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THE STATE AND THE INFORMAL IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICAN URBAN ECONOMIES: REVISITING DEBATES ON DUALISM

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The state and the informal in sub-Saharan African urban economies: revisiting debates on dualism[1]

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Abstract

Conceptualizations of the informal sector in terms of economic dualism have a long history, as have effective challenges to those conceptualizations. These are discussed in this paper, which then examines the dynamics of the urban informal sector in sub-Saharan Africa over recent decades, with reference to these theoretical conceptualization and other approaches. The paper then discusses the role of the state in relation to the informal sector, exemplifying in particular with reference to Kenya, Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe. It also considers briefly the dynamics of rural-urban migration to African cities and the role of this in urban processes, including employment. Finally the paper offers a comparative perspective, from north of the Limpopo, on current debates and policy pronouncements about the informal sector in South Africa.

Introduction

> "the standard dualist framework …. has been the bane of informal economy research since its inception" (Meagher 2001: 154).

The concept of dualism has a long pedigree but so, too, do critiques of the concept. In relationship to understandings of the informal sector, the concept has swung in and out of fashion, and now seems to be on the ascendancy again. Paradigmatic shifts in academe are its life's blood and many impinge only marginally, if at all, on people's lives. In the field of 'development', however, these shifts often have major implications for millions of people, upon whom 'development' is practiced. Since dualistic interpretations of the informal sector are now being revisited in South Africa, and possibly elsewhere in Africa, some consideration of the term and its history may be useful.

The idea that less developed areas of the world could be conceptualized in terms of dualism, either economically and/or socially, is associated with works by authors such as Boeke (1942, 1961) and Furnivall (1939, 1941) from their studies of SE Asia, and the economist, Lewis (1954). It differed in some ways from the then dominant neo-classical economic models, although Lewis, for example, was avowedly in that tradition (Binns 2002). The essence of dualist views was that less developed countries were characterized by two different sectors. One was typified by being capitalist in its mode of production, 'modernizing', dynamic,

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progressive, perhaps capital-intensive. The other, the 'subsistence' sector or 'peasant' sector in societies dominated by agriculture (or, in later terminology, and ominously, the 'marginal' sector), was characterized by pre-capitalist modes of production, often depending on family labour, waas unsophisticated in its operations and production patterns, used low technology and had low levels of productivity. These societies were seen as *separate*. The trick of *economic* 'development', according to Lewis, was for the latter sector to disappear gradually as it was absorbed by, or transformed itself to have the characteristics of the former. Boeke invented the idea of 'social dualism', and his standpoint was rooted in more radical traditions than Lewis's. His ideas related to the clashing of imported social systems (eg high capitalism or, theoretically, socialism) with indigenous social systems but went beyond merely describing two economic sectors (rich and poor), as it incorporated social values and patterns. He was pessimistic about the chances of the two separate societies embodied in the theories mixing successfully or positively, and suggested that governments instead needed separate policies for these different societies. Boeke's views were similar to those of Furnivall (1939), also working in SE Asia, who had developed the concept of 'plural societies'.

The key 'problem' or critique of these dualistic conceptualizations of less developed (and colonized) economies and societies was that it was easy to show that the 'disconnection' between the two sectors upon which they rested was fallacious, or at least greatly exaggerated. Merely exhibiting different characteristics does not necessarily mean that they do not experience the same underlying economic forces. Nor does it mean that there is not a relationship of dependency involved, with the associated implications of subordination and the idea that the less 'modern' sector's growth and development is conditioned by the growth and development of the other. Thus the potential for 'transformation'[2] in the 'backward' sector was often constrained by a restrictive, and possibly institutionalized, framework imposed by the colonizers and the 'modern' society. An example of great significance for southern African societies was the massive alienation of the key factor of production – land – from indigenous people and the subsequent imposition of certain restrictions on commercial agricultural production by them, while settler farmers were subsidised by the state (Palmer and Parsons 1977). Another is that, very often, it suited colonial administrations to maintain some type of 'traditional' legal institutions and authority through which to rule, as 'transformation' to a more 'modern' alternative might be costly in both financial terms and unforeseen and undesirable outcomes (for the colonizers), such as demands for greater democracy. Indigenous pressures for 'modernization' in these respects were often actively discouraged or prohibited. A further example is that colonial investment in non-extractive economic sectors was often minimal, no matter where the economics of 'comparative advantage' lay, because employment and productivity at 'home' were the key imperatives of the colonial state. A final example of particular importance for urban developments in Africa was that, there, long-term or permanent urbanization was discouraged as it was perceived to be both politically and economically disadvantageous for the colonial state – leading to restrictive housing and labour policies which reached their zenith in South Africa, and colonial Namibia and Rhodesia. Many other examples of the analytical problems of the early concept of dualism could be given. Essentially the concept has *descriptive* value but is dangerously misleading if translated into policy which is founded on an idea that the sectors are functionally separate.

Dualist ideas segued into modernization theory which dominated development theories for decades. The policy was to 'transform' the traditional, pre-capitalist sector by stimulating it

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[2] Transformations can, of course, have both positive and negative effects.

to become ‘modern’, and government intervention to hasten this outcome was usually assumed to be necessary and positive. The critiques of the theory and its policies from both the left and, more recently, the neo-liberal right have been exhaustive (e.g. Frank 1966; Ferguson 1999; World Bank 1981). In relation to current debates about the ‘informal’ sector in Africa, the following points are pertinent. The theory has been much condemned for assuming a unilinear pattern of economic development in which 20th century less developed countries would, inevitably, follow the path of capitalist and industrial development ‘enjoyed’ by the industrialized, wealthy nations. This took no account of history and that the global economic and political circumstances facing post-war Africa, Asia and Latin America were profoundly different from those experienced by industrializing Europe and North America. In addition, global power relations remained powerfully skewed in favour of the already ‘modern’ countries. On the left, the ‘dependista’ school was particularly powerful for a while, positing that the dependent relations set up by colonization and capitalist penetration of the less developed countries in the 19th and 20th centuries would prevent their ‘modernization’ along classic, capitalist lines – thus they would remain economically subordinate as their development was still conditioned. This pessimistic outlook had some resonance with the earlier views of Boeke, although a key difference was that early ‘dualists’ felt that the penetration of capitalism into ‘traditional’ society was likely to be negative, while dependistas held that such societies had already been incorporated.

