523,609
2010	447,071	89.39	53,041	10.61	500,112
2011	614,078	95.06	31,883	4.94	645,961
2012	530,457	98.89	5,958	1.11	536,415
2013	620,668	94.13	38,710	5.87	659,378
2014	577,227	94.73	32,093	5.27	609,320
2015	722,508	92.30	60,250	7.70	782,758
2016	862,377	91.35	81,705	8.65	944,082
2017	1043771	83.55	205565	16.45	1,249,336
2018	1251129	90.13	136955	9.87	1,388,084
2019	1262494	92.57	101398	7.43	1,363,892
Total	8,440,904	91.72	762,043	8.28	9,202,947

Source: GPHA, 2019

### **9.2.1 Takoradi Port**

Takoradi port is smaller and less busier than Tema port. It is located 230 km west of Accra. Table 15 shows that Takoradi port handled 65.93 million metric tonnes or about 33 percent of seaborne trade in Ghana from 2009 to 2019. Unlike Tema port, Takoradi port is not a crucial node for transit cargo. Only 762,043 metric tonnes or just about 8 percent of the 9.20 million metric tonnes of the transit cargo in Ghana from 2009 to 2019 passed through Takoradi port.

However, since the discovery of oil and gas in commercial quantities in Ghana in 2007, there has been substantial growth in cargo handling at Takoradi port. Annual vessel calls at this port increased from about 600 before the discovery of oil and gas to 1525 in 2015 (GPHA, 2019). The bulk of the increase in vessel calls at Takoradi port, about 66 percent, has been vessels that provide supplies and other logistics for the oil industry (ibid.). Therefore, in spite



of being small, Takoradi port has emerged as an important player in Ghana's growing oil and gas industry.

### **9.3 Ports Administration and Port Reforms in Ghana**

Tema and Takoradi ports are state-owned ports that are managed by the GPHA. The GPHA was established by law – the Provisional National Defence Council Law (PNDCL 160) of 1986 – with a mandate to plan, build, and develop ports in Ghana. It also manages, maintains, operates, and controls ports in the country. The GPHA sets port tariffs and provides port facilities and services, such as marine and cargo handling services including pilotage, towage, stevedoring, transfer, and storage (GPHA 2021). The GPHA also handles the receipt and delivery of containerized and general cargos. It provides services to ship owners and their agents, freight forwarders, cargo handling companies, importers, and exporters (*ibid.*). The other clients of the GPHA are haulage companies, warehouse companies, and dock labour pool companies (*ibid.*). The wide ranging nature of these functions show that with the establishment of the GPHA, port authority and the provision of port services in the country were merged in one institution (Chalfin, 2010: 581).

In the mid 1990s, the fusion of port authority and port service provision began to change. The government of Ghana, under the “Gateway Project” which was funded by the European Union (EU), started a process to improve port infrastructure in order to enhance ship and cargo traffic in the country (*ibid.*: 582). The reforms also sought to restructure the GPHA and ports management in a way that would reduce the functions of the GPHA to those of a landlord port authority (Britwum, 2010: 153). This meant that the GPHA would focus on inviting, overseeing, and generating revenue through privatisation of port activities (Chalfin, 2010: 582). As a landlord, the sole task of the GPHA was to collect rent from companies that use the facilities and services of the ports (Britwum, 2010: 153). Consequently, the GPHA privatised stevedoring and cleaning services at Tema and Takoradi ports (*ibid.*). It should be noted that the implementation of this port management model – which had become common

around the world – was promoted by the United Nations Conference on Trade (UNCTAD) and the World Bank (Chalfin, 2010: 582.).

The port reforms brought about two major changes in the way that the GPHA and the ports in Ghana operated. First, although the GPHA remained state-owned, it became fully responsible for generating revenues and financing itself without government subvention (Chalfin, 2010: 582). Second, the increased private sector participation in port operations had important ramifications for the patterns of recruitment of casual workers at the ports in the country.

#### **9.4 Port Casual Labour Regimes**

Since 2000, three phases of casual labour recruitment and employment at the ports in Ghana can be observed. These are the direct employment regime, the GDLC regime, and the competition regime.

##### ***9.4.1 The Direct Employment Regime***

Prior to the port reforms in Ghana, casual workers had a direct employment relationship with dock labour employers. This meant that dock labour employers assumed direct responsibility for the casual workers who worked at Tema and Takoradi ports.

The casual dockworkers and the managers of the GDLC who participated in this study recalled that the direct employment relationship brought about two main benefits to the casual workers at the ports in Ghana (interview with Boadi, 2018; interview with Ohene, 2018; interview with Musa, 2018). First, the remuneration scheme of the permanent workers of the GPHA had lighthouse effects on the pay of the casual workers at the ports in Ghana. Boadi, a casual worker of the GDLC recounts that ‘when we were down there [under the GPHA regime], whenever they [GPHA] gave something to the permanent staff, the casuals also

earned something' (interview with Boadi, 2018). Ohene, another casual worker of the GDLC recalls that 'when we were under the GPHA, whenever they gave bonus to the permanent staff, they gave us just a little below of what they gave to the permanent staff (interview with Ohene, 2018). According to Musa, a senior officer of the GDLC, 'the GPHA levels were a bit high in terms of remuneration' (interview with Musa, 2018). Thus, one of the benefits of the direct employment regime was that the remuneration of the permanent port workers positively influenced the wages and bonuses of the port casual workers.

Second, casual workers under this regime enjoyed a generous pay scheme. Musa, a senior officer of the GDLC pointed out that:

when we were under the GPHA, if they booked your gang for work tonight and you get here [Tema port] and they informed you that they have cancelled your gang, the work will not come on, the GPHA would pay you as if you worked. They would pay you the normal hours plus overtime hours (interview with Musa, 2018).

Sammy, a casual worker corroborated this by stating that 'whether there was work or no work, once you spend your time, take a car and come here [Tema port], they [GPHA] found ways to ensure that ... at least you get some money to pay your rent (interview with Sammy, 2018). This generous pay scheme mitigated the effects of work cancellations and work shortages on the incomes of casual workers at the ports.

The lighthouse effects and the generous pay scheme that casual workers enjoyed under the direct employment regime promoted their welfare and enhanced job satisfaction among them (interview with Sammy, 2018; interview with Kwame, 2017; interview with Nana, 2017). Sammy, recounts that 'when we were at the GPHA, it was far better' (interview with Sammy, 2018). Kwame, another casual worker of the GDLC mentioned that 'by far, the services that the GPHA used to give to us were far better than what we get here [at the GDLC in 2018]. There is a big difference' (interview with Kwame, 2017). Nana, a casual worker of the GDLC also lamented that 'if the GPHA was handling us, we would have been ok' (interview with Nana, 2017). Thus, the direct employment relationship between casual workers and dock labour employers at the ports in Ghana is remembered as a golden period by casual workers operating at the ports of Ghana.

Britwum (2010), has broached that the port reforms changed the direct employment regime in two ways. First, the dock labour employers in the country severed direct employment relationships with the casual workers. This was epitomised by the retrenchment of about 3,000 stevedores and cleaners by the GPHA (ibid.: 153). Second, in place of direct recruitment of casual labour, the dock labour employers at Tema and Takoradi ports resorted to casual labour outsourcing. Therefore, port reforms in Ghana abolished the direct employment regime and introduced a new casual labour regime. Central to this, was the creation of the GDLC, which became responsible for the recruitment and management of casual workers at Tema and Takoradi ports (ibid.).

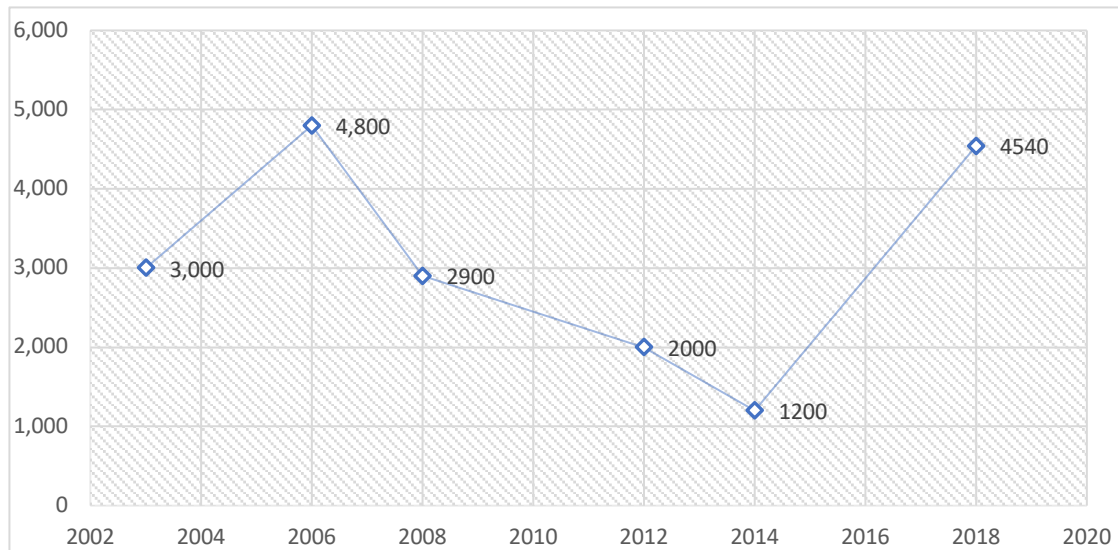
#### ***9.4.2 The GDLC Regime***

The GDLC was formed, and has been managed, by a partnership between a union (the MDU) the public sector (the GPHA), and seven private stevedoring companies in 2002 (interview with Obeng, 2018; interview with Musa, 2017; GDLC, 2002: 6). The private companies are Golden Gate Services Ltd, Atlantic Port Services Ltd, Express Maritime Services Ltd, Carl Tiedermann Ghana Ltd, Speedline Stevedoring Ltd, Odart Stevedoring Ltd, and Dashwood Shipping Agencies Ltd (GDLC, 2002: 6). The MDU holds 20 percent of the shares of the GDLC (Britwum, 2010: 116) while the other 8 partners have 10 percent each (interview with Obeng, 2018). Because of this, the MDU has two members on the Board of Directors of the GDLC (interview with Musa, 2017). The other shareholders of the GDLC have a representative each on the Board of Directors of the company (GDLC, 2002: 6). Yet the Board of Directors of the GDLC is chaired by the GPHA because of its regulatory functions at the ports in Ghana (interview with Obeng, 2018).

The GDLC was formed to meet the casual labour requirements of dock labour employers in Ghana (GDLC, 2002: 9). This objective has shaped the size and the composition of the workforce of the company. The GDLC absorbed the 3000 casual dock workers who were retrenched by the GPHA (Britwum, 2010: 153). In addition, the company recruits and trains

dockers, record clerks, topside men, drivers, and other trades men for supply to dock labour employers in Ghana (interview with Kennedy, 2018). Figure 9 shows that in 2006, the GDLC had about 4,800 workers. The total workforce of the company fell by 38 percent to about 2900 by the third quarter of 2008. This was due to the ‘mechanisation of port services and the ceding of 3 out the 12 berths to the Meridian Port Services’ (Britwum, 2010: 153.). The size of the workforce of the GDLC continued to decline until it reached about 1200 in 2014. A key informant from the management of GDLC maintained that the number of casual workers the company kept in 2014 was influenced by the impacts of the introduction of competition in the supply of casual workers to the ports (interview with Kennedy, 2018).

**Figure 9: GDLC workforce (2002-2018)**



Source: Britwum, 2010 and interview with Kennedy, 2018

As illustrated by Figure 9, the size of the workforce of the GDLC began to rise after 2014. This increase coincided with the suspension of the competition in the supply of casual labour to the ports. In 2018, the GDLC had 4540 workers. This was made up of 4000 contract workers – casual workers whose jobs depended on vessel calls at the ports – and 500 casual workers who have been described by the GDLC as “permanent casuals” (interview with Kennedy, 2018). The “permanent casuals” are a category of casual workers who perform routine and regular jobs at the ports (interview with Musa, 2018). In addition, there were 40 permanent administrative personal who worked at the offices of the GDLC in 2018 (interview

with Kennedy, 2018).

Officials of the GDLC who participated in this study revealed that the main objective behind the establishment the GDLC is not profit maximisation but rather to secure casual labour at the ports (interview with Ampon, 2017; interview with Musa, 2017; interview with Obeng, 2017). According to Ampon, a senior staff of GDLC, ‘when the GDLC was setup, the sole aim was to organise casual labour in the port. So it was not [meant to as a] profit making organisation but to make sure that labour will be there’ (interview with Ampon, 2017). It is important to note that with the exception of the MDU, the other eight shareholders of the GDLC procure casual labour from the GDLC at a level and with a fee, that are determined by the Board of Directors of the GDLC (interview with Musa, 2017). This means that eight out of the nine owners of the GDLC, through their representatives on the Board of Directors of GDLC, have influence in the determination of the labour user fees they have to pay for using casual labour from the GDLC. Arguably, because the GDLC is not their core business function, these shareholders may not have the incentive to set labour user fees much higher than the operational costs of the GDLC. Obeng, a member of the company’s management indicated that dividends to the shareholders:

was proposed once but it was not paid to them. Because the idea of forming this company was not to make profit. The rates [we charge the dock labour employers], all the money that comes in is paid to the boys, the dockers. Our own [what is kept by the GDLC] is the premium that we put [on it], which as a percentage to run the company. So out of this, why do you pay dividends to any shareholder? (interview with Obeng, 2017)

The literature and the interviews in this study show that the involvements of the GPHA, the seven private stevedoring companies, and the MDU in the creation and the management of the GDLC stem from their shared interest in the supply of casual labour to the ports (Britwum, 2010; Boampong, 2010; interview with Musa, 2018). Although the GPHA privatised stevedoring and cleaning services at the ports (Britwum, 2010: 153), it maintained an interest in the supply of casual labour and peaceful industrial relations at the ports. This is because the steady availability of casual workers at the ports remained essential to the revenues that the GPHA could collect from port users. Therefore, through its participation in the GDLC, the GPHA, on the one hand, transferred the direct responsibility and the

management of casual workers at the ports to the GDLC, and on the other hand, maintained influence in the organisation of casual work at the ports through its position at the Board of Directors of the GDLC. Therefore, even though the relationship between dock labour employers and casual workers at the ports became more distanced, the control of dock labour employers over the casual workers was not necessarily reduced (Boampong, 2010: 141).

Similarly, a key informant – a former staff of the GPHA who participated in the formation of the GDLC and later became a manager at the GDLC – revealed that the involvement of the private stevedoring companies in the GDLC relates to their interests in the supply and control of casual labour at the ports (interview with Musa, 2018). As the main sources of casual labour demand at the ports, the participation of private stevedoring companies in the GDLC was important for two reasons. First, the GDLC ensured reliable supply of casual labour and relieved the stevedoring companies of direct responsibility for the administration of casual labour at the ports. Nonetheless, the dock labour employers exerted influence in casual labour organisation at the ports through their equity in the GDLC. Second, the stake of the private stevedoring companies in the GDLC was necessary for the survival of the GDLC. Musa, a senior staff of the GDLC pointed that:

since the stevedoring companies are the main users of casual labour in the ports, they [had to] buy shares in this company, they should own the company. And once they own the company, they will ensure that the company survives. So the whole idea [was] that all the stevedoring companies at that time will have to buy shares in the GDLC (interview with Musa, 2018).

In contrast to the objectives of the GPHA and the private stevedoring companies, the findings of this study show that the participation of the MDU in the GDLC has to be understood as an attempt by the union to avoid membership decline and retain some control over casual labour matters at the port (Britwum, 2010; interview with Musa, 2018). Before the port reforms, casual workers at Tema and Takoradi ports were members of the MDU. Thus, the retrenchment of 3,000 stevedores and cleaners by the GPHA (Britwum, 2010: 153) meant a heavy membership loss. Given that casual dock workers play essential functions in ports operations in Ghana, their membership of the MDU adds to the power and influence of the union at the ports. Because of this, Musa, a key informant in this study, recalls that ‘all the engagements that brought [the GDLC] were championed by the union [the MDU]. I must

say that the union played a major role during the setting up of [the GDLC]' (interview with Musa, 2018). Therefore, for the MDU, participation in the GDLC was an attempt to preserve some of the influence that it wielded at the ports and the control it had in casual labour organisation in them.

In a way, even though different objectives inspired the involvements of the GPHA, the seven private stevedoring companies, and the MDU in the formation of the GDLC, the cooperation among these partners was anchored on mutual benefits and interdependence (interview with Musa, 2018). On the one hand, the GPHA and the stevedoring companies needed the MDU in the GDLC in order to ensure the ready supply of casual labour and peaceful industrial relations at the ports. Musa, a national officer of the MDU argue that:

you know that in the ports, it is always easier to get the union to engage [with casual workers] compared with the management ... So it was not out of place that in the allocation of the shares, the union was given the single largest share in this company [the GDLC]. This was because of the role that [the MDU] played and the role that they [were] expected to play in ensuring industrial [peace], stability, and that kind of thing (interview with Musa, 2018).

On the other hand, the MDU required the cooperation of the GPHA and the private stevedoring companies in the GDLC regime in order to preserve its influence at the ports in Ghana (Britwum, 2010; interview with Musa, 2018). Therefore, the formation and the character of the GDLC served the varied interests of the GPHA, the seven private stevedoring companies, and the MDU and promoted cooperation among them.