In relation to the assumptions of linearity embedded in modernization, literature on the nature of late 20th century economic development and urbanization in Zambia has recently explored the debates and outcomes for a sub-Saharan African country (cf Ferguson and debates in jsas; Potts 2005). These are relevant to the analysis of ‘informality’ in African cities, albeit Zambia is an extreme case. Zambia has experienced serious economic decline since the mid-1970s. A combination of extremely negative terms of trade, and being landlocked in a region where the death throes of white settlerdom and the subsequent destabilization of black-ruled southern African countries imposed huge restrictions and costs on its transport for decades, did indeed ‘transform’ its economy, but in quite a different direction from that supposed under ‘modernization’. The urban economy has been extensively ‘informalized’, poverty has deepened, and the balance of economic forces between urban and rural areas has shifted so dramatically that Zambia has been *de-urbanizing* for twenty years (Potts 2005). Thus the share of national population in towns has been falling, and this in a country which had long been held as the epitome of rapid African urbanization and, as a corollary, of an unwarranted urban policy bias supposed to be typical of less developed countries (e.g. Bates 1981; World Bank 1981).

The urban informal sector: from bad to good (and back again?)

A very common feature of most less developed countries is an urban informal sector[3] which provides livelihoods for millions. The existence of such a sector does not mean that future paths of development will not see that sector shrink or change (or grow further), for, as noted in the introduction, many different ‘development’ paths have been, and are, experienced in the world. In South Africa, for example, by the standards of many less developed countries, including some with currently strong GDP growth, the urban informal sector (IS) is new and relatively undeveloped. This is also true for Namibia and was true for Zimbabwe in the first decade after independence. This is because the restrictive segregationist and apartheid legislation surrounding African urbanization, housing and employment affected rates of in-

[3] Informality also exists in rural areas, but this paper will refer only to urban areas.

migration and the types of work possible and strongly discouraged self-employment in the IS. It is certain that, in the absence of this, the scale of the urban IS within the cities and towns of 'white' South Africa would have been far greater than that inherited in 1994, and it would be larger today, albeit it has grown rapidly since then. While acknowledging that there were elements of an IS before then (e.g. see Rogerson and da Silva 1988; Beavon and Rogerson 1990; Rogerson 1990; Horn 1993), it is nonetheless notable that the first academic collection on the IS in SA was Preston Whyte and Rogerson's in 1991, by which time the nature and role of the urban informal sector in less developed countries elsewhere in Africa, Asia and Latin America had already gone through at least three cycles of academic analyses and interpretations, some of which appear now to be being replicated within South Africa.

The 'informal sector' was often well established by the 1960s in African cities (if not labelled as such) although, in fact, in terms of its key characteristics, this type of employment was part and parcel of pre-capitalist cities throughout the world and is not new (O'Connor 1983). But its scale and importance as a source of livelihoods was different – due to the sheer numbers involved and the fact that rapid urbanization was occurring in many poor countries of the world without the rapid growth in formal sector manufacturing that had occurred in Europe and North America in the early states of their rapid urbanization. At the time of Britain's industrial revolution, the demand for industrial labour in the northern industrial towns of England was extremely high, for England's textile industry dominated the global textile market. In the 1860s it exported more than two-thirds of the entire world's manufactured cotton products (much of this produced by employees who were women and children because labour conditions were unregulated and they were cheaper) (Hobhouse 1992). The differences between this and the experience of rapid urbanization in less developed countries are manifold. The economic control that Britain exercised and global economic conditions were the products of a very specific historical moment which bear little resemblance to those faced by sub-Saharan Africa as it struggled (and still struggles) to industrialize and develop. Analysis of the urban informal sector at this stage was couched very much in terms of dualism. The language describing the characteristics of the sector reproduced that used to describe the 'dualism' of colonial societies and economies and the policy implications were almost identical too.

Thus, the IS was denoted as backward, traditional, with low productivity with many people producing what one person could in the formal sector, low technology, low incomes, low capital use and low levels of investment. The perception was that developing cities needed to get rid of these types of activities as development required modernization and a shift to higher productivity, higher technology, and more capital-intensive types of production and employment. As noted already the term, 'informal sector', came later, being invented by Hart (1973) with reference to the situation in Ghana's towns.[4] Importantly, the sector was also typified as including *unregistered, unrecorded employment and production* that did not feature in government statistics. Strictly speaking, according to the letter of the laws (mainly inherited from colonial times), this made most of the informal sector 'illegal' – and as will be shown, this has left it terribly vulnerable to shifts in government attitudes and policy. Moreover, some typified the sector as a breeding ground for criminals, and of potential political instability. Although not purely related to informal working practices, there was also the idea, propounded in Latin America (Oscar Lewis), that there was a 'culture of poverty'

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[4] It is worth noting that in West Africa the scale of independent female involvement in trade, particularly of food, has a long history and is embedded in most cultures there. As noted already, the idea that the IS, which is often dominated by trade, was 'new' is thereby undermined. Kumasi, for example, was famous for hundreds of years for its vast market – the characteristics of which have always been 'informal'.

which was self-reinforcing, with incredibly negative implications including squarely placing the blame for urban poverty on the poor themselves.

However these viewpoints shifted by the 1970s. The urban IS had continued to grow apace in cities in less developed countries. Poverty and unemployment in towns was a growing concern among the development 'industry'. Revisionist, some would say neo-populist, analyses of the IS were gaining the upper hand. They were typified by the ILO/JASPA reports in countries like Kenya (ILO 1972). The IS was now seen as *a solution* to poverty and unemployment and many of the characteristics previously deemed as negative were now redefined and seen as positive.

Thus the IS's low productivity was, at the same time, one of the reasons for it *creating so much employment*. The potential for 'involution' (Mcgee) whereby many people produced and/or traded items that could be 'efficiently' produced and distributed by far fewer in the formal sector, became a positive feature. Furthemore, the goods were sometimes cheaper because the labour was cheap or they were lower quality or they used recycled products. Classic examples are rubber sandals made from tyres, containers made from recycled metal products like oil drums, or second hand clothes. Even if they were more expensive than the formal sector goods, if there was a market in the goods from poor people it indicated that the producers and sellers were providing for a need – classic examples being the sub-division of luxury items such as bread or cigarettes into units (half a loaf; one cigarette) that poor people could sometimes afford - or were bringing the goods (e,g. groceries brought from wholesale formal outlets) to locations where the 'formal' sector could not or would not reach, probably because the profit rates would be too low or formal outlets were not facilitated by the state.

The low technology criticism also became an advantage as this usually meant more jobs for each thing produced, such as school uniforms produced by local tailors with treadle machines rather than mass-produced. Low investment could also be turned on its head: this meant a high labour-capital ratio and more jobs for each dollar invested. It was pointed out that the IS usually used indigenous resources, meaning domestic capital, and that this was also positive given that there was so often a shortage of foreign exchange and foreign investment.[5]

Other negative conceptualizations of the urban IS were also reconsidered. All typologies of the sector agree that the majority of workers in the sector are self-employed. Family labour is another important element. With the ILO reports and the new emphasis on positive features of the IS, such workers were more likely to be typified as hardworking, entrepreneurial and even politically quite 'conservative'.

Inevitably these new approaches had their own critiques. Evidently the revision took little note of class issues or modes of production. A much used volume of the time was a collection by Bromley and Gerry (1979) which preferred to view the IS as petty commodity producers. There was concern that the new views were too convenient. They could be used by the state

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[5] In the frequently used ILO characterization of the informal sector from its Kenya study in 1972, they specified the use of indigenous resources as one feature and counterposed this specifically to 'frequent reliance on overseas resources'. This has been understood generally to refer to domestic, as opposed, to foreign capital. It has lead to confusion however as it could be interpreted to mean that IS traders 'should' be trading in locally produced goods from within the country. This would be problematic – one only has to think of the cheap watches, CDs, lighters and coat hangers, let alone the vast trade in secondhand clothes from rich countries, which are so typical of IS trade. This interpretation is apparent in the critiques of the classic ILO definition of the IS discussed in Devey et al (2006) with reference to South Africa. However much of the literature on the IS refers to the use of domestic capital, which makes sense in practice, and is the understanding in this paper.

and policy makers to avoid the government's responsibilities to the urban poor such as striving to create more formal sector jobs. The views were noted still to be essentially dualist, ignoring the many connections between the formal and informal sectors such as sub-contracting work to the IS in order to cheapen costs or using formal sector waste products to recycle. The fact that wage costs were reduced by many of the low cost products supplied by the informal sector, from food to clothes (and often including, very importantly, housing),[6] was seen as a form of hidden subsidy from the poor to the rich sector.

The decade of the 1970s thus saw a major shift in how the urban informal sector was characterised and analysed. However the next decade was to usher in the current era of neo-liberalism and the dominance of the 'market', rather than government policies and action, in determining the allocation of resources, and subsequent employment patterns in most countries in the world. In sub-Saharan Africa this was the beginning of rounds of structural adjustment policies (SAPs) which dramatically altered their economies and economic policies. They included currency devaluation; price, wage and trade liberalization; reductions in government spending; and a shift from the policies of 'modernization' to a focus on export-oriented production determined by the theoretical concept of 'comparative advantage'. Although the urban formal labour force was very much a target, being seen as an over-favoured 'labour aristocracy' (for critiques of this issue see Jamal and Weeks 1994; Amis 1989; Potts 1997), the fate and trajectory of the urban informal sector in all this was not much of an issue – the market would work things out. From a theoretical stance, at least prices there were often competitive and the sector was entrepreneurial.

Yet, by the turn of the century, there appeared to be increasing evidence from a number of countries that urban 'informality' – both in employment and low-income housing – was again being regarded negatively. The negative terminology of the earlier period seems to becoming more common again, not that it ever disappeared. Is the IS becoming, once again, perceived primarily to be dirty, dangerous, 'criminal', unproductive: '*unmodern*'?

An Aside on Informality, Criminality and Legitimacy

The issue of 'criminality' (rather than 'illegality') as a feature of the informal sector is worth discussing further at this point because it is so frequently used to demonize the sector and justify draconian interventions. The association is quite fallacious but it is facilitated by dualistic conceptualizations. The problem arises because, by definition, criminal activities are illegal. Since, as explained above, the informal sector is typically unlicensed/unregistered, it is also 'illegal'. The logical fallacy that all too often follows is that, therefore, criminal activities are 'informal sector'. They are not, and it is important to make this distinction. Rich countries have criminal activities too – relating to drugs, theft, fraud etc – and these are not seen as 'informal sector'. The conceptual muddling of the categories is often assisted by geography. In poor cities, some criminals live in poor, unplanned settlements where many people work in the informal sector. Obviously that does *not* mean the criminals' activities are informal, any more than formal sector workers living in such settlements automatically become 'informal'. Obviously, many criminals in poor (and rich) cities also live in formal

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[6] These swings in the paradigms within which the informal sector were analysed, from negative to positive with associated critiques of the latter coming largely from the left, often relating to the 'convenience' of leaving the solution to the poor themselves, were almost exactly paralleled in the low-income housing literature and related policies at this time. The 'new' housing paradigms were much influenced by the work of John Turner in Latin American contexts.

settlements (if their crimes are profitable enough!) and this does not makes them 'legal' – the analytical blurring of *their* geography and their wrongdoing is far rarer. Poor people in African cities living in unplanned settlements, and working in the informal sector, are just as, indeed usually *far more,* exercised by the problems created by the criminal elements living amongst them, than the government or the rich. Their own analytical capacity to distinguish between criminality and 'informality' is usually quite clear: 'He drives an informal, unlicensed taxi cab (a legitimate livelihood), he steals cars (a criminal); I am trying to make an 'honest' livelihood by selling by the side of the road, she deals in hard drugs'.

However there is a disturbing reversal in the literature, let alone government labelling, in this respect as noted by Meagher (2001: 154), who comments that there has been a recent broad 'conceptual shift in the analysis of African informal economies, which previously excluded criminal lines of trade in practice, and often by definition'. As is clear from the paragraph above, and in agreement with Meagher, this is regarded as unhelpful and confusing when analysing the role of the informal sector in African livelihoods.