The GDLC enjoyed a de facto monopoly in the supply of casual workers to Tema and Takoradi ports (interview with Musa, 2018; Aryee, 2011). Although there was no explicit requirement constraining port operators from employing workers outside the GDLC pool, Tema port did not recognize or encouraged any form of casual labour, except workers from the GDLC (Aryee, 2011). The few non-GDLC casual workers who were sporadically engaged by dock labour employers were described, in a telling way, as “unapproved labour” or “unauthorised labour” (GDLC, 2014). Musa, a senior officer of the GDLC recounts that ‘when we started [the GDLC], we were enjoying monopoly. We were the only dock labour [supply company]. So all the, all the casual labour came here, whether you liked it or not,



you came here' (interview with Musa, 2018).

The monopoly of the GDLC in the supply of casual workers to Tema and Takoradi ports enhanced the influence of the MDU in casual labour organisation at these ports in two important ways (interview with Apapa, 2018). First, the union's representation at the Board of Directors of the GDLC meant it had some influence in the decisions that the Board of Directors of the GDLC took on casual labour organisation (interview with Apapa, 2018), although it should be remembered that the MDU was both its single largest shareholder (with 20 percent of the share) and yet a minority one, as the private companies together held 70 percent of the shares and the GPHA held 10 percent (Britwum, 2010). Second, and most importantly, the MDU operated a close shop system at the GDLC. This meant that membership of the MDU was a prerequisite for registration at the GDLC and casual work at the ports in Ghana (interview with Apapa, 2018; Britwum, 2010)

A key informant in this study, a casual worker at Tema port who witnessed the various casual labour regimes, maintained that the close shop arrangement made the 'MDU more powerful (interview with Apapa, 2018). We [the GDLC workers] tried to bring a different union here but we were not successful ... The MDU is powerful at this port, no union can overpower the MDU. They are a strong union (interview with Apapa, 2018). Thus, the monopoly of the GDLC, the equity of the MDU in the GDLC, and the close shop system gave the MDU significant influence over the supply of casual labour to the ports in Ghana.

In some important aspects, the operations of the GDLC resemble the dock labour schemes which became pervasive in ports across the world in the 1960s. These schemes operated in a number of EU ports and involved the registration of port workers by port labour pools (Verhoeven 2011: 154). The National Dock Labour Scheme (NDLS) in the United Kingdom (UK) involved the administration of a register of dock workers by the National Dock Labour Board (NDLB) as a holding employer (Stoney, 1999: 18). These dock labour schemes controlled port labour supply – they ensured availability, effective allocation, and labour mobility – and compensation (Turnbull and Sapsford, 2001: 236). In the UK, the NDLB controlled the size of the dock labour registers, provided welfare facilities, paid wages, and

performed other functions such as recruitment, discipline, and dismissal of labour (Stoney, 1999: 18). Such port labour schemes placed obligations on port operators to participate in the labour pools and/or use exclusively workers who are members of such pools (Verhoeven 2011: 154). Under these schemes, port managements and trade unions jointly controlled labour supply but the state and unions had de jure and de facto controls, respectively (Turnbull and Sapsford, 2001: 236.). The UK's NDLB was controlled jointly by the operating employers and trade unions (Stoney, 1999: 18). Similarly, we have seen how the GDLC gave the GPHA, dock labour employers, and the MDU control over casual labour organisation at the ports in Ghana.

Significantly, the MDU, through its shares and representation in the GDLC and the close shop system that derived from it, wielded appreciable influence in the supply and the management of casual labour at the ports in Ghana. Therefore, the port reforms in Ghana generated an initial casual labour regime that positioned the union as source of casual labour and gave it a strong control over who worked as a casual worker at Tema and Takoradi ports. Yet, as we shall see in the next chapter where I discuss the implications of the casual labour regime changes, this came with some costs to the casual workers of the GDLC.

#### ***9.4.3 The Competition Regime***

We saw in the introduction of this chapter that in 2014, the GPHA introduced a competition regime that abolished the monopoly of the GDLC in the supply of casual workers to the ports in Ghana. This involved the licensing of the Get Labour and the Trust Labour to operate at Tema port in 2014 and the SCSSL at Takoradi port in 2015.

Key informant interviews revealed that under this new regime, the GPHA did the allocation of vessels to the stevedoring companies (interview with Musa, 2017; interview with Obeng, 2017). The stevedoring companies then procured casual workers from their preferred casual labour supply companies (interview with Musa, 2017). The dock labour supply companies then paid the casual workers out of the labour user fees they imposed on dock labour

employers (interview with Obeng, 2017) . In effect, the GDLC, the Get Labour, the Trust Labour, and the SCSSL had to compete to attract labour requisitions from dock labour employers.

The official narrative is that the introduction of the competition regime was influenced by concerns of dock labour employers over the work ethics of the casual workers of the GDLC (interview with Musa, 2018). According to Musa, a senior officer of the GDLC, because ‘we [the GDLC] enjoyed monopoly, some of our guys started misbehaving. Some attitude of theirs actually did not go down well with the customers’ (interview with Musa, 2018). Therefore, it is said that the competition regime was meant to provide dock labour employers with options and to discipline the workforce of the GDLC. Musa recounted that:

at berthing meetings, you have some of them [dock labour employers] complaining. In fact, they started complaining to the GPHA that there should be another dock labour company for us [the GDLC] to compete with so that if they are not happy with us [the GDLC], they can go there. So these discussions started. There was pressure on the GPHA to licence other dock labour supply companies so that at least the customers may have a choice to make (interview with Musa, 2018).

Nevertheless, the introduction of the competition regime as a measure to improve work ethics and to check indiscipline among casual workers of the GDLC needs unpacking. Before the arrival of the Get Labour, the Trust Labour, and the SCSSL at the ports in Ghana, the GDLC had elaborate sanctions for the promotion of discipline among its workforce. The collective agreement between the GDLC and the casual workers gave to the GDLC, the right to summarily expunge the names of casual workers from its register for offences such as deliberate refusal to work, stealing or abetting with stealing, drunkenness or use of narcotics while on duty or on company premises, and wilful damage to the property of the GDLC or that of a registered dock labour employer.

The literature and the interviews with casual workers in this study indicate that the GDLC strictly enforced its disciplinary measures (interview with Musa, 2018; interview with Osibo, 2017; Britwum, 2010). Britwum (2010: 273) posits that casual workers of the GDLC felt let down by the inability of their local trade union – the Non-Permanent Staff Local Union of the MDU – to ‘mediate harsh sanctions imposed by management on workers who break

workplace rules'. Osibo, a dock worker of the GDLC who participated in this study supported this reading of the situation, when he lamented that 'if you scratch a car, even if it is just a little scratch, they will suspend you. You can be on suspension for about three months' (interview with Osibo, 2017). Therefore, the fact that the GDLC had an adequate sanction regime which was strictly enforced, undermines the argument that the introduction of competition regime was meant to cure the problem of indiscipline among casual workers of the GDLC at the ports.

In addition, contrary to the dock labour employers' account of the reasons leading to the emergence of a competition regime, the interviews in this study suggest that the licensing of the Get Labour, the Trust Labour, and the SCSSL was driven by the desire to enable the GPHA and the dock labour employers to resist and weaken industrial actions by casual workers at the ports (interview with Sammy, 2018; interview with Musa, 2017; interview with Osibo, 2017). The monopoly of the GDLC meant that protests by casual workers disrupted port operations in Ghana. In May 2009, casual workers of the GDLC halted work for two days in protests for trade union pluralism (GDLC, 2009). Similarly, agitations by casual workers of the GDLC over the management of their Welfare Fund disrupted work at Tema port for a day in 2010 (GDLC, 2011: 13). Sammy, a casual worker at the GDLC pointed out that:

when we were the only source of casual labour at Ghana Ports and Harbours, they [dock labour employers] saw that we had power. If things are not going well for us and we decide not to work, then no work would go on. So they [the GPHA] planned to bring another labour supply company. That is why they [the GPHA] brought the Get Labour and the Trust Labour (interview with Sammy, 2018).

Musa, a senior officer of the GDLC shared a similar opinion. According to him:

if for instance there is an issue or there is a problem at dock labour company [the GDLC] and the workers say that they would not work, it means the port is taken ransom, so nothing happens at the port. Anytime there is a problem and the workers say they would not work, it means that nothing will happen at the port. And we shouldn't forget that the port is a national asset (interview with Musa, 2017).

Therefore, even though the official justification for the introduction of the competition regime was to promote good work ethics among casual workers, latently, the move by the GPHA and users of dock labour at Tema and Takoradi ports was also driven by the goal of

reducing their vulnerabilities to the impacts of agitations and strikes of casual dock workers of the GDLC.

The idea that dock labour employers pushed for the competition regime in order to reduce their vulnerabilities to workers' unrest at the GDLC can also be seen in their recourse to alternative casual labour as a response to workers militancy at the GDLC, even before the arrival of the Get Labour, the Trust Labour, and the SCSSL to the ports (GDLC, 2008: 5). In 2008, the use of non-GDLC casual workers by dock labour employers increased at Tema port because of an upheaval by dock workers of the GDLC (GDLC, 2008: 5). Thus, the emergence of the competition regime enabled the GPHA and dock labour employers to avoid disruptions in port operation that may arise from agitations and strikes by casual workers of the GDLC.

Also, the demands by dock labour employers for alternatives to workers recruited through the GDLC sought to legitimise the use of "unauthorised labour" as a means to reduce their labour costs (GDLC, 2008). "Unauthorised labour" was cheaper because dock labour employers did not pay payroll taxes such as social security contributions when they hired them (GDLC, 2008: 8). Therefore, the advocacy by dock labour employers for alternatives to the casual workers of the GDLC was partly motivated by their desires to reduce the cost of casual labour at the ports. And as I shall show later, labour price reduction became an important strategy that was used by the competitors of the GDLC.

In addition to the pressures from dock labour employers, the interviews with the casual dockworkers and the managers of the GDLC in this study revealed that politics also facilitated the emergence of the new labour agencies and shaped the competition they posed to the GDLC (interview with Musa, 2018; interview with Yaw, 2018; interview with Obeng, 2017; interview with Mike, 2017). Obeng, a manager of the GDLC, bemoaned that 'about three years ago [in 2014], some politicians formed two labour companies to compete with us' (interview with Obeng, 2017). Mike, a casual worker at the GDLC corroborated this by saying that 'the politicians realised that there was profit in casual labour companies. So they formed the Get Labour and the Trust Labour' (interview with Mike, 2017). Yaw, another casual worker at the GDLC espoused that 'they brought politics in [casual labour organisation

at the ports]. The top people established two companies to create money for themselves to run their political party' (interview with Yaw, 2018).

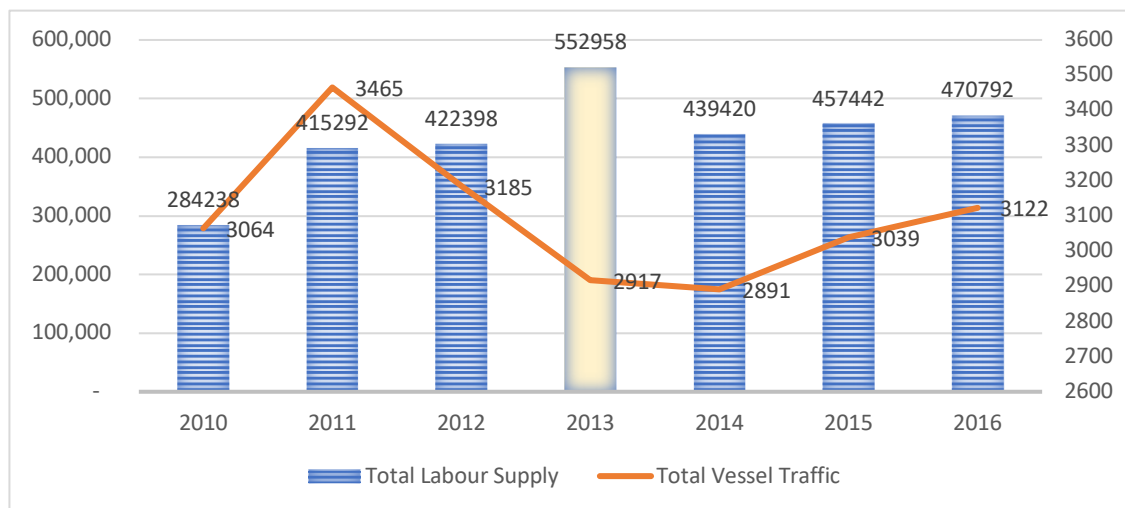
The role of politics in the licencing of the new casual labour supply companies can be seen in the coincidence of their arrival to, and departure from, the ports with change of government in Ghana (interview with Musa, 2018; interview with Nana, 2017). The Get Labour and the Trust Labour were licensed to supply casual labour to Tema port in 2014 and the SCSSL at Takoradi port in 2015, during the regime of the National Democratic Congress (NDC) government from 7 January 2013 to 6 January 2017. However, the operational permits of these companies were revoked by the GPHA after the New Patriotic Party (NPP) government came to office in 7 January 2017. Musa, a senior officer of the GDLC pointed out that the Get Labour, the Trust Labour and the SCSSL 'are gone, another [casual labour supply company] one is coming. It is deletion and substitution. They are all political companies. You know they are political companies. So two are gone and they are bringing another one to replace them' (interview with Musa, 2018). The revisions in the licensing of casual labour supply companies at the ports that occurred with the change in political regime in Ghana point to the role of political influence in the competition regime. And as I would show shortly, apart from the role of politics in the emergence and disappearance of dock labour supply companies, political power also influenced vessel allocation and requisitions for casual labour at the ports.

As expected, Figure 10 indicates that the introduction of competition in the supply of casual labour to Ghana's ports reduced the demand for the GDLC's workforce. Figure 10 shows that prior to the arrival of the other casual labour supply companies, the supply of labour – number of workers – by the GDLC increased consistently from 284,238 in 2010 to 552,958 in 2013. Significantly, even though vessel traffic – number of ships – at the ports in Ghana declined by about 8 percent in 2013, the labour that was supplied by the GDLC increased by 130,560 or about 31 percent. However, in spite of the fact that vessel traffic in 2013 was only 0.9 percent higher than that of 2014, the total labour supplied by the GDLC in 2014 was 113,538 or about 21 percent less than that of 2013. These suggest that the decline in the supply of casual labour by the GDLC after 2013 cannot be attributed to the level vessel traffic

at the ports.

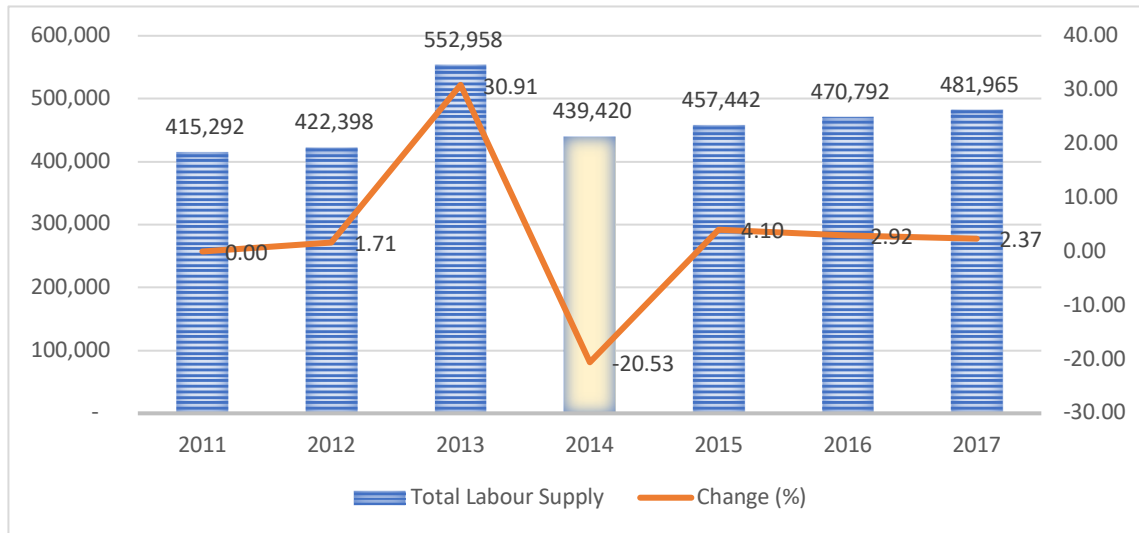
Instead, the change that occurred in the number of casual workers that the GDLC supplied to dock labour employers after 2013 was due to a redirection of some of the casual labour requisition to the new dock labour companies. In 2015, the total labour that was supplied by the GDLC to Tema and Takoradi ports was 109,181, or about 17 percent less than what was recorded in 2013. This was due to the registration of the three new companies (GDLC, 2016: 2). Therefore, the emergence of the Get Labour, the Trust Labour, and the SCSSL reduced the demand by dock labour employers at Tema and Takoradi ports for the casual workforce of the GDLC.