The dynamics of the urban informal sector in sub-Saharan Africa

The growth of the informal sector in African towns and cities has been well documented (eg Hansen and Vaa 2004; Rogerson 1997; Bryceson 2006). Briefly, in the 1960s there was often strong growth in urban-based employment backed by government investment in the productive and service sectors but there was also very rapid urban population growth, the main component of which was rural-urban migration. By the 1970s there was a significant gap between formal sector job opportunities and the urban labour force seeking jobs and the informal sector had grown considerably. However, as Table 1 shows, this sector was already strongly apparent in many countries in the 1960s, particularly among women and particularly in West Africa. The economic decline accompanying the oil crises of the 1970s saw further IS growth, but the era of SAPs from the 1980s brought about a massive surge. The impacts of economic 'globalization' have been very diverse across the less developed countries of the world. Unfortunately, in sub-Saharan Africa, and in its urban areas in particular, they have, on balance, been extremely negative (Bryceson and Potts 2006). The effects on economic activities and employment patterns varied from country to country, as did precise timing, but the combination of sharply reduced government expenditure and being opened up to global competition led to significant retrenchments in both the public and private sector. Some countries de-industrialized with startling speed: manufacturing industry in Zimbabwe had accounted for 25-27% of GDP in the 1980s (Hawkins 2001) but, after SAPs began in 1991, this reduced to 17% by 1998 (Stoneman 2004). The thousands who lost their jobs mainly had to find work in the IS, or leave town for rural areas (see Potts 1995) or another country (frequently South Africa). Before SAPs, the formal sector was not keeping pace with the demand for urban jobs but it was usually still growing in absolute terms. Now it often shrank in *absolute* as well as relative terms in many countries and, as it did so, the informal sector expanded to 'replace' the lost jobs and fill the need for new ones. *It had to* – for generally speaking becoming genuinely, openly, unemployed in African towns is a 'luxury' in which few can indulge, as there is no welfare net/social grants and few realistic pensions. The exception is young, unmarried people who can remain dependent on working kin – most other urban adults responsible for children and other dependents must work and earn cash *in order to survive*.

If, as is argued here, most adults in post-structurally adjusted African cities must work in whatever job they can find to generate some cash, why are unemployment rates so often cited as being astonishingly high? Often they are simply wrong. The problem usually stems from inconsistent and illogical treatment of work in the IS (both urban and rural), the lack of adequate data on the urban IS, which is scarcely surprising as one defining feature is that it is unregistered, and very loose treatment of the issue of 'underemployment' which often gets classified, erroneously, as unemployment. Analysis of these issues for urban African employment statistics, and in particular for Zimbabwe and an ILO (1997) study of employment in Africa, can be found in Potts (2000). The ILO study both argued that average urban unemployment had doubled from about 1980 to 1995 to 20% and would be 30% by 2000, *and* that rates of open urban unemployment had *not* risen dramatically. The latter conclusion was more realistic. For Zimbabwe urban unemployment in the mid-1990s was variously cited as being as 'low' as 22% and as high as 50%. The lower rate made more sense. Indeed, given analyses all over sub-Saharan Africa detailing that there was *increasing participation* in the labour force by women and children, almost entirely in the IS; that formal sector workers who had been lucky enough to retain their jobs were often now so poorly or irregularly paid that they were forced to take on extra jobs in the IS; and that the retrenched were forced into the IS, competing with the already established traders etc., the more obvious deduction is that labour force participation rates have greatly increased and that there are, relative to the urban adult population, more people working than ever before. More adults (and many children now) are also in need of work as most households need more than one income.

In Zimbabwe by June 1996 there were 915,800 non-agricultural formal workers compared to 939,900 in 1991 (EIU 1997) – the absolute fall may not seem dramatic but the urban labour force had, of course, grown significantly in the interim (Potts 2000). In Zambia, the proportion of the labour force in formal employment, which was concentrated in urban areas, fell from 24% to 10% between 1980 and 1990.[7] The vast majority of urban workers there now derive their livelihoods from the IS. Excluding agriculture, the numbers in IS employment rose by 49% between 1986 and 1993 whilst formal sector employment fell by 7%. Formal mining employment fell by 7% from 54,400 to 50,700, formal manufacturing jobs by 8.5% from 59,900 to 54,800, formal utility jobs by 40% and formal construction jobs by 47%. The vast majority of the informal job growth was in trade, where incomes are usually very low. In the more lucrative areas of informal manufacturing and construction, employment also *fell* sharply over this period by 57% and 33% respectively (calculated from data in Muneku 2001, see Potts 2005).

The initial absolute falls in formal sector employment in African countries eventually steadied but the rate of growth has generally been very slow since, and thus urban population increase has been accompanied by further substantial growth in informal employment. However it is hard to provide precise figures – data such as those for Zambia and Zimbabwe above are often not easily acquired - and they are almost never comparable. The chapters on individual cities in Bryceson and Potts (2006) give some other indications. In Mozambique in 1997, only 32% of the economically active in the capital, Maputo, were in the formal sector (Jenkins 2006). In Mombasa, Kenya's port, 50% of the labour force was in the IS by the end of the 1990s (Rakodi 2006). An ILO study specifically on the IS in sub-Saharan Africa in the 21st century also found it hard to provide comparable or reliable data and virtually none on the urban IS (Xaba et al 2002). Its summary table on the growth and size of the sector, and the text, provide the following data on the share of urban/non-agricultural employment derived from

[7] The definition of the labour force changed during this period (Mulenga 1999) so that these data can only be taken as indicators of the scale of the fall, and must be used with caution.

informal activities: in Zambia it is estimated at 43% (undated) but also at 52% in 1986; in Mozambique at 30-40% in the 1990s; and in Angola at 26% or 36% of all non-farm employment in the 1990s. For Zambia and Mozambique, estimates of under 50% seem too low given the data from other studies given above – and it is hard to understand how any realistic estimate for Angola's cities could be made during the war. Another figure cited is that the informal sector accounted for 61% of Africa's urban employment, and 93% of new jobs (Chen, 2001 cited in Xaba et al). This seems to fit more with general observation and many case studies – that is, that *most* workers in African towns today are informal, and that it is the *dominant* form of employment and the trend is increasing. Further ILO data on the value of the informal sector in a selection of African countries in the 1990s are shown in Table 2, but these are very crude surrogates for urban informal employment, given that even if non-agricultural formal employment is a small element of total employment, it tends to produce much more valuable products. The Zambian figure of 24%, for example, is misleading because even though formal mining (ie copper) was still a struggling sector in 1998, it was still much more 'valuable' than the production of the majority of the workforce in the IS.