**Figure 10: Total vessel traffic and GDLC labour supply (2009-2015)**



Source: GDLC (2010, 2011, 2013, 2014, 2015, and 2016) and GPHA, 2019

**Figure 11: Total labour supplied by the GDLC (2011-2017)**



Source: GDLC 2010, 2011, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, and 2017

The casual dockworkers and the managers of the GDLC in this study revealed that the most important vessel handling process that experienced massive decline in the requisition for the GDLC casual workforce after the introduction of the competition regime was shore handling (interview with Musa, 2018; interview with Kennedy, 2018; interview with Yao, 2017; interview with Ike, 2017). Shore handling involves receipt, storage, and delivery of cargo from the quayside into storage and the final delivery to customers and vice versa (interview with Musa, 2018). At the ports in Ghana, shore handling is labour intensive. It involves many shoremen in shed deliveries, direct discharge of cargo in vessels onto trucks, and the stacking of cargo into sheds prior to their departure from the ports (ibid.). Shore handling is therefore an important source of work for casual dockers at Ghana's ports. It provided jobs to about a third of the workforce of the GDLC (interview with Kennedy, 2018). Yet, the Get Labour, the Trust Labour, and the SCSSL 'took about 90 percent of the shore handling from us [the GDLC], can you just imagine?' (interview with Musa, 2018). This momentous swing explains the drop in the number of casual workers that the GDLC supplied to the dock labour employers during the competition regime (See Figure 11).

Contrary to the substantial decline in the demand for shoremen, the GDLC continued to dominate the provision of labour for most of the skilled jobs and technical port operations in



Ghana (interview with Musa, 2018; interview with Ike, 2017; interview with Yao, 2017). The GDLC kept most of record keeping, machine operations, and “permanent casual” jobs. According to Ike, a record clerk of the GDLC at Tema port, ‘I get work every day. There are times that I stay at the port for about three or four days without going home ... I am a record clerk, and the record clerks are not many in the system’ (interview with Ike, 2017). According to Musa, a senior officer of the GDLC:

there are areas that we continue to enjoy more. There are few areas that they [dock labour] take our labour on daily basis. For the regular [casual work], we have a lot of them. There are certain categories that they [our competitors] are not there, like operators, they don’t have operators (interview with Musa, 2018).

The continued dominance of the GDLC in the provision of dock workers for certain port functions emanates from the experience and expertise that the GDLC and its workforce have accumulated over the years (interview with Musa, 2018; interview with Alhassan 2018). It is important to note that even for unskilled jobs, the dock labour employers had to rely on the shoremen of the GDLC in the loading and offloading of *challenged* or *bad cargos* (interviews with Musa, 2017; interview with Alhassan 2018). Such cargos, including what is referred to as “caked rice” – huge bags of rice grains that are bound together – are difficult to load or offload. According to a senior officer of the GDLC, although dock labour employers such as ‘Redsea [Ltd] was giving their jobs to Get Labour, anytime they had *challenged cargo* or *bad cargo* which needed some skill, they wanted to fall on us to do it’ (interview with Musa, 2018).

The above shows that the transition to the competition regime affected the casual workers of the GDLC differently based on their expertise. The demand for the services of machine operators and record clerks of the GDLC remained largely unchanged. We have seen, for example, that Ike, a record clerk, continued to get regular jobs at Tema port. Yet the competition took away about 90 percent of the work allocations of the shoremen of the GDLC. Yao, a shoreman at the GDLC lamented that ‘I do not get enough jobs because of my department’ (interview with Yao, 2017).

A Key informant interview in this study and the literature show that another significant

downside of the competition regime was the use of labour user fee cuts by the new dock labour suppliers to outcompete the GDLC (interview with Musa, 2018; GDLC, 2016: 4). Musa, a senior officer of the GDLC lamented that ‘the other companies were undercutting which meant that they were becoming cheaper. The GDLC went to a [stevedoring company] and the people told us that your counterparts came here and said they will do [the job] at a cheaper rate’ (interview with Musa, 2018). This practice affected the ability of the GDLC to attract new dock labour employers and retain existing labour requisitions. In 2015, the GDLC made strenuous efforts to convince some dock labour employers to use its services but was informed that its service charges were higher (GDLC, 2016: 4). A senior officer of the GDLC recounts:

an experience when we had a vessel, we had worked for the customer in the first or the maiden operation. The second vessel [came] only for one of our competitors to go there to undermine us. They said that they could do it at a cheaper cost. We also went there. In fact, I personally went there and said no, if anything, let’s share the work on the vessel. [The customer] said yes, provided we accept whatever offer the other company has accepted. I asked how much, he mentioned it and I said no, that one, I have to talk to my boss. I mentioned it to my boss, and he said let it go, we cannot go that low (interview with Musa, 2018).

Labour user fee cuts was something that the GDLC could not easily respond to because the collective agreement between the GDLC and the casual workers specified the wages and benefits that the company must pay for job allocations (interview with Musa, 2018; interview with Obeng, 2017). The labour user fee of the GDLC is equivalent to the basic wage plus a premium (interview with Obeng, 2017). The basic wage component goes directly to the dock workers while the premium covered the payroll taxes, the employment benefits included in the collective agreement, and the administration costs of the GDLC (ibid.). Therefore, any labour user fee that is either the same or below the wages that the GDLC paid to its workforce meant a loss to the company.

To illustrate the above, let us look at one instance at Tema port when some casual workers rejected the payment of lower wages (interview with Musa, 2018). A senior officer of the GDLC recounts an instance when the attempt by a competitor to reduce wages was resisted by the workers:

they [labour supply company] said they could do the work at a cheaper cost. Little

did we know that they did that [they reduced the fees] without the consent of the workers. They did the work and decided to take some money from the wages of the workers only for the workers to say “ye empini” [we will not agree] give us the difference. They [labour supply company] gave them [the workers] their difference. They [labour supply company] went back to the customer and the customer said you told me that you were ready to do it at this cheaper cost. So eventually they [competitor] lost because they could not take money from the wages of the workers (interview with Musa, 2018).

Given the difficulties with wage reduction, the competitors of the GDLC externalised the cost of labour user fees reduction to the workers by providing limited employment benefits (interview with Ohene, 2018; GDLC, 2015). The Get Labour, the Trust Labour and the SCSSL only offered workman compensation and some pittance to casual workers for injuries or sickness (GDLC, 2015: 5). Ohene, a casual worker at the GDLC, said that ‘we are better, ahead of them in wages and other things ... [if] we compare with some of the casuals in the ports, we are far better than some of them ... some of them are not paid SSNIT [social security] and all these things. They don’t have benefits’ (interview with Ohene, 2018). The limited employment benefits that these companies offered to their casual workers provided them with some fiscal space to cut labour user fees to outcompete the GDLC and still remain profitable. Also, they did not have to attract casual workers through the provision of superior wages and working conditions. Instead, by using their political influence – which I explain below – to get constant labour requisitions from dock labour employers, these companies attracted casual labour even though they offered inferior wages and benefits.

The competition that took away the jobs of the shoremen of the GDLC was marred by political influence (interview with Musa, 2018; interview with Yaw, 2017; GDLC, 2015). We have already underlined that the dock labour employers in Ghana had to fall on the casual workers of the GDLC for the handling of *challenged* or *bad cargo*, most of the machine operations, and for “permanent casual” jobs. This shows that Get Labour, Trust labour, and the SCSSL did not outcompete the GDLC in the supply of casual workers for shore handling because of the expertise of their workforce. Musa, a senior officer of the GDLC deplored that ‘the bad side of it [the competition] was that there were times that you had some invisible hands giving instructions that give this job to this company, give this job to that company. Political hands [intervened] so we didn’t have a fair competition’ (interview with Musa,

2018). In 2015, the GDLC attributed the 17 percent decline in its labour supply to the ‘order from above syndrome’ that compelled some dock labour employers to allocate vessels to the Get Labour and the Trust Labour (GDLC, 2016: 2). Such an account by the management of the GDLC seems plausible because, as we shall see shortly, it is also shared by the casual workers of the GDLC.

This ‘order from above syndrome’ manifested itself in instructions from a higher authority which directed casual labour requisitions at the ports (interview with Yaw, 2017; GDLC, 2015). This functioned to the disadvantage of the casual workers of the GDLC in two ways. First, it deprived the GDLC of vessels allocation. In 2015,

despite the effort of [the] management [of GDLC] to attract more work for the non-permanent staff, there were instances where the efforts were thwarted by officials of the GPHA who (allegedly) instructed stevedore companies on where to pick labour to work with (GDLC, 2016: 5).

Similarly, Yaw, a casual worker of GDLC lamented that ‘work is not coming, the work that is supposed to come here [the GDLC] is not coming. If you go to the field, we have the skills and everything, but they do not look at that. They say ‘order from above’ (interview with Yaw, 2017). The second manifestation of the ‘order from above syndrome’ is the termination of work started by casual workers of the GDLC and the reassignment of it to dockworkers of another casual labour supply company (GDLC, 2016). Yaw, a casual worker of the GDLC decried:

they can bring a vessel, full cargo and give it to us. We would start working on it. It would get to a point and they would come and take it from us, and tell us that the Get Labour and the Trust Labour are coming for that vessel. They would take it from our hands. Can you imagine? They would say it is ‘order from above’. We don’t know where that power comes from. So it is politics, we know that it is all about politics (interview with Yaw, 2017).

These manifestations of the ‘order from above syndrome’ attracted some responses from the casual workers of the GDLC (interview with Musa, 2018). The casual workers have retaliated by refusing to take up jobs that had been given to their competitors but which the competitors could not do. Musa, a senior officer of the GDLC recounts that:

there were some few occasions where, particularly [with] Redsea those times. What happened was that, I told you that they [Redsea] were giving their jobs to the Get

Labour. [But] anytime they had *challenged cargo* or *bad cargo* which needs some skills they wanted to fall back on us to do it. On two occasions, my people [GDLC shoremen] said that, look, you don't go using other people when you have lighter jobs and when it comes to difficult work, you want us to do it, we are sorry. In fact, on one occasion, they said, no. I had to plead with them to do it. On another occasion they said no and I sided with them (interview with Musa, 2018).

The role of political influence in vessel allocations and its impact on the demand for workers of the GDLC is visible in the changes that occurred in vessel allocations at the ports after a change of political regime in Ghana (interview with Musa, 2018; interview with Nana, 2017). The NDC government under whose tenure the competition regime was introduced was defeated by the NPP in the December 2016 polls. Subsequently, the Get Labour, the Trust Labour and the SCSSL were deregistered by the GPHA. According to an officer of the GDLC, 'Redsea Maritime was also an NDC company, so they [the GPHA] did not renew their licence [to operate at the ports]' (interview with Musa, 2018). Nana, a casual worker shared a similar opinion: 'we had a company inside here [Tema port] called Redsea. When there was a change of government, they [Redsea] had signed a contract but they [the GPHA] sacked that company [Redsea]' (interview with Nana, 2017). After the deregistration of these companies, 'things just changed. We [the GDLC] were getting work most of the time. Things just changed as far as the shore handling [allocation for the GDLC] was concerned (interview with Musa, 2018). Figure 11 shows that after that the Get Labour, the Trust labour, and the SCSSL left the ports in Ghana, the number of workers that was supplied by the GDLC to the ports increased by over 42,545 from the 2014 level. These trends show the extent of political influence in the competition regime at the ports in Ghana.

## **9.5 Conclusion**

This chapter has shown how the ambition to transform the ports in Ghana into landlord ports brought about the privatisation of some of the port operations and significant changes in casual labour regimes at the ports. We have seen how the GPHA and dock labour employers at Tema and Takoradi ports reconfigured their relationships with casual workers and the emergence of the GDLC, as the monopoly supplier of casual workers at the ports in Ghana.

This transition meant that dock labour employers in the country no longer had direct responsibility for casual workers who worked for them. Yet through their stake in the GDLC, they retained control over casual work organisation at the ports.

Furthermore, the introduction of competition in the supply of casual labour to the ports strengthened the hold of dock labour employers. Under this regime, dock labour employers used labour requisitions to limit the strength of the casual workers of the GDLC. In sum, through the reforms, the government of Ghana achieved its objectives of transforming the ports in the country into landlord ports and, in the process, brought about significant changes in casual labour regimes that worked towards the interests of the GPHA and the other dock labour employers. However, for the casual workers of the GDLC and the MDU, what did these changes mean? How did the transitions influence their powers and interests? The next chapter attempts to explore these questions.

## **CHAPTER 10: THE IMPLICATION OF CASUAL LABOUR REFORMS FOR THE INTERESTS, POWER, AND STRUGGLES OF CASUAL DOCKWORKERS**

### **10.1 Introduction**

This chapter examines the impacts of the reforms of the modalities of employment of casual workers at the ports in Ghana on the interests, power, and struggles of casual dock workers, and what such changes meant for the union that operates at the ports – the MDU. In the previous chapter, we saw how the casual labour reforms at the ports in Ghana forced the MDU to assume dual functions at the ports: to become an employer of the casual workers of the GDLC and, at the same time, the sole representative of the casual workers at the GDLC. In this chapter, we shall look at the contradictions and the compromises that such dual functions brought in the relationship between the casual workers of the GDLC and the MDU. We shall also see what such contradictions meant for the mobilisation of casual workers of the GDLC and the character of the trade union itself. The insights in this chapter are significant as they add to the literature on 1) the relationship between trade unions and informal workers and what this teaches about the applicability of labour aristocracy theory's main arguments, 2) the powers of workers and trade unions, and 3) the mobilisation of workers.

This chapter presents a mixed picture of how the reforms at the ports in Ghana had contradictory outcomes for casual workers. On the one hand, that the transition to the GDLC brought about some improvements in the representation of, and social protection coverage among, casual workers at the ports in Ghana (interview with Musa, 2017; Britwum, 2010; Martin, 2006: 12). In these respects, the casual workers at the ports enjoyed better terms and conditions than they did before the ports restructuring (Martin, 2006: 12). Before the establishment of the GDLC, casual workers were part of the union of the permanent staff of the GPHA. This undermined the representation of casual workers as their interests were not fully taken care of by the union of the permanent staff (Britwum, 2010: 153). The emergence of the GDLC came with the formation a local trade union for casual workers, the Non-

Permanent Staff Local Union of MDU – affiliated to the MDU –, that acquired a collective bargaining certificate and negotiated wages and working conditions of casual workers with the GDLC (interview with Musa, 2017). The ‘casuals [got] their own representatives in [negotiations], whereas before [the GDLC regime] they were excluded from direct representation’ (Martin, 2006: 12). In addition, prior to the GDLC, casual workers at the ports enjoyed only the minimum statutory social protection coverage – retirement, incapacitation, and survivors’ benefits – in the country. This changed under the GDLC regime as the company added medical and insurance cover to the benefits of the casual workers (interview with Kennedy, 2018). These advancements in the representation and social protection cover stand out among the improvements that came with the casual labour regime changes at the ports in Ghana.

On the other hand, these reforms had two main negative impacts on the casual workers of the GDCL (interview with Yaw, 2018; interview with Fuseini, 2017). First, the competition regime reduced work allocation and incomes for the casual workers (interview with Fuseini, 2017). We saw in the previous chapter that the Get Labour, the Trust Labour, and the SCSSL took away about 90 percent of shore handling – about a quarter of the casual labour requisition – from the GDLC. Given that casual work income at the ports in Ghana depended on job allocations, the loss of shore handling detracted from the incomes of the casual workers of the GDLC. Second, the arrival of the Get Labour, the Trust Labour, and the SCSSL diminished the power of the casual workers of the GDLC by creating alternative casual labour sources for the dock labour employers at the ports (interview with Yaw, 2018).

Furthermore, the pattern in casual labour protests at the ports in Ghana since 2000 show that the changes in casual labour regimes, and the diminished powers of casual workers, led to a transformation in the focus of casual workers’ agitations at the GDLC from disputes of interests to disputes of rights (interview with Musa, 2018; GDLC, 2014; GDLC, 2010; GDLC, 2004). Disputes of rights are about the application of existing legal instruments, while disputes of interests concern the establishment of a new right (Emejuru, 2015: 135). Since the emergence of the GDLC regime, protests by casual workers have focused on statutory



rights and negotiated entitlements. These include agitations over wage payment in 2004 (GDLC, 2004: 6), protests over the management of Welfare Funds in 2009 (GDLC, 2010), and demonstration against the non-payment of the statutory social security contributions in 2014 (GDLC, 2014). The casual workers also staged protests on trade union rights during the GDLC regime. In contrast, prior to the GDLC regime, the agitations of casual workers at the ports included non-statutory issues or matters of interests such as the levels of wage adjustment and bonus payment (interview with Musa, 2018). These shows the changes that have occurred in the disputes for casual workers at the ports in Ghana.

The study of such changes reveals the important impacts of economic reforms on the interests and powers of casual workers and on the MDU itself. In order to examine these, the rest of this chapter is divided into six sections. This next section highlights how casual labour reforms affected the wages and working condition of the casual workers of the GDLC. In section 3, I present the struggles of the casual workers of the GDLC in detail. I then turn attention to how changes in casual labour regimes shifted the sources of casual workers disputes in section 4. This is followed by an analysis of the implication of the creation of the GDLC for the MDU in section 5. I conclude this chapter in section 6.

## **10.2 Casual Labour Reforms and Casual Labour Wages and Working Conditions**

### ***10.2.1 From Direct Employment to the GDLC***

One of the main consequences of the emergence of the GDLC regime was a reduction in the annual bonus of casual workers (interview with Ohene, 2018; interview with Musa, 2018; Boampong, 2010; Martin 2006). Even though the basic wage did not reduce, annual bonus – which is an essential component of casual work remuneration at the ports in Ghana (Martin 2006: 12) – began dwindling when the casual workers started working under the GDLC regime (Boampong, 2010: 142). Musa, a senior officer at the GDLC, maintains that ‘the quantum [of bonus] at that place [the GPHA] was better. The GPHA levels were a bit higher’

(interview with Musa, 2018). Ohene, a casual worker of the GDLC laments that ‘the bonus we get here [at GDLC] are below what we used to receive at the GPHA (interview with Ohene, 2018).

In the previous chapter, we saw that casual workers under the direct employment regime enjoyed generous pay scheme and lighthouse effects of the GPHA pay scheme. The qualification for bonus in the GPHA era was ‘49 days, at least you [a casual worker] must work for 49 days in a year to qualify for some bonus ... and because the jobs were there, more people qualified for annual bonus. Only few people did not qualify for bonus’ (interview with Musa, 2018). Nana, a casual worker at the GDLC recalls that ‘once you worked for the minimum number of the days, they [the GPHA] gave everybody the same amount when it came to bonus’ (interview with Nana, 2017). Yao, another casual worker of the GDLC corroborated this: ‘they [the GPHA] gave us flat bonus [the same amount to all casual workers]’ (interview with Yao, 2017). Nana recounted that ‘in 2002, the GPHA gave us GH¢125 [US US\$140.38] as bonus before Dock labour [the GDLC] took over [in August [2002]’ (interview with Nana, 2017). Such generous remuneration scheme that casual workers enjoyed under the direct casual labour employment regime enhanced their bonuses.

However, when the casual workers were moved to the GDLC, the method for calculating bonus was changed to a percentage of the basic wage earned in the year (interview with Musa, 2018). In 2018, bonus at the GDLC was calculated at 10 percent of the actual or earned basic wage (interview with Kennedy, 2018) – which as we would see later, is lower due to reduction in job allocations. This method of calculating bonus at the GDLC brought about low, and in some case, significant disparities in annual bonuses. In chapter 9, we saw that the about 400 “permanent casual” workers of the GDLC who have regular jobs receive higher incomes. This implies higher bonuses for them. In contrast, we learnt that the many contract workers of the GDLC, about 4000 of them, have irregular jobs that generate lower incomes. Thus, the change of the formula for calculating bonus to a percentage of earned income meant that they earned lower bonuses. Therefore, it is not surprising that contract workers of the GDLC have complained about their dwindling incomes since they started working under the GDLC regime (Boampong, 2010: 142). Yao, a shoreman at the GDLC summed up the

frustrations with the new bonus scheme in the following words:

I don't get enough jobs because of my department. Someone gets regular jobs and had 600 allocations in the year, and I had only 100 allocations. Why should they [the GDLC] look at my 100 allocations to pay my bonus? It is wrong. I am really bitter about this ... if someone is getting a bonus of GH¢3000 [US\$679.27] and mine is GH¢400 [US\$90.56], does it make sense? (interview with Yao, 2017).

In order to appreciate Yao's bitterness, one must consider the purchasing powers of the GH¢125 (US\$140.38) that casual workers received from the GPHA as bonus in 2002 and the GH¢400 [US\$90.56] that the GDLC paid as bonus to Yao in 2017. From 2003 to 2017, the average annual inflation in Ghana was 14.26 percent (World Bank, 2020b). Based on this inflation rate, I estimate that Yao required about GH¢920 (US\$208.31) as bonus in 2017, to buy the same amount of goods and services that the GH¢125 (US\$140.38) bonus could buy in 2002. This illustrates the significant shortfall in the real value of the annual bonus that the casual workers could earn following the emergence of the GDLC regime.

Furthermore, the emergence of the GDLC regime negatively affected the wages of casual workers in two ways (interview with Musa, 2018; Martin, 2006; GDLC, 2002). First, the growth of the basic wages of the casual workers of GDLC were affected by the ownership structure of the company. In the previous chapter, we learnt that with the exception of the MDU, the other shareholders of the GDLC use casual labour from the GDLC at a fee. Musa, a senior officer of the GDLC pointed out that 'the other members of our [the GDLC] Board of Directors are customers of the company [they procure labour from the GDLC]. So they fix the rate [labour user fee] they have to pay (interview with Musa, 2018). We know that labour user fees charged by the GDLC are equivalent to the basic wage of casual workers plus a premium that covers the administrative costs of the GDLC and the employment benefits of casual workers. This means that higher labour user fees promote the incomes and benefits of the casual workers of the GDLC. Yet, such fees detract from the profits of the core businesses of the GPHA and the seven private companies who own 80 percent of the GDLC. In the past, these shareholders have shied away from taking decisions that could promote the operations of the GDLC when such decisions had financial implications for their stevedoring businesses (GDLC, 2002: 13). Notably, collective bargaining became more difficult for the Non-Permanent Staff Local Union of the GDLC because they have to

‘negotiate with the stevedoring companies who are on the Board of Directors [of the GDLC], ... and are also the customers [of the GDLC] and want to keep their costs down’ (Martin, 2006: 12). Therefore, most of the shareholders of GDLC have not had the incentive to set higher labour user fees that could enhance the incomes and benefits of casual workers of the GDLC. This has important consequences for the MDU and its ongoing role as representative of its casual workforce, as we will discuss later.

Second, the labour user fees of the GDLC have also been influenced by the port tariffs that are set by the GPHA (interview with Obeng, 2017; Aryee, 2011). Even though wages and working conditions at the GDLC are set by negotiations between the Non-Permanent Staff Local Union of the GDLC – which is led by the MDU – and the GDLC, these negotiations have taken place in a context in which parties were constrained by the port tariffs. Dock labour employers complain about the cost of labour and its effects on the competitiveness of the ports in the Ghana to attract maritime freight in West Africa (Aryee, 2011). This puts some pressure on the GPHA to suppress casual labour wages so that the ports in Ghana would be competitive in the sub-region. Obeng, manager of the GDLC pointed out that:

The GPHA has the control. Once they [GPHA] increase the port tariffs, we [GDLC] follow and negotiate properly. Otherwise, the GPHA people will not agree to an increase in wages as it will make the port expensive when you want to take labour to work for you. Our wages are indexed to the cost involved in the port. Like last year, they said the port was not going to increase tariffs. That was the directive from the government. So they gave the casual workers something we call COLA [cost of living allowance] to cushion them. Anytime the GPHA increases their tariffs, it will have the same effects on their wages (interview with Obeng, 2017).

In spite of the above, the analysis of the wage schedule in the collective agreement between the GDLC and the Non-Permanent Staff Local Union of the GDLC revealed that the wages of the casual workers of GDLC were higher than the national minimum wage and the poverty line in Ghana. Table 17 shows that in 2018 the lowest net pay for an eight-hour day shift was GH¢23.39 (US\$4.83), and the highest was GH¢44.34 (US\$9.16). The lowest earner at the GDLC received GH¢16.03 (US\$3.31) or about 180 percent higher than the national daily minimum wage (GH¢8.80 or US\$1.82). Compared with income poverty, the lowest net pay was GH¢16.18 (US\$3.34) or over two times (224.6%) higher than the inflation adjusted national upper poverty line (GH¢7.21 or US\$1.49). These show that casual labour incomes

at the GDLC in 2018 were at least in compliance with the minimum wage regulations in Ghana and kept the dock workers above the national poverty line.

**Table 17: Non-permanent staff net wages – 2018**

Group	Overtime Hours	Total hours	Weekday		Weekend	
			Day (GH¢)	Night (GH¢)	Day (GH¢)	Night (GH¢)
8 Hours	0	8	23.39	34.17	43.88	65.47
8 Hours	4	12	38.75	49.54	64.37	85.93
<b>Group 4</b>						
8 Hours	0	8	24.83	36.53	47.05	70.45
8 Hours	4	12	41.50	53.20	69.28	92.67
<b>Group 5</b>						
8 Hours	0	8	26.33	38.97	50.34	75.62
8 Hours	4	12	44.34	56.98	74.35	99.63

Source: Adapted from GDLC (2018)

In addition to wages, the casual workers of the GDLC also get some allowances and bonuses. These include allowances for work in vessels, night duty allowance, weekend work premium, and leave allowance. In 2018, the GDLC paid GH¢4.00 (US\$0.83) as allowance for work in vessels. Table 17 shows that the lowest paid casual workers at the GDLC received GH¢10.78 (US\$2.23) or about 46 percent more for night shifts. They earned GH¢20.49 (US\$4.24) or about 88 percent more for day shifts at weekends. The leave allowance and annual bonus in 2018 were calculated at 10 percent of basic wage (interview with Kennedy, 2018).

The GDLC regime also brought some innovations in employment benefits and working conditions of casual workers (interview with Kennedy, 2018; interview with Musa, 2018; GDLC, 2018). Aside the statutory social security and sick benefits, the GDLC also provides enhanced social protection cover. It absorbs the costs for the enrolment of casual workers onto the National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS) (interview with Kennedy, 2018). This provides medical care cover for the casual workers. The GDLC also runs a Provident Fund

and a Welfare Fund. It pays 10 percent of workers' wages into the Provident Fund and the workers contribute 5 percent of their wages to the Provident Fund (GDLC, 2018). The GDLC has introduced death or survivors' benefits: GH¢1200.00 (US\$777.41) for deaths that occur at work and GH¢800.00 (US\$518.27) for deaths that occur out of the workplace (ibid). It also operates a loan scheme and guarantees loans from banks for the casual workers (interview with Jack, 2017). Also, the GDLC entered into an agreement with an insurance company in 2018 to provide life insurance and workmen's compensation cover to staff of the company. The insurance agreement provides an automatic cover of up to GH¢100,000 or US\$22,322.20 (interview with Kennedy, 2018). The insurance cover and Welfare Funds are innovations that the GDLC implemented to improve social protection cover for casual dock workers. These improvements have come in the context of the port labour reforms largely due to the efforts of the Non-Permanent Staff Local Union of the casual workers of the GDLC and the MDU.

In addition to the above, the GDLC introduced an innovation that smoothed the way that the wages and bonuses of casual workers are paid, and eased the tensions and excitements that used to surround such payments (interview with Musa, 2018; GDLC, 2013). In 2012, the GDLC enrolled the casual workers onto E-zwich (GDLC, 2013: 21). This incorporated the casual workers into the switch and biometric smart card payment system and the banking system, which enabled the payment of casual workers to be made electronically instead of by cash (ibid). Prior to this, the wages and bonuses of the about 4000 casual workers were paid in cash. The inefficiencies and delays in the cash payments of the wages and bonuses used to generate excitement among the casual workers. Musa, a senior officer of the GDLC, recounts: 'those times [before the GDLC was formed] when they [stevedoring companies] were paying, everybody at the port would hear about it because they [the casual workers] will make noise (interview with Musa, 2018). However, with E-zwich, the GDLC 'pays bonuses and workers do not even hear. We pay through E-zwich and tell them that they have been paid. We have never failed paying their wages on Tuesdays and Fridays' (ibid.).

In sum, the transition to the GDLC regime generated contradictory outcomes for casual workers. How these outcomes persisted or changed following the introduction of the

competition regime, which I now turn to, is important to our understanding of the impacts of casual labour reforms at Tema and Takoradi ports.

### ***10.2.2 From the GDCL to the Competition Regime***

The advent of the competition regime diminished the incomes of the casual workers of the GDLC (interview with Musa, 2018; interview with Fusieni, 2017; interview with Yaw, 2017). Although basic pay rates at the GDLC did not decrease, because casual work income at the ports in Ghana depends on job allocation, the arrival of the Get Labour, the Trust labour, and the SCSSL – which reduced job allocations of the casual workers of the GDLC – affected the incomes of the casual dockworkers of the GDLC. As much as 90 percent of shore handling – a about third of the casual labour requisition of the GDLC – was taken away by the competitors of the GDLC (interview with Musa, 2018). Fusieni, a GDLC casual worker bemoaned that ‘sometimes you will come here for one week and you will not get an allocation. There are no jobs. Yesterday, I did not get a job. I have come today, whether I will get a job or not, only God knows. I have a wife and children, I pay rent and light bill’ (interview with Fusieni, 2017). Yaw, another worker of the GDLC lamented that sometimes ‘they allocate you to shipside. You buy your food, you buy everything and you go to shipside. You can spend morning to evening and they would say that there is no work. You would come back without getting paid (interview with Yaw, 2017). These show that the competition regime brought uncertainties and overall reduction in job allocations and these reduced the incomes of the casual workers of the GDLC.

Consequently, the casual workers in this study maintained that some of them had to stay longer than expected at the ports in order to avoid missing work allocations or take advantage of an unexpected increase in demand for casual labour (interview with Jack, 2017; interview with Kojo, 2017). Jack, mentioned that ‘as casual workers we only get paid after ships come and we have allocations. But when there is no ship, you would not get any allocation. You would just stand under the shed until you go home’ (interview with Jack, 2017). Therefore, some of the casual workers of the GDLC converted the waiting area at the GDLC premises

into temporary accommodation. Kojo, a casual worker mentioned:

when it is 7:30 pm and you [refereeing to me] are here, you come and see something. You would see a lot of mosquito nets mounted for sleeping. There are not enough spaces here [staff waiting area]. So if you come and this place is occupied, you go to other container areas and sleep. You wake up early in the morning and come here (interview with Kojo, 2017).

Aside the uncertainties in job allocations, economic reasons also contributed to the conversion of the waiting area at the GDLC into temporary accommodation (interview with Kojo, 2017). Sleeping at the GDLC became a strategy by the workers to avoid transportation cost in the face of unguaranteed work allocation. Kojo has been a casual worker of the GDLC for ten years and lives about 40 km west of Tema port. He bemoaned:

I stay somewhere around Kasoa. So automatically I have to sleep here [at the GDLC premises] for almost one week to wait for something [job] whether there is shift for me or not. Because sometimes, you take transport and gets here only to be told that you have missed your allocation or to find out that you don't have allocation. I always have to sleep here. But they have not created any place for us to sleep here (interview with Kojo, 2017).

**Image 4: Casual workers at the GDLC staff waiting area**



Source: Daily Graphic, 2016b

The casual workers of the GDLC also dealt with job uncertainties through multiple job holding at the ports (interview with Obeng, 2017; GDLC, 2016). What is referred to as *idling gang* – long waits for job allocations among the working groups of the casual dockworkers



(interview with Obeng, 2017) – increased at the GDLC with emergence of the Get Labour, the Trust Labour, and the SCSSL (GDLC, 2016). This pushed some dockworkers of the GDLC into moonlighting. We have seen that the new labour supply companies took about a quarter of the casual labour requisitions at the ports. Significantly, although the GDLC formally prohibits moonlighting, it was powerless in observing that ‘some experienced workers [of the GDLC] who were unable to wait for such long period [before getting jobs] drifted to the new labour companies for work’ (GDLC, 2016: 5). Obeng, manager of the GDLC bemoaned that ‘the jobs moved there [Get Labour and Trust Labour]. So the boys [casual workers of the GDLC] ran there to do the jobs ... If you sit down here [at the GDLC] for one week or two weeks and there is no job, you would be forced to go there (interview with Obeng, 2017).

Multiple job holding at the ports comes with contradictory outcomes. On the one hand, it enables the casual workers to smoothen income flows (interview with Musa, 2018; interview with Yaw, 2017). Yaw, a casual worker at the GDLC recounts that ‘when we were at Western gate [under the GPHA], ... I had about four companies that I worked with. I was roaming. When was time for payment, I collected pay from here, from there, and from the other places’ (interview with Yaw, 2017). On the other hand, moonlighting compromises the provision of non-wage, but equally important, employment benefits such as social security and other welfare support to casual workers by the dock labour employers. We have seen the improvements that occurred in the non-wage employment benefits of the casual workers under the GDLC regime where multiple job holding did not exist. Contrary to this, Musa, recounts the that under the direct employment regime, where moonlighting was prevalent, with ‘exception of the GPHA [which] paid some attention to the welfare issues [of casual workers], the rest [other stevedoring companies] did not (interview with Musa, 2018). Therefore, the resurgence of multiple job holding under the competition regime had both positive and negative impacts on the interests of casual workers of the GDLC.

The casual workers and the managers of the GDLC who participated in this study maintained that the introduction of the competition regime also had negative implications for collective bargaining between the casual workers and the GDLC (interview with Musa, 2018; interview

with Yaw, 2017; interview with Mo, 2017; interview with Fusieni, 2017). Yaw, an executive member of the Non-Permanent Staff Local Union of the GDLC decried that ‘we have two competitors in the system. Because of these labour companies, if you demand higher wages, the dock labour employers would not come here [to the GDLC] for labour. They would go to the other side’ (interview with Yaw, 2017). Similarly, a senior officer of the GDLC lamented that:

the competition is rather leading into a system where bargaining for better conditions for the casual workers becomes more and more difficult. While we [the GDLC] feel that they [the casual workers] deserve more, the customer tells you I have a choice. The same job, somebody is ready to do it at a cheaper cost so why should I come to you? (interview with Musa, 2018).

The presence of the Get Labour, the Trust Labour, and the SCSSL at the ports also had negative lighthouse effects on the wages and working conditions at the GDLC (interview with Mo, 2017; interview with Fusieni, 2017). According to Mo, a casual worker of the GDLC, ‘we have other labour companies, about three here. If you compare our wages and everything that we receive here [at the GDLC], we are far, far ahead of them’ (interview with Mo, 2017). Thus, wages and working condition at the competitors of the GDLC were inferior to those of the GDLC, and this state of affairs weakened the claims of the casual workers of the GDLC for improved remuneration. Fusieni, casual stevedore at the GDLC intimated:

there are differences in the conditions here [at the GDLC] and over there [the Get Labour and the Trust Labour]. I will be honest with you, there are differences. You see, dock labour [the GDLC] is an old company so when these new ones came, we were thinking that the Get Labour and the Trust Labour will do something better. But even the wage at the dock labour [the GDLC] is higher than that of the Get Labour and the Trust Labour (interview with Fusieni, 2017).