One country for which there are useful data on urban informality up until 1990 is Tanzania, for which Jamal (2001) has provided the type of careful analysis which is often lacking. They fully support the generalization made above. As shown in Table 3, the share of formal sector workers in the urban labour force fell from 90% in 1960 to 16% in 1990. His analysis also shows that in the 1990s the seemingly inexorable downward drift of an index of *real* minimum, formal, wages in urban Tanzania, - from a high of 206 in 1972 to 37 in 1989 - had stopped and begun to improve. However, as he points out, this was of little comfort for the urban population since so few of them now work in the formal sector. This also means that yet another data problem has arisen for analysis of urban employment and incomes – as the formal sector has shrunk, formal minimum wages, which were at least recorded, have been rendered almost useless as an index of urban living standards.

Fairly obviously any conceptualization of informal and formal sectors in terms of duality and some notion of gradual absorption of the former by the latter, with no dynamic interconnection between the two, has to be discarded when considering the evidence presented above. Unilinear development models are simply meaningless in the face of the informal cities of contemporary Africa. One should reiterate this does not mean that some African cities will not once again be dominated by formal jobs – the logic of accepting multi-path 'development' is that change can happen in any direction. And the structural interdependence and links between the two sectors cannot be denied - the structural forces which further unravelled the vitality and employment-creating potential of the public and private formal sector, simultaneously and inevitably forced the explosion of the informal sector. Urban people who have to remain in the cities, must work – if the formal sector cannot provide, self-employment is the answer, and if city laws and government policy and development agencies deem this 'informal' and 'illegal', so be it. The sectors are clearly not separate – throughout Africa today hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions, of people who used to have formal sector jobs are now self-employed informal workers, and many others who still have a formal job are also 'moonlighting' in the informal sector. In 1985-86, 54% of poor, lower middle-income and middle income urban wage workers surveyed in Dar es Salaam had secondary jobs (Maliyamkono and Bagachwa 1990).

Only in exceptional circumstances can the state do much about this by acting against, or directing policy at, the IS. The independent variable in the equation is much more the formal sector – state policy to stimulate employment there is likely to lead to some shrinkage in the IS. Both sectors are also dependent on global forces so the state's influence is further limited. Nonetheless, African states can and do have powerful effects on the urban informal sector, as will be discussed next.

African States and the Urban Informal Sector

> 'informal sector activities are largely ignored, rarely supported, often regulated and sometimes actively discouraged by the government' (ILO, 1972:6).
>
> 'The official turn to "free market' economies in many African countries in the 1990s has altered the relationships between states and informal sector activities described in much scholarship of the previous decades' (Hansen 2004:62)

To some extent, the attitudes and policies of African states towards their urban informal sectors have reflected some of the shifts in theoretical conceptualizations outlined in the sections above. In the early post-independence era, when global and African economies were generally performing well and formal sector employment was expanding, albeit more slowly than those wanting formal jobs, the IS was generally seen as a rather inconvenient reality which would, no doubt, disappear as modernization spread through the economy. Policies tended to be discouraging, and street traders and small-scale artisans were often harrassed by the police. In addition, 'planning' was highly fashionable – from national development plans to regional planning to city zoning. Whatever the perceptions of the role of the IS at any particular time, urban planners are rarely in favour for it contravenes almost everything, almost by definition. Health and safety regulations, zoning by-laws, traffic laws – all are broken daily by informal sector workers. The 'image' of the sector was also problematic – newly independent governments often wanted their capital cities, in particular, to appear 'modern' and 'planned' – to look like First World cities of the late 20th century. Downtown traders in particular undermined that image – and were thus discouraged.

In Malawi, for example, whose first President combined a number of idiosyncratic attitudes towards urbanization which was often seen as a corrupting influence in all its manifestations, and where 'obedience' and 'discipline' were two of the central ideologies of the ruling Malawi Congress Party, the urban informal sector was repressed. It was tolerated in *planned* market spaces but was quite limited in evidence beyond those, compared to West Africa or many of the cities of Asia. In Lilongwe, Malawi's new garden capital city from the mid-1970s, it was prohibited in the 'new' CBD, and even the old central area was 'tidy' – although this was also where the main market was in those days and within the confines of that area there was a hive of activity and production. These planning practices were replicated in the other major area of informality – low income housing – and squatting was prevented for many years and even the planned, low-income settlements were hidden away from the main roads as being too unmodern and unsightly (Potts 1994; Myers 2002).

The 1960s and 1970s were decades of far greater control by governments over all facets of economic activity in Africa. This included prices and marketing of many products, including (and often especially) staple foods. The general ambience therefore was somewhat constraining although, as seen, it certainly did not prevent IS activities expanding very significantly. The 1970s also saw, as discussed above, the major shift driven by the ILO towards a far more positive view of the potential economic role of the IS. This was not just about addressing the shortfall in formal employment although there was stress on the employment-creating aspects of the IS. In addition, though, there was a strong steer given to governments that many entrepreneurial activities within the IS could become larger and more productive and contribute much more strongly to the national/city economy if only certain restrictive laws and practices were abolished or relaxed. Furthermore, proactive *government* investment in informal businesses, in legal sites, training and credit facilities for them was recommended. This was the beginning of SMME (small, medium and micro-enterprise) policies which are still around today, although the terminology was different. A classic study of the time was Kenneth King's (1977) *African artisan: education and the informal sector in Kenya* which strongly promoted the role of education in enabling informal sector artisans to progress to a position where they could eventually enter the formal sector and contribute fully to the national economy. This was followed up by King's (1996) study, *Jua Kali Kenya: change and development in an informal economy, 1970-95,* in which he reviewed an array of Jua Kali ('under the hot sun' – a shorthand term for informal sector activities) initiatives from major agencies, government and NGOs in Kenya. He also followed up some of the original artisans from the first study and whilst there were many problems, the overall analysis was fairly positive.