In sum, the foregoing shows that in the long term, the transition from the direct employment regime to the establishment of the GDLC, and the subsequent introduction of a competition regime, the overall trend was a decline in job availability and incomes. Certainly, the mechanisation of port operation reduced the casual jobs that were available at the ports in Ghana (Britwum, 2010: 153). In addition, ‘increased containerisation [brought about] further job reductions, as container ports are less labour intensive ... result[ing] in the casual pool shrinking [by] 3-5 percent per annum’ (Martin, 2006: 14). Significantly, at the time when the mechanisation of port operations and increased containerisation reduced the demand for

casual labour, the arrival of the Get Labour, the Trust Labour, and the SCSSL increased the supply of casual workers, especially shoremen, which affected the number of times the shoremen of the GDLC received job allocations. We now know that fewer job allocation means lower incomes. However, some innovations were introduced by the GDLC to enhance social protection cover of casual workers. These momentous changes in casual labour regimes and their impacts on the interest and powers of the casual workers at the ports had significant implications for casual workers struggles, to which the analysis now turns.

### **10. 3 Casual Labour Regime Changes and Casual Workers' Struggles**

#### ***10.3.1 Direct Employment Regime Struggles***

The struggles of the casual workers in the direct employment regime were mostly about wage adjustment, payment of bonus, back pay, non-statutory payments, and job security (interview with Musa, 2018; interview with Yaw, 2017; Britwum, 2010; Boampong, 2010). Musa, a senior officer of the GDLC, states that the direct casual labour regime 'was a period where there were a lot of agitations when it came to payment of bonuses and back pay,' (interview with Musa, 2018). Yaw, a casual worker of the GDLC corroborated this by recalling that when they were under the direct employment regime, 'there were a lot of agitations and sometimes the whole port could be locked until there are negotiations before we start work' (interview with Yaw, 2017). Thus, the direct employment regime was characterised by casual workers struggles on wages and bonuses.

In the last year of the direct employment regime, casual workers at Tema port staged two significant protests that had considerable financial and administrative implications for the GPHA (All Africa, 2020; Britwum, 2010; Boampong, 2010; World Socialist Web Site, 2002). The first was in September 2001, when casual dock workers at Tema port staged demonstrations against aspects, especially the proposed redundancies, of the port privatisation process that had implication for their jobs (All Africa, 2020). This protest culminated in some 'radical shake-up in [the] administration of the GPHA', such as changes

in the management of the public relations and the personnel departments of the GPHA (ibid.). In the previous chapter, we saw that privatisation was one of the key objectives of the port reforms in Ghana. Hence, the fact that casual workers could demonstrate against aspects of it that affected them – even though a year later, about 3000 of them were retrenched by the GPHA (Britwum, 2010: 153) –, and in so doing, brought about some changes in the administration of the GPHA, illustrates the power that casual workers had in the direct casual labour regime.

Secondly, in May 2002, before the GDLC started operating in August, casual dockworkers at Tema port waged a protest on redundancy payment (Boampong, 2010; World Socialist Web Site, 2002). This protest was meant to press the GPHA to pay them ‘severance benefits’ (Boampong, 2010: 140). The casual dock workers blocked access to the port, marched throughout the port singing war songs, and ‘fought a pitched battle with police at the port’ (World Socialist Web Site, 2002). The police had to fire tear gas and rubber bullets to disperse the demonstrators (ibid.). At the end of this protest, the GPHA paid out ₵20 billion (US\$2.45 million) as “handshake” to the casual workers (ibid.). This translated into about ₵4.2 million (US\$523.05) for each worker. This pay out was forced by the protests of the casual workers because, according to the Director General of the GPHA at the time, the casual workers were not entitled to severance pay (ibid.). Therefore, this payment points to the ability of the casual workers in the pre-GDLC era to wrestle concessions on non-statutory employment benefits from the GPHA.

### ***10.3.2 GDLC Regime Struggles***

With the establishment of the GDLC, casual workers protested over wage payment, trade union pluralism, and the management of their Welfare Funds (interview with Yaw, 2018; interview with Opoku, 2017; interview with Adjoda; GDLC, 2008; GDLC, 2004). The first struggle of the casual workers at the GDLC was about wage payments (GDLC, 2004: 6). In 2004, casual workers of the GDLC refused job allocations in protest against non-payment of their daily wages (ibid.). The protestors returned to work when their wages were paid, shortly

after they started the strike (ibid.).

In 2008, a section of the casual workers of the GDLC staged a demonstration for trade union pluralism at the GDLC (GDLC, 2008: 6). The protestors demanded for a new trade union and a collective bargaining certificate (ibid.). This demonstration was sparked by discontent with the dual functions of the MDU at the GDLC. Significantly, although, this demonstration did not bring about a new trade union, it disrupted the operations of the GDLC in such a way that it compelled dock labour employers at Tema port to use “unapproved labour” or “unauthorised labour” (ibid.: 5).

The third protest by the casual workers during the GDLC regime was also about trade union pluralism (interview with Yaw, 2018; interview with Opoku, 2017; interview with Adjoda, 2017). In 2009, some casual workers of the GDLC opted out of the MDU and joined the National Union of Harbour Employees (NUHEM) (GDLC, 2009). Opoku, a casual worker of the GDLC recounts that ‘a group [of casual workers] decided to bring in another union. That was NUHEM’ (interview with Opoku, 2017). This move was influenced by what the casual workers considered as the inability or the unwillingness of the MDU to effectively represent and promote their interests, owing to the union’s stake in the GDLC. Yaw, a casual worker at the GDLC, recalls that ‘most of the [casual] workers thought that the MDU is a shareholder of the GDLC, so we must bring different union to come and represent us in order for us to get what we want’ (interview with Yaw, 2018). Adjoda, another casual worker at the GDLC intimated that ‘the management of the GDLC and the MDU seem to be the same. They seem to be one. When we put our grievances to them [the MDU], they [the MDU] connive with the management [of the GDLC] and do not fulfil our demands’ (interview with Adjoda, 2017). Similarly, Yao who has been with the GDLC since 2006, lamented: ‘the person [the MDU] who is supposed to fight for you is also a shareholder of the company [the GDLC]. What fight can he fight for you? He cannot fight for your benefit. No one would want to operate a company and not make profit’ (interview with Yao, 2017). Thus, the dual functions that the MDU played at the ports, as the representative of the casual workers of the GDLC and as a shareholder of the GDLC, influenced the attempt by the casual workers of the GDLC to bring the NUHEM to the GDLC.

The emergence of the NUHEM at the GDLC brought about a struggle between the MDU and the NUHEM, as according to Ghana's labour legislation, only one union could have the right to hold the collective bargaining certificate and to negotiate for the casual workers of the GDLC (Kunateh, 2016; GDLC, 2009). Consequently, the Chief Labour Officer called for a referendum at the GDLC in order to establish the union with the majority membership which would hold the collective bargaining certificate to negotiate at the GDLC (Kunateh, 2016). Significantly, the referendum was not held as the membership recruitment by the NUHEM was cancelled by the National Labour Commission – the adjudicator of industrial disputes in Ghana. The Commission ruled that the membership enrolment process that the NUHEM used was 'null and void' (GDLC, 2009: 2). This was because the NUHEM did not comply with the requirement to give to the MDU information on those workers who had resigned from the MDU and joined the NUHEM (Kunateh, 2016). This failure, or more appropriately, the unwillingness of the NUHEM to provide such information to the MDU can be understood as an attempt by the NUHEM to protect the jobs of the casual workers who have opted to join the NUHEM. The GDLC at the time, was re-registering its casual workers (GDLC, 2009: 2) and could, under promptings from the MDU, use that exercise to expunge the names of those casual dockworkers who had joined the NUHEM from its register. This point should be taken alongside the fact that in 2009, the GDLC enjoyed de facto monopoly in the supply of casual workers to the ports in Ghana.

In response to the cancellation of the membership recruitment of the NUHEM, some supporters of the NUHEM staged demonstrations that destroyed some properties of the GDLC and stopped work for two days (GDLC 2009). Heavy police presence was maintained at the premises of the GDLC until calm was restored (ibid). The police used water cannons, rubber bullets, and tear gas to disperse demonstrators, and manhandled some of the striking workers (Kunateh, 2016). Jack, a casual worker of the GDLC decried that 'they [GDLC] brought police here. They [the police] threw tear gas. They gave warning shots. They beat some of our workers. Others, including me, got injured while trying to run away. So it became a fight here' (interview with Jack, 2017). Kojo, one of the casual workers who supported the NUHEM recounts:

we had a demonstration here. That time, the Get Labour and the Trust Labour were not here. We had the demonstration because we wanted to change of the union. This was because how the union was treating us was not good. In law, every worker has the right to choose any union he wants. If you know this union is not helping you, you can change. They can't force you to marry a woman you don't like. But they brought police here (interview with Kojo, 2017).

The last significant protest by casual workers under the GDLC regime was about the management of their Welfare Fund (GDLC, 2011; GDLC, 2010). In 2010, casual workers of the GDLC staged a demonstration and refused to work in protests against irregularities in the management of their Welfare Fund (GDLC, 2010: 7). This protest stopped work at the GDLC for a day (GDLC, 2011: 13). Together with the earlier demonstrations, this protest shows the ability of casual workers under the GDLC regime to agitate over their rights and entitlements.

### ***10.3.3 The Competition Regime Struggles***

The protests of the casual workers of the GDLC under the competition regime have been about social security and back pay (interview with Wahab, 2018; interview with Musa, 2018; interview with Nii, 2017). In 2014 and 2016, the casual workers of the GDLC organised demonstrations against the failure of the GDLC to remit their social security contributions to the Social Security and National Insurance Trust (SSNIT) and pension fund managers (interview with Wahab, interview with Nii, 2017). Wahab, a casual worker of the GDLC recounts that 'our SSNIT [social security contributions] were not paid for almost two years. So we [the casual workers] had a demonstration here and they [the GDLC] paid (interview with Wahab, 2018). Significantly, the 2016 struggle led to the dismissal of the Executive Director of the GDLC. Nii, a casual worker of the GDLC, pointed out that 'the [Executive] Director who just left, it was our demonstration that got him to be sacked' (interview with Nii, 2017). Musa, a senior officer of the GDLC corroborated this by recounting how protests of casual workers over 'SSNIT [social security] contributions, eventually culminated in the dismissal of the Executive Director' (interview with Musa, 2018).

The next protest by casual workers of the GDLC under the competition regime was about

back pay (interview with Musa, 2018; GDLC, 2016). In October 2016, casual workers of the GDLC staged a strike against an agreement by the Joint Standing Negotiation Committee of the GDLC. This agreement had annulled back pay after a 10 percent wage increment in September 2016 (GDLC, 2016b: 3-4). Such an agreement was against the practice at the GDLC. Usually, pay increases at the GDLC took effect from January irrespective of when wage negotiations end and any difference between the new and the old wage rates constituted back pay from the beginning of the year (interview with Musa, 2018). Therefore, the casual workers of the GDLC found the agreement against back pay in October 2016 to be reprehensible and protested. The GDLC had to pay GH¢200,000, or US\$50,185.00, to the casual workers (GDLC, 2016b: 4), as “handshake” in order to end the strike. This was about GH¢166.66 (US\$41.82) to each of the casual workers.

#### **10.4 Changes in Casual Workers’ Power and Disputes**

So far, we have seen how changes in the casual regimes affected the interests of, and influenced the struggles by, the casual workers of GDLC. We would now look at how casual labour reforms and their effects on the power of casual workers of the GDLC altered the sources of the disputes that casual workers of the GDLC waged.

It is important to note that the location and functions of the casual workers of the GDLC give them some workplace bargaining power. In chapter 2, we learnt that ‘workers who are enmeshed in tightly integrated production processes, where a localized work stoppage in a key node can cause disruptions on a much wider scale than the stoppage itself’ enjoy workplace bargaining power (Silver, 2003: 13). We know that casual workers of the GDLC are the main workforce for the loading and offloading of vessels at the ports in Ghana. In addition, they are the only source of labour for some of the technical and essential jobs at the ports. In the previous chapter, we saw the importance of Tema port for the maritime freight of Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger. Consequently, the protests by the casual workers of the GDLC that disrupted port operations for two days in 2009 and a day in 2010, had implication for Ghana and beyond. These protests manifest the power that casual workers of the GDLC



derive from their location and functions at the ports in Ghana. Therefore, the casual workers of the GDLC wield some structural power similar to what Silver characterised as workplace bargaining power (Silver, 2003: 13).

However, the accounts of the casual workers in this study reveal that the transformations in casual labour regimes and the introduction of competition in the procurement of labour at Tema and Takoradi ports affected the power of the casual workers of the GDLC, as dock labour employers could obtain other labour beyond the GDLC, to the point that the GDLC lost about 90 percent of the shore handling, the most labour intensive port operation, to the new companies (interview with Jack, 2017; interview with Tutu, 2017; interview with Fuseini, 2017). According to Jack, a casual worker of the GDLC, ‘in Ghana, there is no work. If you stay at home, you would not eat. So what you have to do is to shut your mouth and sit down’ (interview with Jack, 2017). Tutu, a casual worker bemoaned that ‘there are no jobs. If you misbehave and they sack you, you have nowhere to go. You don’t have any saviour’ (interview with Tutu, 2017). Another casual worker, lamented that:

now they have established the Get Labour and the Trust Labour. So the workers are afraid that if they stage a demonstration, make a lot of noise, they [dock labour employers] would take the jobs from them [casual workers of the GDLC] and give them to the Get [Labour] and the Trust [Labour]. So it has put fear in everyone. Everyone is sitting down quietly (interview with Fuseini, 2017).

Interviews with some casual workers in this study revealed that their weakened structural power of the – owing to the taking away of about 90 percent of shore handling (interview with Musa, 2018) – undermined the associational power of the Non-Permanent Staff Local Union, which casual workers at the GDLC formed and which has an affiliation with the MDU (interview with Osibo, 2017; interview with Alhassan, 2017; interview with August, 2017). This union has a collective bargaining certificate and negotiates with the management of the GDLC. Yet, Osibo, a casual worker of the GDLC bemoaned that the ‘workers here [GDLC] do not have power in the sense that if you agitate, you will be suspended and the union [the Non-Permanent Staff Local Union] will not intervene on your behalf’ (interview with Osibo, 2017). Alhassan, another casual worker of the GDLC lamented ‘what power can we have? We have no power here. If they say go and work and you say you would not work, another person would go and work’ (interview with Alhassan, 2017). Similarly, August, a casual

worker, stated that ‘we [casual workers of GDLC] don’t have power, we don't have influence. I don’t think the union [the Non-Permanent Staff Local Union] can fight for us’ (interview with August, 2017). Thus, one of outcomes of the transformation in the casual labour regimes at Tema and Takoradi ports was a decrease of the structural power of the casual workers of the GDLC, which affected the associational power of their local union.

Nonetheless, as we have seen from their struggles – reviewed above –, the casual workers of GDLC have not been completely docile. Since 2004, these workers have staged seven protests. These protests show that instead of passivity, what happened was a shift in the sources of casual workers agitations from disputes of interests to disputes of rights. It is worth recalling that disputes of right ‘involve the interpretation and application of existing legal instruments such as contractual clauses in collective agreements while disputes of interests concern the establishment of a new right’ (Emejuru, 2015: 135). Since the emergence of the GDLC, the agitations of casual workers have focused on statutory rights and negotiated entitlements. The first of these agitations was about wage payment. In September 2004, casual workers of the GDLC refused job allocations because they did not receive their daily wages (GDLC, 2004: 6). The second source of agitation at the GDLC has been about trade union rights. In 2008 and 2009, some workers of the GDLC protested in attempts to bring about trade union pluralism at the GDLC. The third agitation was about negotiated welfare entitlements and statutory social security rights. In 2010, casual workers of the GDLC staged a demonstration and refused to work in protests against the mismanagement of their Welfare Fund (GDLC, 2010: 7). In 2014 and 2016, the workers organised demonstrations in protests against the failure of the GDLC to remit social security contributions to the SSNIT and pension fund managers. Taken together, these instances of unrest have all been about workers’ statutory rights and negotiated entitlements. Therefore, one of consequences of the reforms in the casual labour regime at the ports was an emphasis on, or a shift in the focus of the agitations of the casual workers of the GDLC to disputes of rights.

The change in the focus of casual workers disputes at the GDLC can be explained by the limitations of the power of the casual workers and the possible reaction of the management of the GDLC to such disputes. First, disputes of rights such as grievances over the non-

payment of statutory social security contributions are about breaches of the laws of Ghana. Given the legal sanctions for violations of such entitlements, the GDLC had to tolerate and contain agitations by casual dock workers over such matters. Second, in spite of their power limitations, protests by casual workers at the GDLC over their rights are less likely to attract reprisals by the management of the GDLC. In 2010, when the casual workers of the GDLC stopped work and protested over the management of their Welfare Fund, those casual workers whose activities breached the regulations of the GDLC were pardoned (GDLC, 2010: 7). We have also seen that the agitations by the casual workers of the GDLC over the non-payment of social security contributions resulted in the dismissal of the Executive Director of the GDLC. These illustrate that despite power limitations, the GDLC workers could still promote the enforcement of their rights and legal entitlements.