The policy recommendations of the agencies such as the ILO and World Bank in the 1970s therefore helped to provide a less repressive regime towards informal sector work. Many governments also embarked on various projects to promote specific elements of the IS and some small business sites were sometimes developed for small, informal entrepreneurs who were involved in various types of production (rather than trading only). However, these were often in peripheral locations which imposed costs and disadvantages which could quickly render marginally profitable businesses unviable, unfortunately. Once ensconced in a planned site and registered, the businesses were probably no longer 'IS'. This was, of course, part of the objective.

That the IS could provide a profitable livelihood for thousands was shown clearly by Nici Nelson's (1997) work in Mathare Valley in Nairobi, starting in the 1970s. At that time it contained about 20% of the city's population, and was dominated by female-headed households. She identified five main types of IS livelihoods based on the entertainment industry (alcohol, companionship and sex); self-built housing for sale; small shops; other small businesses; and hawking. Of particular interest was the brewing of buzaa (maize beer) which was an activity done by the majority of the women she studied. It required very little start-up capital but generated, at that time, reasonable profits which could support a woman and her family. The ingredients for a brew of 16 gallons cost Ksh 30 and a typical monthly income from brewing was in the range Ksh 250-400, at a time when the minimum wage was Ksh 200/month and the exchange rate was Ksh 7 to the US$. A barmaid or house servant, however, would earn only around Ksh 30 and had to pay for childcare. Buzaa brewing was illegal and women could be arrested but the police were bribable with around Ksh 20 and, when unavoidable, fines were not impossibly onerous at Ksh 200, and women rarely ended up in jail. On the other hand, vegetable vending generated far less money although women might try their hand for a while if the police were causing too much trouble. It was illegal to buy vegetables as individuals at the big central market and they were often harrassed by the police there for obstruction. The complicated mix of 'illegality', low level harrassment from the 'state' yet simultaneously a degree of tolerance (albeit backed by bribes), that has been so typical of the relationship between the state and the informal sector in African cities is neatly encapsulated by the Mathare Valley of the 1970s. It was a bit of a risk, but not too much so, and while only a few got rich or moved on into the formal sector, families could 'get by' (as Nelson's study was sub-titled).

The era of SAPs and neo-liberalism has had conflicting effects on the IS. On the one hand, rolling back the state *did* allow lots of new trading activities in a far less regulated set of markets. By the 1990s in Malawi many analysts were commenting on the changes in Malawian towns, with far more visible evidence of informal sector activities. Even in Ghana, where food trading was such an important part of history and culture, it was noted that food marketing was expanding in the Central Region and that markets were much less heavily 'policed' under the Economic Recovery Programme (Ghana's SAP) (Dennis 1996). On the other hand, as discussed, SAPs also stimulated the informal sector in the negative sense of forcing the retrenched and new job seekers into self-employment in order to survive so the expansion was driven more by necessity than new opportunity in most cases.

The forces of trade liberalization and related government policies can, however, also have very negative influences on the IS and the evidence is increasing that this has become the dominant experience. In Mathare Valley, *buzaa* brewing livelihoods were destroyed in the 1980s by 'competition' from South African, mass produced, Chibuku beer which came into Kenya in 1982. The President of Kenya then banned 'native alcohol' in 1983. As is almost always the case in such examples, as indicated above, new legislation was not the problem – *buzaa* was always illegal. It was just that now the law was ferociously enforced and the old semi-tolerance disappeared. The women found themselves faced with fines that had increased to Ksh 1,000-Ksh 1,500 and jail sentences of up to a year. Bribes escalated to Ksh 500 and most went out of business – as Nelson's title for her paper noted, in comparison to the earlier period, people were doing 'not so well' (Nelson 1997).

In Zambia, as indicated by the quotation at the start of this section from Karen Hansen, who has worked on Zambian urban livelihoods for decades, the neo-liberal era ushered in a significant shift towards the urban IS and, as in the Kenyan example, there is far greater antagonism now towards it which has undermined the livelihoods of the majority of the urban population.[8] However, this needs to be understood in two phases and distinctions made between the local and national arms of the 'state' as they have not always operated in tandem. At first, SAPs transformed the urban economy as elsewhere in sub-Saharan Africa and hundreds of thousands were forced into the IS through the 1980s and 1990s. As Hansen (2004) describes, Kenneth Kaunda's 'Second Republic' response to the IS had been typical of much of Africa – a low-level, longstanding harrassment which, however, lacked rigour or true commitment so that the vendors and other operators always returned to their activities fairly swiftly. In 1991 Kaunda was removed in multi-party elections and replaced by Chiluba and the "Third Republic". Two years later Lusaka City Council (LCC) undertook a major sweep of street vendors, yet Chiluba weighed in on the vendors' side, arguing the action was unfair, especially when the Council had not provided alternative space for their trading. The vendors took this as support from the very top, and that they could now trade anywhere in the capital city; and they did. The central streets of the city became a hive of IS trading and the street vending was nicknamed the 'Office of the President'. However this populist support from the President was not to last. In 1997 the Council opened a new, *privately managed* covered set of market stalls, New Soweto Market (within the long-established Old Soweto Market), later renamed the New City Market. The new market was controversial. Many vendors had to be moved for its construction. At first they lobbied for guaranteed space within it but when it opened most subsequently moved out into the streets and surrounding space. Their reasons were that the fees were too high – this was the country's first private market – but also that the

[8] The discussion of the relationship between the state and Zambia's i.s draws heavily on Hansen (2002), supported by fieldwork by the author in Lusaka's markets in 2003.

locational disadvantages of operating from within it were undermining their incomes too much. Those who were still operating from just outside were greatly advantaged in obtaining customers. Various struggles with the Council ensued and in 1999 the new market's occupancy rate was a mere 10%. Precisely the same arguments were advanced by traders inside and outside the market when questioned during research on food trading in the city in 2004 so, not surprisingly, the forces of economic geography remained critical or, as retailers worldwide might phrase it, 'location, location, location'.[9] However, by then the relationship between the IS and the state in Lusaka had transformed.