However, with changes in the casual labour regime and the arrival of other possible sources of workers at the port, the extent and the intensity of disputes of interests by casual workers diminished. These have been inhibited by their weakened structural power and the fact that the GDLC was not in danger of legal sanctions for not responding to the demands of the casual workers for wage increases. In addition, given the competition in the supply of casual labour at the ports, the relationship between work allocation and incomes, and the absence of unemployment benefits, the casual workers of the GDLC simply could not sustain disputes of interests.

In 2017, the casual workers of GDLC demanded for death or survivors' benefits of GH¢1500.00 (US\$950.91) for deaths at work location, GH¢1,000.00 (US\$633.94) for deaths that occur out of work, and a compassionate donation of GH¢500.00 (US\$316.97) to bereaved families of registered dock workers (GDLC, 2018). Even though the costs of these demands were relatively low, the management of the GDLC dismissed the demand for compassionate donation and agreed to pay 80 percent of the proposed death benefits (ibid). This did not attract any responses from the Non-Permanent Staff Local Union of the casual workers of the GDLC. The casual workers and their local union did not agitate like they did in the cases of the disputes on the Welfare Fund, Social Security, and trade union rights because compassionate and bereavement benefits are not statutory. They are matters of

interests not rights. Therefore, given the limitation in their power, these workers could not escalate the struggle for these demands.

Contrast this with period of the direct employment regime, in which non-statutory issues, or disputes of interests, triggered agitations by casual workers. We have seen how protests by casual workers in September 2001 and May 2002 that brought about some “radical” shake-up in the administration of the GPHA and the pay out of ₵20 billion (US\$2.45 million) by the GPHA to the casual workers, respectively. In addition, casual workers under this regime struggled for wage level increments and better bonus payments - these matters are not determined by the laws of Ghana. Joe, a casual worker of the GDLC savoured:

down there, we were under the GPHA and part of the MDU. Down there we had power, anything that we organised brought results. Do you understand? We had different departments but there was one department called Cocoashed. Have you heard that name before? Those people were strong, they carry heavy things. Anytime we plan, if that side succeeds, all the other departments would succeed and we would get what we want (interview with Joe, 2018).

Casual workers under the direct employment regime could protest over wage levels, resisted aspects of port privatisation, especially the proposed redundancy, that affected them, and struggled for non-statutory severance pay, i.e., engage in disputes of interests, largely due to the direct employment relationship between them and the GPHA. The casual workers under this regime did not face threats of decline in work allocation. The costs and time for recruitment and training of new casual workers made casual labour attrition problematic for the dock labour employers. Therefore, the dearth of competition in the supply of casual labour gave some structural power to casual workers. This partly explains the predominance of disputes of interests in the agitations of casual dockers in the pre-GDLC era.

Furthermore, we have seen that casual workers in the direct employment regime could fight for better wages and non-statutory severance pay, and protests against some elements of port privatisation – redundancies – despite the fact that they did not have adequate representation, as they did not have their own local trade union. Casual workers under the direct employment regime were excluded from direct representation (Martin, 2006: 12). Musa recounts that:

in the past [under the direct employment regime] we didn't have a situation where the casuals were well represented. [So] when it came to the determination of these things [wages and bonuses], there were always suspicions. It was like the concerns of the casuals were not taken on board. We had the situation where you [casual workers] would be there and the permanent workers would come and tell you that your wages have been reviewed from this to that without any input from you. Bonus, when it was time to pay bonuses, then it was like what you were expecting was not what was paid to you, or when you were supposed to be paid did not happen as expected, so that always led to agitations (interview with Musa, 2018).

Therefore, lack of trade union representation does not always generate docility among workers. The casual workers in the pre-GDLC era demonstrated that workers who do not have adequate trade union representation can self-organise and exercise workplace militancy provided they have some structural power.

Interestingly, although casual workers under the direct employment regime protested on disputes of interests such as wage increment levels, bonuses, and severance payments in the absence of their own local trade union, they were unable to do so under the GDLC regime even though they had the Non-Permanent Staff Local Union of the MDU. Benji, a casual worker of the GDLC lamented that:

sometimes we, the workers had to do demonstration without the union. Because sometimes when you go to them [local union officers], it is like they are not willing to organise the demonstration, or they agree with the office people [the management]. So we would do it ourselves (interview with Benji, 2018).

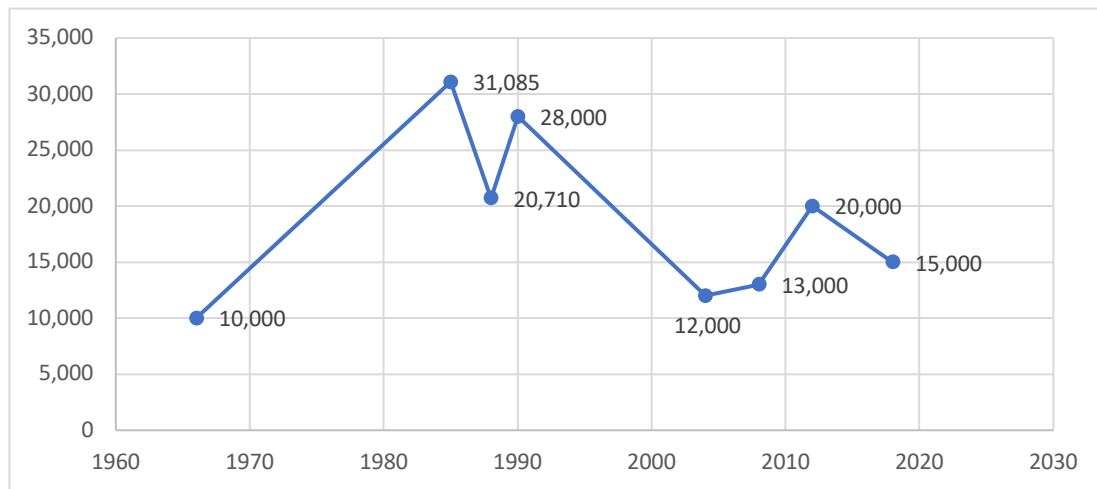
In the light of the above, the changes that occurred in the sources of the disputes of the casual workers at the ports in Ghana do not relate solely to issues of representation or the formation of a trade union. Instead, the power losses they suffered as a result of reduced work allocations owing to the changes in the casual labour regimes accounted for the shifts in the sources of disputes.

## **10.5 The Implications of the Creation of the GDLC for MDU**

In spite of the above impacts of the port reforms on the casual workers, the MDU maintained

significant control over casual labour and remained the main trade union at the ports in Ghana (interview with Serwaa, 2018). Figure 12 shows that the membership of the MDU increased from about 10,000 in 1966 to about 31,000 in 1985. Since then, the membership of MDU has been below the peak. This has been due to privatisation and the merger of maritime enterprises under the ports reforms in Ghana (Britwum, 2007: 130).

**Figure 12: MDU membership (1960-2018)**



Source: TUC, 2012; Nimoh, 2015; and interview with Serwaa, 2018

A key informant from the MDU revealed that the casual workers of the GDLC form an important part of the MDU (interview with Serwaa, 2018). About a quarter of the membership of the MDU in 2018 were casual workers from the GDLC (ibid.). Such membership also matters financially, as the union receives financial contributions from the casual workers of the GDLC. The MDU gets GH¢0.10 or US\$0.02 for each work allocation at the GDLC as union dues (ibid.). In 2017, the GDLC handled 481,965 work allocations at Tema and Takoradi ports (GDLC, 2018). This meant that the MDU received GH¢48,196.50 or US\$9,639 in union dues from the GDLC that year. These show that casual workers of the GDLC add to the numbers and revenue of the MDU.

The GDLC regime also sustained the control that the MDU had over casual labour supply to the ports in Ghana. This is because the MDU, as we saw in chapter 9, operated a close shop system which required casual workers to be members of the union in order to be registered

with the GDLC for jobs at the ports. This meant that until the abolition of the monopoly of the GDLC in 2014, casual workers required membership of the MDU for jobs at the ports in Ghana. Significantly, even under the competition regime, the close shop system at the GDLC continued de facto, as membership of the MDU remained necessary for most of the casual jobs at the ports. This is because, despite the introduction of the competition regime, the GDLC provided about 70 percent of the casual labour to the ports in Ghana, including casual labour for the essential and machine operations.

Nonetheless, the dual functions that the MDU played at the ports, as a representative of workers and as part of the GDLC's management, detracted from the confidence that casual workers had in the union (interview with Ohene, 2018; interview with Mawuko, 2017; GDLC, 2002). From the onset, some casual workers did not want to register with the GDLC because they considered that the ownership structure of the GDLC would prevent the MDU from fighting for their interests (GDLC, 2002: 8). Almost all the casual workers of the GDLC who took part in this study decried the dual functions of the MDU at the GDLC (interviews with: Ohene, 2018; Mawuko, 2017; Osei, 201; Wahab, 2017; Albert, 2017; Alhassan, 2017; Asante, 2017; August, 2017; Ben, 2017; Yaw, 2017; Danaa, 2017; Dannya, 2017; Ali, 2017; Fuseini, 2017; Ageorgia, 2017; Hamidu, 2017; Ike, 2017; Jack, 2017; Boadi, 2017; Joe, 2017; Kuuku, 2017; Nana, 2017; Tutu, 2017; Atta, 2017; Yao, 2017; Lucky, 2017; Mo, 2017; Nii, 2017; Adjoda, 2017; Sammy, 2017; Yaw, 2017; Sulley, 2017). Ohene, a casual worker at the GDLC bemoaned:

the MDU is a referee, team manager, and also represent us. This is not good. The MDU has shares here [in the GDLC], how can it negotiate and improve our lives? This is something we don't know how to describe. It is not fair but that is what we find ourselves in (interview with Ohene, 2018).

Similarly, Mawuko, another casual worker intimated:

you [referring to me] know the MDU is a union. The purpose of a union is to be a link between the company and the workers. So if the worker has a problem, it is the union that has to see to it that the problem is solved. But here, because the union is a shareholder of the GDLC, the duty of the union is sometimes questionable. The aim of any company is to make profit, and unions take part of the profit for their members. But being a part of the company, you want to maximise profit so that when they are sharing the profit, you will benefit. So what do you think? You cannot be the referee and at the same time be a player (interview with Mawuko, 2017).

The above is consistent with earlier findings on the implications of the dual functions of the MDU (Daily Graphic, 2016a; Ryklief, 2013; Britwum, 2010). According to Ryklief (2013: 16-17), the dual roles of the MDU at the ports generate a conflict of interest. It has been said that the MDU has concerns for productivity and workers' conduct as an employer (Britwum, 2010). In addition, it has been argued that the union's stake in the GDLC impinges on negotiations for wages and working conditions at the GDLC and relegates the duty to defend the rights of casual dockers to decent income and working conditions to the back (ibid.). In 2016, casual workers of the GDLC engaged in a strike action over back pay and accused the MDU of complicity with the management of the GDLC (Daily Graphic, 2016a). This was because, as mentioned earlier, there was an agreement by the Joint Standing Negotiation Committee of the GDLC that annulled back pay after a 10 percent wage increase (GDLC, 2016b: 3-4). Thus, the dual functions played by the union generate scepticism among casual workers about the capacity or the willingness of the MDU to represent them.

We have already seen how this scepticism has engendered struggles by casual workers of the GDLC for trade union pluralism. Mawuko, a casual worker at the GDLC pointed out that 'there were times when we said that we did not like the MDU. This is because the MDU is part of the company. So we wanted to have an independent union' (interview with Mawuko, 2018). In 2008, a section of the casual workers of GDLC protested for the formation of another union at the GDLC (GDLC, 2008: 5). This resulted in some disruptions in the operations and administration of the company (ibid). In 2009, there was another unsuccessful attempt by a group of casual workers to get another union at the GDLC. According to Yao, a casual worker, 'we said the MDU was cheating us. So we tried to bring a different union here. We fought and fought but we were not successful' (interview with Yao, 2017).

## **10.6 Conclusion: Trade Unions and Casual Work at the Ports**

Clearly, the dual role played by the MDU, in an attempt to retain some control over labour matters at the ports, was a source of resentment and controversy among the casual



dockworkers. Its roots are complex. We have seen that the transition from the direct employment regime occurred with the formation the Non-Permanent Staff Local Union – which affiliated to the MDU – at the GDLC. This was important because it provided the casual workers the opportunity to negotiate with their managers for their wages and working conditions. This enhanced their voice and representation on matters that affected them at their workplace. In 2018, the collective agreement between the Non-Permanent Staff Local Union and the GDLC gave the casual workers of the GDLC a representation in grievance handling processes at the GDLC. Hence in contrast to the industrial relations atmosphere that prevailed under the direct employment regime, the GDLC regime involved some consolidation of the associational power of the casual workers.

Notable contradictions characterised the relationship between the casual port workers and the MDU. This chapter has shown how the dual role the MDU had to play as the employer of the very casual workers that it represented led to tensions between the casual workers and the MDU. It also brought about serious struggles by the casual workers for trade union pluralism at the GDLC. Significantly, the casual port workers at the time of this study were faced with the situation where same trade union that was supposed to stand with, and fight for them, become their employer. Such contradiction has implications for workers' mobilisation at the ports.

In chapter two, we reviewed mobilisation theory, and how it suggests that central to workers' organisation are shared interests, perception of injustice and specific opportunities. It is argued that the conversion of injustice into collective interest that leads to collective action requires trade union activists to blame employers for such injustice (Kelly, 1998: 29-30). Yet, in this study, we have seen that the casual port workers attribute the injustice they face to their union – the MDU – and the GDLC. Such attribution has generated protests by casual dock workers against both their union and the GDLC. This contradiction shows that workers can frame injustice independently from their trade unions, and blame their own union and employers for injustice. In addition, we know the significance that has been attached to opportunity – balance of power and the costs of repression – in mobilisation (Tilly 1978; Kelly, 1998). In this chapter we have noticed that the casual workers at the ports suffered

from power limitation – owing to the port labour market reforms –, and mobilisation constraints – due to their relations to the trade union –, and these altered their struggles at the ports. This empirical evidence shows the critical connection between the power of workers and mobilisation.

How has the residual power of the casual workers been mobilised? The chapter has shown that the character and the operation of the GDCL have inhibited the extent of casual worker agency and the exercise of the associational power of the casual workers of the GDLC. The unionisation of casual workers by the MDU constrained the workers to channel their grievances through their local trade union at the GDLC, or at the national secretariat of the MDU. This inhibited workers' agency, shop floor militancy, and the utilisation of the associational power of the trade union of the casual workers of the GDLC in two ways. First, this chapter has shown the fears that casual workers of the GDLC have that any workplace labour militancy in disputes of interests which are not sanctioned by the MDU was less likely to gain the protection that national unions offer their members at the shop floor against managerial reprisals. We have seen that apart from matters of rights, such as the non-payment of social security contribution, the management of the Welfare Fund, and freedom of association, issues of interests such as the levels of wage adjustment and other non-statutory employment benefits have not attracted much labour militancy among the casual workers of the GDLC.

Second, and related to the preceding point, the presence of the MDU in the management of the GDLC detracted from the confidence of casual workers to embark on protests on issues of interests against the GDLC. Casual workers of the GDLC became sceptical of the representation and collective bargaining efforts of the MDU at the GDLC. There are also some doubts about the preparedness of the MDU to encourage collective action against the GDLC. These shows that unionisation can act as deterrent to grassroots militancy through the absorption of workers' power by trade unions. This involves removal of, or changes in, grassroots or shop floor labour militancy by unionisation. Absorption of workers powers happens when workers and their workplace collective organisations contribute to the legitimacy and the power of national trade unions, but the augmented national trade union

power does not flow downwards to enable workers and their local collective organisations to achieve all, or some, of their grassroots aspirations.

What was in the power of the union, and what are the key pressures that it faced in making its choices? The involvement of the MDU in the GDLC, through which the union therefore became both an employer and a union of its employees, provides an instance of the pressures, tight corners, and hard compromises that the trade union faced. It also shows us how it reacted to the unavoidable prospect of membership decline that the shift from the golden days when the state controlled port operations to the more market friendly set-up where the GDLC functioned.

This study provides a lesson on the contradictions that trade unions may face in their attempts to remain relevant. It is a similar story to that of Durban, in South Africa, where Von Holdt and Webster (2008: 341) found that the workplace bargaining power of the dockworkers has been undermined by weak marketplace bargaining power created by casualization, and that the trade unions have not been able to generate sufficient associational power to forge sustained solidarity between casuals and permanent workers. Even, at Tema and Takoradi ports, the MDU, on balance seems to have little power to resist the downward pressures on wages and the increasing insecurity of employment, as it is in a position of minority on the Board of the GDLC from the outset, and is then subjected to competition from other labour brokers from 2014 onwards.

We have seen also how the transition from the direct employment regime to the GDLC, and the arrival of the Get Labour, the Trust Labour, and the SCSSL at Tema and Takoradi ports caused a deterioration in the marketplace bargaining power of casual workers of the GDLC. At the same time, because the GDLC provided most of the casual labour at the ports, including the most skilled labour for essential port operations, the casual workers of the GDLC maintained some of their workplace bargaining power. Improvements in the coverage and value of social protection to casual workers were perhaps the most tangible benefits accrued from this residual power. Such gains, at Tema and Takoradi ports, came alongside a shift in the focus of dock labour agitations from disputes of interests to disputes of rights.