In 1999 the LCC embarked on a mass clearance of street traders in the city which was pursued with rigour and thoroughness and, this time, *maintained* over the longer-term. It then spread to the Copperbelt and other towns. There are many parallels between this campaign and Zimbabwe's Operation Murambatsvina in 2005, discussed below, but in Zambia the attack on the informal sector did *not* spread to housing. The astonishment and despair of the hundreds of thousands deriving their livelihoods from the IS in Lusaka is described in Hansen (2004). The commitment and resources involved in this new policy were quite different from the on-off harrassment of the past. Her analysis shows that many vendors did then move to official markets including the New City Market, and those in the low income residential 'townships' or 'compounds'. The latter became extremely overcrowded. The LCC continued to enforce existing regulations which had always made the street traders 'illegal' and introduced further legislation – a 'Nuisance Act' which prohibits sales in public spaces and made it illegal to buy from street vendors. In 2000 the LCC evicted 'foreign' marketeers from designated markets and relocated them to the so-called COMESA flea market, again causing serious overcrowding. The need for IS incomes means that some traders still operate outside designated spaces, but at a much smaller scale and on a highly mobile basis, so they can escape raids with their stock if possible. Another major sweep occurred in 2002 (Hansen 2004). In 2003 Soweto market was affected, and the thousands of vendors who had been driven thence from the streets and were trading under a series of power lines that run through the market were moved out.

Hansen's (2004:70) analysis of this shift in the state's policy towards the IS emphasises that 'above all… issues linked with economic liberalization efforts, with introducing "free market practices", were at the heart of the exercise to remove vendors from public space'. Notably, the President's former championing of the IS fell away by the end of the 1990s. Modern shopping malls were being developed with foreign capital at the time, and she deduces that the state decided that such investment would be discouraged if 'anarchy and lawlessness reigned on the streets'. She chronicles the development of the malls and various new markets, where previous vendors' stalls have been demolished, only to find that the new spaces are unsuitable and unaffordable for their sort of trade. A notable example was the clearance of Kamwala, the oldest market in Lusaka, in 2003. The replacement 'market', funded by Chinese investors was redesigned from 400 stalls to shops, which were then rented to Chinese and local formal businesses as the rents excluded the former IS traders. There were also a set of EU-funded markets being developed throughout the urban system and, if they were to be filled, street trading had to be discouraged.

[9] This DFID-funded research is reported in Porter, G, Tanya Bowyer-Bower, Deborah Potts, Fergus Lyon, Alhaji A. A. Adepetu, John Olaniyan, Hyacinth Daloeng, Chileshe Mulenga, Sampa Mumba (2004) *Improving market institutions and urban food supplies for the urban poor: a comparative study of Nigeria and Zambia: scoping phase.* R8330 SCOPING REVIEW INCEPTION REPORT TO DFID, May 2004.

A further issue may relate to market levies. In 2004, I was involved in DFID-funded research (see footnote 8) and we found that in Soweto traders paid both LCC fees and levies to the ruling party, the MMD. The market was ostensibly managed by the LCC, which also by then was managing the privately owned New City Market (Hansen 2002), although we were told that stalls were allocated, in practice, by the party. The ruling party thus had a further vested interest in locating the IS within the market. In any case, the markets are highly politicised and controlled by the party and this is central to any understanding of their functioning.

The language of the new, highly antagonistic, policies towards the urban IS in Zambia is familiar to those who have studied the removal of the poor, in cities worldwide, from locations advantageous for their livelihoods (e.g. Parnell 1993). Much is couched in terms of health and safety – for example, Soweto market suffered cholera, which was undeniable, but the Council had failed to undertake the necessary clearance of drains and provision of sanitation, for which presumably market fees were, in part, paid. Image was also invoked in relationship to the chaos and crowded nature of the CBD before 1999. Hansen comments that the 'public' were generally favourable to the policies, although she also provides despairing critiques from IS actors, who make up a significant proportion of Lusaka's 'public'.

If one returns to the dualism conceptualization of the IS at this point, it is clear the examples above provide strong challenges to the notion that the formal and informal are separate. They also put paid to ideas that benign forces from the formal sector and 'trickle down' will help the IS to transform into modernity and improved livelihoods. The examples fall squarely into the analytical framework discussed where the sectors have to be regarded as interdependent, with the IS subordinate and conditioned by changing priorities in the formal sector, and with both sectors affected by broader global forces. In Zambia, there are real tensions between understandings of the meaning of the power of the 'free market' for the two sectors, with the IS actors perceiving it, at first, as an ideology that *allowed them* more freedom to trade. Evidently, the local, and then also the central, state's perception was, in contrast, that it was more to do with enabling and facilitating formal trading activities, which necessitated *restrictions* on the IS. The outcomes have been increased poverty for many in the IS. Hansen found that those who had been forced to the New City Market suffered lower profits. For some a reduction was impossible if they were to survive so they were forced to rove outside (illegally). There were others in the NCM who had been able to build real livelihoods in their previous locations, who said they had 'built their own homes from earnings they made selling goods from their *tuntembas*[10] and that they were "going broke" in the new market' (Hansen, 2002:73).

There are two other southern African examples of very recent state intervention in the urban IS which has strongly disadvantaged the livelihoods of the poor. These are Malawi and Zimbabwe. The conference has papers on both of these cases so the analysis here will be brief. In April 2006, the Malawian government imposed a 'clean-up' campaign in its towns, moving vendors off the street. They were directed to move to formal markets (flea markets in local terminology). As in Lusaka, the 'legal' market space was far too small for all the displaced traders and overcrowding ensued. As earlier outlined, the main expansion of Malawi's urban IS occurred only after Banda's regime ended, from the mid-1990s, so this was somewhat later than in Zambia. However, as in Zambia, the first multi-party President, Bakili Muluzi, supported the IS. He was replaced by Bingu wa Mutharika in 2004, from the

[10] Bemba term roughly translating as 'area of operation' and referring to various temporary open-air structures used for street trading.

same political party, but resigned from it the following year, and set up another. The new President supported the removals in the 2000s, as Chiluba eventually did in Zambia. The campaign was actively resisted during the run-up to it, and the local traders' organization tried to negotiate but in vain (Chronicle 2006a).[11] As in Zambia, there was apparently some public support for the 'clean-up'. A local editorial (Chronicle 2006b)[12] was full of praise. Entitled, 'Well done government for removing vendors', it said,

> 'government should be patted on the back for the forceful removal of vendors off the streets… The streets are now looking neater than before… We are also grateful that vendors cooperated with the government, the police and assembly officials unlike in other countries like in Liberia and Tanzania where some vendors lost their lives during the same exercise'.