The relations between the trade union and the casual workers at the time this study ends, is one in which there is workers' disillusionment with what the MDU can deliver for them. However, the ongoing presence of the MDU at the port, against which workers vent frustrations, was something that was achieved due to the union's choice, under duress, to join the GDLC, and all the compromises that this entailed. As a result of them, the casual workers of the GDLC have largely been disempowered both economically and politically, in terms of labour militancy. A few advances in social protection, are what the union can offer to sweeten the bitter pill of economic reforms at the ports of Ghana.

Such events partly corroborates and partly contradicts the key arguments of labour aristocracy theory. On the one hand, the MDU was able to reach out some of the most marginal workers at Ghanaian ports, and success in reaching them was clearly crucial to the union very survival at the ports. On the other hand, the only way the union could reach such informal workers was at the cost of significant compromises with employers, and institutionally, led to the union becoming an employer itself. The most marginal workers were not impressed by such turn of events, perhaps without fully appreciating the structural constraints that the union was under.

## CHAPTER 11: CONCLUSION

This study explored three trade union responses to the impacts of economic liberalisation at the workplace and outside the workplace in Ghana. The first case study documents trade union struggle to counter the attempts by the government of Ghana to remove subsidies on electricity in the country in the last decade. The second explored the capacity of trade unions in Ghana to engage with the informalisation of the labour market by looking at the outcomes of the unionisation of traditional restaurant operators in Accra in the past ten years. The third case study focused on the reforms at the port sector in Ghana since 2000, how this affected the casual workers at Tema and Takoradi ports, and the responses of the MDU to these changes. These case studies, when taken together, open a window into the efforts of the trade unions in Ghana in building institutional capacity and responding to the impacts of economic liberalisation at the workplace and outside the workplace on their members. Moreover, the three case studies in this study present a mixed picture – positives outcomes and significant contradictions – of the trade union responses to economic liberalisation in Ghana.

The insights from these case studies contribute to the debate on the current state and future trade unionism in four main ways. First, they provide a bottom-up narrative to the debate on trade union relevance and vitality in contemporary times. The insights in the case studies of this study engage with the research that argues that neoliberalism poses significant challenges to the organisational and political strength of trade unions (Lévesque and Murray, 2010; Engeman, 2014), and that it has fatally undermined its relevance (Lévesque and Murray, 2010: 334). Trade unions have been described as ‘relics of another era’ (Moody 1997a: 305). Others similarly saw workplace labourism as no longer viable (Standing, 2011; Gallin, 2001).

Second, the narratives in this study engage with an influential conceptualisation in the literature on contemporary trade unionism, namely, Social Movement Unionism (SMU). SMU is heralded as the solution for unions to address the crisis of trade unionism, as alliances with progressive sections of the wider society on issues that go beyond the factory gate are perceived to hold the key to a renewed vibrancy and relevance of trade unions.

Third, the empirical evidence in this study contribute to the debate on labour aristocracy – the assumption that the so-called privileged workers and their trade union tend to disassociate themselves from other segments of the working people and are unlikely to push for progressive economic policies (Arrighi, 1973; Celik, 2017; Kerswell, 2019).

Finally, the insights in the case studies engage with some of the critical assumptions on mobilisation theory, namely, interest and opportunity – two of the key concepts that seek to explain the transformation of individual workers into collective actors that engage in collective actions against employers (Tilly 1978; Kelly, 1998; Darlington, 2018; Holgate et. al. 2018).

It is in light of the above that this study, through its case studies materials, and their attention to context and its politics, offers a critique of some of the overgeneralisations about a) the incapacity of trade unions to defend the rights and interests of workers under economic liberalisation or b) the solution for trade union renewal.

We have seen how Ghana’s transition to economic liberalisation brought about significant impacts on workers. The government expenditure rationalization, cost recovery objectives, and the reduction or removal of subsidies on public services under the economic recovery and structural adjustment programmes increased the cost of living. At the same time, these measures kept the rate of wage increases below inflation. These reduced the purchasing power of incomes and affected the welfare of workers and their families. In addition, the economic reform programmes in Ghana severely affected trade union membership in Ghana. We have seen how these programmes occurred with a massive destruction of formal employment in the country. Because trade unions in the country mostly organised formal sector workers, the decline in formal jobs led to substantial declines in trade union membership. Therefore, with economic liberalisation, trade union membership decreased by a significant proportion, and this put pressure on the unions to engage with workers in the informal economy in search for new members.

This study has shown that trade unions in Ghana have not passively endured economic liberalisation. At the workplace, the unions have responded to membership declines through intensified efforts at organising in the informal economy. There has also been a trade union collaboration with private sector entities to form the GDLC in order to absorb retrenched casual dockworkers at the ports in the country. Outside the workplace, electricity tariff hikes and their impacts on the welfare of workers and their families have been a source of repeated conflicts between trade unions and the government of Ghana.

We have seen how trade unions in Ghana attempted to prevent the government of Ghana from attaining one of the goals of the economic recovery and structural adjustment programmes in the country – a fiscal squeeze agenda that sought to achieve full cost recovery in the electricity sector through substantial hikes in end user tariffs. In spite of the modest concessions that have come out of the trade union struggles, this study teaches us how the presence of trade unions in the electricity tariff regime prevented the government of Ghana from achieving full cost recovery in the electricity sector through end user tariffs. Therefore, despite the many changes to the electricity tariff formula and the institutional arrangement in electricity tariff setting, government subsidies have remained on electricity in Ghana due to trade union efforts. Significantly, the electricity subsidies that have been wrestled by trade union struggles are modest, as the pressure behind reforms was very strong. Limited as they are, they benefitted a wider constituency than just trade unions and their members in the country. Unionised electricity users, non-unionised electricity consumers, and some non-domestic electricity users in Ghana benefited from the electricity subsidies.

The trade unions struggles on electricity tariffs also teaches us how endeavours outside the workplace relate to the relevance and power of trade unions in contemporary times. We have seen that business associations in Ghana commended the TUC (Ghana) for its demands for electricity subsidies to support both domestic and non-residential consumers. CSOs in the country also accept the connections that trade unions in Ghana make between their core mandate and the necessity to engage with the government of Ghana and the PURC over electricity tariffs. The TUC (Ghana) is seen as the representative of consumer interests in the electricity tariff administration in Ghana. Therefore, this study supports the ideas that one of

the ways for contemporary trade unions to renew is Social Movement Unionism, i.e., to look beyond the workplace and advocate for issues that are of interests to the society in general.

At the same time, this study teaches us that it is important to pay attention to the contestation and internal trade union contradictions in the practice of SMU. We have seen how the trade union struggles on electricity tariffs conflict with the interests of workers and their trade unions in the electricity sector. Also, this study has shown that the shared experience of a struggle and the way it ends can generate disquiet within unions. Two of the non-affiliates of the TUC (Ghana) that participated in the 2013 protests took issues with the agreement between the TUC (Ghana) and the government of Ghana, and with the cancellation of planned demonstrations and strike action without consultations with partners in the trade union movement.

In addition to the above, the outcomes of trade union struggles on issues outside the workplace can mean different things to different groups in trade unions. In this study, we see how national union leaders and rank-and-file union members perceived the outcome of the struggle on electricity user fees differently. The national union officials felt that the concession from the government of Ghana was appreciable. In contrast, trade union activists in Tema, the bastion of trade unionism in the country, saw the gains to be too little, given the human efforts and financial resources that were invested in the preparations towards the demonstrations and the strike. Therefore, while supporting the importance of SMU for trade union renewal, this study teaches us that it is important to pay attention to context and the internal trade union dynamics, as trade unions look beyond the workplace and advocate on issues that are of interests to the society in general.

Another important lesson that this study has shown is that context matters in the kind of relationship that trade unions can or should forge in their quest to engage with the wider society on issues outside the workplace. We have seen how ideological differences and inconsistencies in electricity user fee positions prevented trade unions in Ghana from forging alliances with CSOs around electricity tariffs. Despite this, the unions managed to engage with the wider society through *individualised alliances*. These differ from the conventional



relationships that trade unions tends to establish with CSOs in SMU. This is because they emerged out of direct engagement between the trade unions and the individuals who participated in such union actions. Therefore, trade union struggles on electricity tariffs and their outcomes in Ghana show that in place of formal institutional alliances between trade unions and CSOs, trade unions can directly enter into *individualised alliances* with citizens/consumers. Such alliances bypass institutionalised groups and yet work towards SMU goals.

In addition to above, the study teaches us that the nature of the relationship that trade union establish with informal labour matters. We have seen that trade union organising in the informal economy in Ghana is an instance of SMU because, until 1990s, trade union relationship with informal labour in Ghana was severely limited. Significantly, given the characteristics of trade union members in the informal economy in Ghana at the time of this study – almost all of them were own-account operators –, their inclusion into the trade unions constitutes a trade union attempt to establish SMU relationships with informal workers (Waterman, 1993). We have reviewed how SMU is heralded as the key for trade unions to reverse the crisis of trade unionism in order renew the vibrancy and relevance of trade unions. Yet, this study has shown some of the difficulties that come with the practice of SMU. We have seen the disagreement between informal economy operators and the TUC (Ghana) over the associate membership status of the former in the union. Such contestation touches upon the debate on the role that trade unions must play in SMU relationship (Moody, 1997b; and Scipe, 2014). We know that Moody advocates that trade unions should lead and provide vision and content in their alliance with other social movements (Moody, 1997b). In contrast, Scipe argues that SMU should be based on an equal relationship (Scipe, 2014). In this study, we have seen how the lower status of informal economy operators in the TUC (Ghana) has nurtured some misgivings and discontent among informal economy operators. This shows that even though SMU is a vital trade union strategy for renewal, it should be based on equal relationship if it is to promote harmony between trade unions and informal workers.

Another significant contribution of this study is the analysis of the ways in which workers and trade union powers may be yielded and utilised. The analysis of the unionisation of

traditional caterers teaches us how the associational powers of the collectives of workers who have limited structural powers may not be enough for such workers to achieve their goals. We have seen that in isolation, the collective organisations that the *chop bar* owners in Accra formed – the Ga East Traders Association (GETA), the Indigenous Caterers Association of Ghana (ICAG), and the United Caterers of Ghana (UCG) – did not possess enough associational power that enabled them to protect and promote their economic interests. Significantly, after the *chop bar* owners joined the TUC (Ghana), the harassment that they hitherto faced from city authorities ceased. This shows how trade union affiliation can augment the power of workers who lack structural power. It also portrays how collective organisations that lack associational powers can enhance their powers through unionism.

At the same time, reviewing the business support that the TUC (Ghana) provided to the organisations of *chop bar* owners reveal the tensions that emerge when trade unions operate like NGOs. On the one hand, access to credit and training is perceived as important by some of its beneficiaries, although these are, one should remember, employers. On the other hand, these supply-side interventions, blind as they are to the demand-side of the market, are likely to be of very limited impact, as they suffer from “employment dementia” (Amsden, 2010).

Another important insight of this study is that it shows that trade unions can absorb the power of workers. The absorption of the powers of workers occurs when unionisation removes, or changes, grassroots or shop floor labour militancy. It is a situation where the powers of workers and their workplace collective organisations build up the legitimacy and the power of national trade unions. However, the augmented national trade union power does not flow downwards to enable workers to achieve all or some of their grassroots aspirations. Thus, unionisation can enhance the power of national trade unions but, paradoxically, creates conditions that disempower workers and constrain or shift grassroots or shop floor labour militancy.

The case study of the changes of casual labour regimes at the ports in Ghana provide evidence that shows how the inclusion of casual workers of the GDLC into the MDU mitigated the expression of workers militancy and shifted the source of workers disputes from interest to

disputes of rights. We have seen how the interests of the MDU in the GDLC undermined the confidence of its casual workers to stage protests on disputes of interests against the GDLC. These factors led to a decline of shop floor labour militancy in disputes of interests or issues that are not contained in the collective agreement or guaranteed by the laws of Ghana. These show that unionisation can detract from grassroots militancy through the absorption of workers power by trade unions.

In addition to the above, this study teaches us that the extent of trade union coverage matters to how power may be yielded and utilised, and who benefits from trade union presence. We have seen that unionisation at the traditional restaurants in Accra has been limited to *chop bar* owners. The many workers who play vital roles at the traditional restaurants are not covered by trade unions. Consequently, these workers face significant decent work deficits. Some *chop bars* in this study pay below the national minimum wage in Ghana and all of them violate the statutory rights of their workers to social security contributions and paid annual leave. Aside the non-enforcement of employment standards in the informal economy, the decent work deficits that *chop bar* workers face is also due to the lack of trade union protection. Therefore, the way trade unions go about seeking new members in the informal economy can mean different things to different interest groups. In this instance, the paid workers who are the most vulnerable at *chop bars* are excluded from trade union protections.

Such incapacity to reach out to these workers connects with labour aristocracy theory, and the extent to which its insights help or hinder the understanding of reality on the ground in Ghana. The failure to reach the most vulnerable workers in the informal economy validates one of the key arguments of advocates of the labour aristocracy theory, namely the fact that there is a stark division between the unionised workers in the formal economy, and workers in the informal economy who, by and large, are not reached by unions. A more mixed picture emerges from the case study on the ports. There, the MDU was indeed able to reach out to some of the most marginal workers at Ghanaian ports, and success in reaching them was clearly crucial to the union's very survival at the ports. Yet, the only way the union could reach such informal workers was by becoming an employer itself. This led to the dissatisfaction of the most marginal workers at the port, who demanded trade union

pluralism. At the same time, other aspects of the empirical evidence presented in the case studies in this study contradicts the labour aristocracy theory and its relevance to understand Ghanaian trade unions and their members. Most notably, the trade union struggles against the removal of electricity tariffs have included the interests of non-unionised electricity users in the country. Thus, despite their limitations and contradictions, to some extent, these trade union responses to economy liberalisation in Ghana and their outcomes, are at odds with the propositions of labour aristocracy, and therefore, detract from the application of such category to the trade unions and the so-called privileged workers in the country.

As for the relevance of this study to engage with the ideas of mobilisation theory, the following considerations arise. In chapter two, we saw that mobilisation theory postulates the necessary conditions that bring about the transformation of workers into collective actors who are disposed to, and capable of, creating and sustaining collective organisation and collective action against employers (Kelly, 2019). Mobilisation theory emphasises on the importance of the conversion of dissatisfaction into injustice (Holgate et. al. 2018: 607), and the attribution of injustice to employers (Darlington, 2018: 3). In essence, mobilisation theory largely focuses on explaining workplace struggles and struggles against employers.

Nonetheless, the case study of the trade struggles against the removal of subsidies on electricity tariffs in Ghana have shown us how the trade unions converted the dissatisfaction with electricity tariffs hikes into injustice and collective interests, and blamed the government of Ghana and the PURC. These strategies contributed to the transformations of both unionised and non-unionised electricity users into collective actors against the removal of subsidies on electricity user tariffs in Ghana. Also, the case study of the trade union response to labour market reforms at the ports in Ghana has showed us that casual port workers framed and attributed the injustice they faced to their own union – the MDU –, in ways that brought about their struggles for trade union pluralism at the GDLC. In light of these insights, I argue that mobilisation strategies can be applied beyond workplaces, and in situations where there are no direct employer-employee relationships.

Last, but not least, and moving away from specific theories, we conclude by highlighting the two main contradictions that emerge from this study. First, the chapters on trade union relationship with informal labour revealed that extent of trade union coverage and protection in the informal economy conflicts with what we know about the traditional character and the composition of trade unions. Admittedly, while the benefits of trade unionism in the informal economy are worthwhile, we have seen that the TUC (Ghana), at the time of this study, only related with traditional restaurant owners, i.e. those who occupy the upper strata at the *chop bars*, and not the paid workers at these establishments. Thus, the trade union coverage and protection at the *chop bars* depict a significant paradox – one in which a trade union associate with petty employers while neglecting the precarious conditions of their natural allies, the paid *chop bar* workers.

Second, the case study of the trade union response to the labour market reforms at the ports in Ghana teaches us the critical contradictions that came with the evolutions in the relationship between casual dockworkers and the MDU. The chapters on the port labour reforms illustrate how the desire of the MDU to avoid membership loss meant that it had to assume a dual, and arguably a conflicting, role at the ports in Ghana, as employer of the very casual workers it represents. We have seen how this prompted tensions and provoked struggles by casual workers for trade union pluralism at the GDLC. The casual port workers at the time of this study, were faced with a contradictory situation, as the very trade union that was supposed to fight for them become their employer. Thus, the trade union responses to economic liberalisation in Ghana came with some notable contradictions that question the very essence of trade unionism.

Significantly, this study has taught us how trade unions in Ghana attempted to deal with the impacts of economic liberalisation in the country. By struggling on issues outside the workplace, such electricity tariffs hikes, and by attempting to incorporate informal labour – informal economy operators and casual workers – into trade unions, and by even becoming employers at the ports, this dissertation offers a different, and mixed, picture of the outcomes of the trade union responses to economic liberalisation in Ghana. In it, one can observe that some tangible improvements were won by the unions, alongside losses and difficult

compromises. Taken together, these findings show the importance of putting grounded and context-specific studies at the heart of the discussion on trade union relevance in contemporary times, to which this thesis aims to contribute.

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**APPENDIX A: LIST OF PARTICIPANTS**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Details and place of Interview</b>	<b>Place of interview</b>	<b>First Interview Date</b>
<b>Case Study on Electricity Struggles</b>				
National trade union officers	SG	Secretary General of TUC (Ghana)	Accra	05/10/2017
	Ohene	Head of Department of TUC (Ghana)	Accra	24/10/2017
	Mensah	Former Secretary General of TUC (Ghana)	Tema	20/10/2017
	Manu	Former Secretary General of TUC (Ghana)	Nungua	01/11/2017
	Teacher Kofi	National officer of Ghana National Association of Teachers	Accra	30/10/2017
	Hator	National officer of PSWU	Accra	07/11/2017
	Robertson	Former General Secretary of PUWU	Accra	01/11/2017
	Doctor Mensah	National officer of Ghana Medical Association	Accra	03/11/2017
	Awuraa	Former Chairperson of TUC (Ghana)	Accra	01/11/2017
	Otabil	National officer of PUWU	Accra	23/10/2017
	Okrah	Former General Secretary of PUWU	Accra	23/10/2017

	Piesie	Former Secretary General of TUC (Ghana)	Dansoman	21/10/2017
	Afram	Former General Secretary of GAWU	Accra	03/11/2017
	Kwaku	Former trade union representative at PURC	Accra	23/10/2017
	Peters	Head of Department of TUC (Ghana)	Accra	30/10/2017
Tema	Collins	Member of Tema District Council of Labour	Tema	03/11/2017
	Charles	Executive member of Tema District Council of Labour	Tema	31/10/2017
	Ato	Trade union member and worker at Tema	Tema	08/11/2017
	Nii Armah	Trade union member and worker at Tema	Tema	08/11/2017
	Dela	Trade union member and worker at Tema	Tema	08/11/017
	Fico	Trade union member and worker at Tema	Tema	08/11/017
	Alima	Trade union member and worker at Tema	Tema	08/11/017
	Misa	Trade union member and worker at Tema	Tema	08/11/017
	Dan	Trade union member and worker at Tema	Tema	08/11/017
	Nanne	Trade union member and worker at Tema	Tema	08/11/017

Utility workers	Amoah	Worker of Electricity Company of Ghana	Accra	30/11/2017
	Mills	Worker of Electricity Company of Ghana	Accra	29/11/2017
	Daniel	Worker of Electricity Company of Ghana	Accra	30/11/2017
	Jay	Worker of Ghana Water Company	Accra	29/11/2017
	Vitus	Worker of Volta River Authority	Accra	29/11/2017
	Sena	Worker of Ghana Water Company	Keneshie	14/03/2018
	Vincent	Worker of Volta River Authority	Accra	29/11/2017
Business	Ajumawura	Officer of Ghana Employers Association	Accra	07/11/2017
CSO	Ennin	Official of Consumer Protection Agency	Accra	01/11/2017
	Ansah	Official of Africa Centre for Energy Policy	Accra	08/11/2017
	Cindy	Official of Coalition of NGOs in Water and Sanitation	Accra	30/11/2017
	Isaacs	Official of Kumasi Institute of Technology and Environment	Accra	29/05/2018
	Baaba	Official of Imani Ghana	Accra	13/06/2018
	Bondah	Official of Water and Sanitation for Urban Poor	Accra	30/11/2017

	Obenfo	Official of Integrated Social Development Centre	Accra	05/06/2018
	Agyemang	Official of Consumer Protection Agency	Accra	06/11/2017
	Agya	Member of PURC	Accra	05/06/2018
<b>Case Study on Organising Informal Economy Workers</b>				
National trade union officers	SG	Secretary General of TUC (Ghana)	Accra	05/10/2017
	Ohene	Head of Department of TUC (Ghana)	Accra	20/10/2017
	Mensah	Former Secretary General of TUC (Ghana)	Tema	20/10/2017
	Manu	Former Secretary General of TUC (Ghana)	Nungua	01/11/2017
	Aidoo	Former General Secretary of PUWU of TUC (Ghana)	Accra	24/10/2017
	Korklu	Former Informal Economy Desk Officer of TUC (Ghana)	Accra	06/10/2017
	Amoah	Former Deputy Head of Organising Department of TUC (Ghana)	Accra	18/10/2017
	Ibrahim	National Executive Officer of GAWU	Accra	16/10/2017
UNIWA officers	Maame	National Executive Officer of UNIWA	Accra	10/10/2017
	Boateng	National Executive Officer of UNIWA	Accra	13/10/2017

	Kojo	National Executive Officer of UNIWA	Accra	12/10/2017
Chop bar Owners	Ama	Chop bar owner - member of GETA	Madina	22/10/2017
	Ayish	Chop bar owner - member of UCG	Agbobloshie	12/10/2017
	Cece	Chop bar owner - member ICAG	Accra	19/10/2017
	Efo	Chop bar owner - executive officer ICAG	Accra	10/10/2017
	Owusuaa	Chop bar owner - member of UCG	Agbobloshie	13/10/2017
	Amoakoah	Chop bar owner - member of UCG	Agbobloshie	13/10/2017
	Gina	Chop bar owner - member of GETA	Abokobi	04/05/2018
	Mawuenya	Chop bar owner - member of GETA	Madina	15/10/2017
	Addobea	Chop bar owner - member ICAG	Accra	19/10/2017
	Serwaa	Chop bar owner - member GETA	Madina	
	Gifty	Chop bar owner - member ICAG	Accra	19/10/2017
	Priscilla	Chop bar owner - member ICAG	Accra	19/10/2017
	Hajia	Chop bar owner - member of UCG	Agbobloshie	13/10/2017

	Jenny	Chop bar owner - executive officer of GETA	Madina	15/10/2017
	Akuvi	Chop bar owner - member of UCG	Agbobloshie	12/10/2017
	Aba	Chop bar owner - member of UCG	Agbobloshie	23/10/2017
	Akua	Chop bar owner - member of UCG	Agbobloshie	12/10/2017
	Dedei	Chop bar owner - member of UCG	Agbobloshie	23/10/2017
	Atswei	Chop bar owner - member of UCG	Agbobloshie	23/10/2017
	Akwele	Chop bar owner - member ICAG	Dansoman	19/10/2017
	Margie	Chop bar owner - member of UCG	Agbobloshie	15/10/2017
	Akuba	Chop bar owner - member of UCG	Agbobloshie	16/10/2017
	May	Chop bar owner - member of GETA	Madina	19/10/2017
	Elorm	Chop bar owner - member of GETA	Madina	22/10/2017
	Acquah	Chop bar owner - executive officer ICAG	Kaneshi	19/10/2017
	Daavi	Chop bar owner - member of GETA	Madina	15/10/2017
	Adaku	Chop bar owner - member of ICAG	Accra	23/10/2017

	Humu	Chop bar owner - member of GETA	Madina	22/10/2017
	Esi	Chop bar owner - executive officer of GETA	Madina	15/10/2017
	Dada	Chop bar owner - executive officer of UCG	Agbobloshie	12/10/2017
	Barimah	Chop bar owner - executive officer ICAG	Accra	13/10/2017
	Vicky	Chop bar owner - member GETA	Madina	15/10/2017
	Adwoa	Chop bar owner - member of UCG	Accra	18/10/2017
	Kromo	Chop bar owner - member of GETA	Madina	14/10/20
	Kai	Chop bar owner - executive officer ICAG	Accra	13/10/2017
Chop bar workers	Abiba	Chop bar worker of a member of UCG	Agbobloshie	17/04/2018
	Afia	Chop bar worker	Agbobloshie	18/10/2018
	Anna	Chop bar worker of a member of GETA	Abokobi	04/05/2018
	Bene	Chop bar worker of a member of UCG	Agbobloshie	17/04/2018
	Tawiah	Chop bar worker		20/04/2018
	Connie	Chop bar worker of a member of ICAG	Accra	17/04/2018
	Efe	Chop bar worker of a member of ICAG	Accra	17/04/2018

	Sowah	Chop bar worker of a member of ICAG	Accra	16/05/2028
	Erica	Chop bar worker of a member of UCG	Dansoman	17/04/2018
	Esinam	Chop bar worker of a member of ICAG	Kaneshie	12/04/2018
	Boahemaa	Chop bar worker of a member of ICAG	Accra	20/04/2018
	Afriyie	Chop bar worker of a member of GETA	Madina	17/04/2018
	Boye	Chop bar worker of a member of ICAG	Accra	20/04/2018
	Hawa	Chop bar worker of a member of UCG	Agbobloshie	17/04/2018
	Joana	Chop bar worker of a member of ICAG	Accra	16/05/2018
	Torgbe	Chop bar worker of a member of GETA	Abokobi	20/04/2018
	Odjao	Chop bar worker of a member of UCG	Accra	16/05/2018
	Hajara	Chop bar worker of a member of ICAG	Accra	17/04/2018
	Mamuna	Chop bar worker of a member of ICAG	Agbobloshie	17/04/2018
	Mansa	Chop bar worker of a member of ICAG	Kaneshie	18/04/2018
	Akos	Chop bar worker of a member of ICAG	Accra	20/04/2018
	Otuwaa	Chop bar worker of a member of GETA	Madina	17/05/2018



	Rahi	Chop bar worker of a member of ICAG	Accra	20/04/2018
	Rose	Chop bar worker of a member of ICAG	Accra	20/04/2018
	Lamatu	Chop bar worker of a member of ICAG	Accra	20/04/2018
	Sackey	Chop bar worker of a member of ICAG	Accra	16/05/2018
	Thess	Chop bar worker of a member of GETA	Madina	17/05/2018
	Enyonam	Chop bar worker of a member of UCG	Agbobloshie	17/04/2018
	Abena	Chop bar worker of a member of GETA	Abokobi	04/05/2018
	Anaba	Chop bar worker of a member of GETA	Abokobi	20/04/2018
	Yaa	Chop bar worker of a member of UCG	Agbobloshie	16/10/2017
	Mimi	Chop bar worker of a member of GETA	Madina	17/05/2018
	Suzzy	Chop bar worker of a member of UCG	Agbobloshie	16/05/2018
Public Authorities	GRA Official	An officer of Ghana Revenue Authority	Accra	05/06/2018
	Nii	An officer of Accra Metropolitan Assembly	Accra	27/04/2018
<b>Case Study on the involvement of MDU in GDLC</b>				
Casual workers	Osei	Casual worker at GDLC	Tema port	12/11/2017
	Wahab	Casual worker at GDLC	Tema port	23/11/2017
	Albert	Casual worker at GDLC	Tema port	23/11/2017

	Alhassan	Casual worker at GDLC	Tema port	23/11/2017
	Asante	Casual worker at GDLC	Tema port	20/11/2017
	August	Casual worker at GDLC	Tema port	23/11/2017
	Ben	Casual worker at GDLC	Tema port	23/11/2017
	mawuko	Casual worker at GDLC	Tema port	21/11/2017
	Yaw	local union leader at GDLC	Tema port	27/11/2017
	Danaa	casual worker at GDLC	Tema port	24/11/2017
	Dannya	Casual worker at GDLC	Tema port	22/11/2017
	Ali	Casual worker at GDLC	Tema port	20/11/2017
	Fuseini	Casual worker at GDLC	Tema port	21/11/2017
	Ageorgia	Casual worker at GDLC	Tema port	22/11/2017
	Hamidu	Casual worker at GDLC	Tema port	23/11/2017
	Ike	Casual worker at GDLC	Tema port	21/11/2017
	Jack	Casual worker at GDLC	Tema port	24/11/2017
	Boadi	Casual worker at GDLC	Tema port	24/11/2017
	Joe	Casual worker at GDLC	Tema port	24/11/2017
	Kuuku	Casual worker at GDLC	Tema port	21/11/2017
	Nana	Casual worker at GDLC	Tema port	21/11/2017
	Tutu	Casual worker at GDLC	Tema port	23/11/2017
	Kojo	Casual worker at GDLC	Tema port	24/11/2017
	Ohene	Casual worker at GDLC	Tema port	24/11/2017
	Atta	Casual worker at GDLC	Tema port	24/11/2017
	Yao	Casual worker at GDLC	Tema port	22/11/2017
	Kwame	Casual worker at GDLC	Tema port	24/11/2017
	Lucky	local union leader at GDLC	Tema port	24/11/2017
	Mike	Casual worker at GDLC	Tema port	21/11/2017
	Mo	Casual worker at GDLC	Tema port	24/11/2017

	Nii	Casual worker at GDLC	Tema port	22/11/2017
	Adjoda	Casual worker at GDLC	Tema port	27/11/2017
	Sammy	Casual worker at GDLC	Tema port	23/11/2017
	Yaw	Casual worker at GDLC	Tema port	24/11/2017
	Sulley	Casual worker at GDLC	Tema port	27/11/2017
GDLC Managers	Obeng	Manager of GDLC	Tema port	27/11/2017
	Kenedy	Manager of GDLC	Tema port	06/06/2018
GDLC Permanent Staff	Dela	Permanent staff of GDLC	Tema port	20/11/2017
	Amponsah	Permanent staff of GDLC	Tema port	20/11/2017
	Musa	Permanent staff of GDLC	Tema port	19/03/2018
MDU officials	Serwaa	National officer of MDU	Accra	19/11/2020
	Owu	National officer of MDU	Accra	17/03/2018

## APPENDIX B: RESEARCH PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

### Introduction

This form is to provide you with information, so you can decide whether to participate in this study. I would answer any questions you may have. Once you are familiar with the information on this sheet and have asked any questions you may have, you can decide whether or not to participate. If you agree, you will be asked to fill in the consent form for this study or record your consent verbally.

1. Research title: Trade Union Responses to Economic Liberalisation in Ghana
2. Name and contact details: Prince Asafu-Adjaye - [645246@soas.ac.uk](mailto:645246@soas.ac.uk) and telephone in Ghana +233244791487 (telephone number)
3. Type of research project: PhD Research
4. Research purpose: to look at what have been trade union responses to economic liberalisation in Ghana. I would focus on trade union response to electricity tariff reforms in Ghana and union membership loss in Ghana
5. Why you have been chosen: I selected you to be part of this research because of your position and knowledge on the research topic.
6. Informed consent:
  - a. You do not have to take part in this research.
  - b. If you agree to take part, I would interview you for about 30 minutes. I may come back and talk to you again.
  - c. If you agree, I would record the interviews.
7. Data protection: whether you agree for me to record you or not, your responses would be anonymised and securely stored. This means that I would not use your name or anything that can be linked to you in storing the information you would provide and in writing my thesis.
8. Data Protection Privacy Notice:
  - a. The data controller for this project will be SOAS University of London. The SOAS Data Protection Officer provides oversight of SOAS activities involving the processing of personal data and can be contacted at [dataprotection@soas.ac.uk](mailto:dataprotection@soas.ac.uk)

- b. Your personal data will be processed for the purposes outlined in this Information Sheet. The legal basis that would be used to process your personal data under data protection legislation is the performance of a task in the public interest or in our official authority as a controller. However, for ethical reasons we need your consent to take part in this research project. You can provide your consent for the use of your personal data in this project by completing the consent form that has been provided for you or via audio recording of the information sheet and consent form content.
  - c. Your Rights : You have the right to request access under the General Data Protection Regulation to the information which SOAS holds about you. Further information about your rights under the Regulation and how SOAS handles personal data is available on the Data Protection pages of the SOAS website (<http://www.soas.ac.uk/infocomp/dpa/index.html>), and by contacting the Information Compliance Manager at the following address: Information Compliance Manager, SOAS, Thornhaugh Street, Russell Square, London WC1H 0XG, United Kingdom (e-mail to: [dataprotection@soas.ac.uk](mailto:dataprotection@soas.ac.uk)).
  - d. If you are concerned about how your personal data is being processed, please contact SOAS in the first instance at [dataprotection@soas.ac.uk](mailto:dataprotection@soas.ac.uk). If you remain unsatisfied, you may wish to contact the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO). Contact details, and details of data subject rights, are available on the ICO website at: <https://ico.org.uk/for-organisations/data-protection-reform/overview-of-the-gdpr/individuals-rights/>
9. Copyright Notice: The consent form asks you to waive copyright so that SOAS and the researcher can edit, quote, disseminate, publish (by whatever means) your contribution to this research project in the manner described to you by the researcher during the consent process.

Thank you for reading this information sheet and for considering taking part in this research study.

## APPENDIX C: CONSENT FORM

Research Title: Trade union responses to economic liberalisation in Ghana

Student: Prince Asafu-Adjaye

Supervisor: Matteo Rizzo

Purpose of Research: This research seeks to examine trade union responses to economic liberalisation in Ghana

I, the undersigned, confirm that (please tick box as appropriate):

1.	I have been informed and understand the purpose of this data collection	<input type="checkbox"/>
2.	I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the project and my participation.	<input type="checkbox"/>
3.	I voluntarily agree to participate in the project.	<input type="checkbox"/>
4.	I understand I can withdraw at any time without giving reasons and that I will not be penalised for withdrawing nor will I be questioned on why I have withdrawn.	<input type="checkbox"/>
5.	The procedures regarding confidentiality have been clearly explained (e.g. use of names, pseudonyms, anonymisation of data, etc.) to me.	<input type="checkbox"/>
6..	The use of the data in research, publications, sharing and archiving has been explained to me.	<input type="checkbox"/>
7.	I understand that other researchers will have access to this data only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the data and if they agree to the terms I have specified in this form.	<input type="checkbox"/>
8.	Select only <b>one</b> of the following:	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I would like my name used and understand what I have said or written as part of this study will be used in reports, publications and other research outputs so that anything I have contributed to this project can be recognised.</li> </ul>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I do not want my name used in this project.</li> </ul>	<input type="checkbox"/>

9.	I, along with the Researcher, agree to sign and date this informed consent form.	<input type="checkbox"/>
----	--	--------------------------

**Participant:**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**Researcher:**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Researcher

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date