There was, in fact, some active opposition, particularly in Blantyre but, as with the 'negotiations', to no avail. The reference to other African countries is suggestive of the spread of this sort of state action, although it has not yet been possible to follow these up.

The last example considered here is the notorious Operation Murambatsvina, 'Clear out the trash/Restore order', in Zimbabwe in mid-2005. The scale and breadth of this operation against 'informality' in all its forms, and the impact on poor urban people, surpassed all other campaigns. According to a UN report, around 650,000 to 700,000 people directly lost either the basis of their livelihoods or their homes, or both. In the IS, the estimate was that 98,000 lost their livelihoods. When those indirectly affected were added in, the final estimate was that the campaign affected 2.4 million people – about 20% of the national population (Tibaijuka 2005). The really big difference between the Zimbabwean policy and the others so far discussed is that in Zimbabwe the primary target was informal *housing*, and not just informal street traders. At least 92,460 dwellings were knocked flat, and 570,000 people lost their homes. In fact, the loss of rent from such dwellings, of which the largest number were in *formal* low-income housing areas in the form of illegal extensions and backyard shacks on the legal stands, was a major element of the loss of informal livelihoods in Zimbabwe. In addition, Operation Murambatsvina was accompanied by a concerted government effort to make displaced urban dwellers move to rural areas, involving some outright coercion and strategies such as transit camps, raids on churches, and trucking people out of the cities (for further analysis of these issues see Potts 2006, 2007, and forthcoming; on the impact on local political views see Bratton and Masunungure 2007). Similar policies of removing urban people who were perceived not to be 'legitimately' productive have been pursued from time to time in a variety of African countries but usually without much long-term effect on population distribution as the numbers involved were too small and their return so swift, with perhaps the exception of Operation Production in Mozambique in 1985 (Jenkins 2006). Of course, influx control measures in white settler southern Africa were effective in this respect for many decades but their nature and rationale was somewhat different (Potts 1994, 2006).

It is worth quoting, in full, the Harare Commission announcement at the start of OM. According to this the programme intended to:

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[11] The Chronicle [Lilongwe] (2006a). Lilongwe vendors defy government order. April 10 2006.

[12] The Chronicle [Lilongwe] (2006b). Well done government for removing vendors. April 27, 2006. I am grateful to Wendy Willems for drawing my attention to these newspaper articles and informing me about the campaign in Malawi.

> enforce by-laws to stop all forms of illegal activities. These violations of the by-laws in areas of vending, traffic control, illegal structures, touting/abuse of commuters by rank marshals, street-life/prostitution, vandalism of property infrastructure, stock theft, illegal cultivation, among others have led to the deterioration of standards thus negatively affecting the image of the City. The attitude of the members of the public as well as some City officials has led to a point whereby Harare has lost it glow. We are determined to bring it back. ... It is not a once-off exercise but a sustained one that will see to the clean-up of Harare. ... Operation Murambatsvina is going to be a massive exercise in the CBD and the suburbs which will see to the demolition of all illegal structures and removal of all activities at undesignated areas....

There are clear similarities in the language and sentiments between this and some of the rhetoric which accompanied the campaigns in Zambia and Malawi. There is an emphasis on the 'illegality' of much of the IS and on its 'untidiness' and impact on the city image. The savagery, thoroughness, and long-term impacts of OM, and the peculiarities of the political context and economic crisis in Zimbabwe must be acknowledged, for the situations are different and facile comparisons may be dangerous. However, there is another parallel with the switching position of the central government over the IS. Although Zimbabwe has been wedded to technocratic planning processes in both rural and urban areas in ways that are significantly different from most other African countries (see Potts 1994; and on rural areas Drinkwater 1991; Alexander 2006), in the 1990s it became apparent that there was some flexibility creeping in among some decision-makers in the central government and certain IS practices, including some street vending and the operation of IS activities from formal low-income housing stands, were increasingly tolerated, often against the wishes of the municipal authorities, particularly in Bulawayo. In 2001 the government-appointed Commission running Harare threatened to launched its own purge of backyard shacks and informal shops (tuckshops), and began the purge in March. Backyard shacks were threatened en masse and contemporary reports stated that at least 145,000 illegal outbuildings were to be demolished within a fortnight, rendering over 500,000 homeless. Yet, the ruling party this time stepped in *and stopped* the campaign (Potts 2007).

Two quotations are reproduced at the start of this section on African states and the IS. One is from the ILO report on the IS in Kenya in 1972 and the other from Karen Hansen's analysis of the pressures on the IS in Zambia at the turn of the century. Both relate to negative state policies towards the IS and thus might be read to indicate that nothing much has changed but, in reality, much *has* changed. In the thirty years that elapsed between these two statements, there were improvements in attitudes towards the urban IS. Donors did encourage the idea that the sector offered much that was positive – employment and production geared towards the poor – and that its contribution to national GDP could be enhanced with judicious encouragement and investment. The introduction of 'free market' ideology did bring about some lifting of constraints on informal workers and trading. Unfortunately the very same ideology generally had such a negative impact on the urban formal sector that the positive potential identified in the 1970s was largely swamped as millions were forced into IS activities, saturating the markets and causing such intense competition that profit margins were frequently squeezed to survival levels. Study after study across the continent has noted how longstanding IS workers have commented on how their previously acceptable, if hardly enviable, livelihoods have been downgraded by the new circumstances. Now far too many IS jobs are typified as coping strategies (e.g. Rakodi), rather than routes to some accumulation and improved life chances. Equally negatively, unfortunately, after a brief period of evidence of some government sympathy for the urban poor and recognition of the underlying causes of their moves into the IS, there appears now to be an intensely negative trend in state policy.

This latest trend appears hard to counter in Africa. In Zimbabwe, civil society was despairing about the lack of success in stopping OM, or obtaining compensation.[13] IS trader organizations have developed with NGO support but have had little effect (War on Want 2006) – there is even the chance that they have made things worse by their claims and opposition to government policies, although this is speculative. The evidence of the case studies above certainly suggest that one factor in the trend is the influence of neo-liberalism and an alliance between ruling parties and foreign capital which is encouraging governments to undermine elements of the IS which are deemed to be in competition and/or adversely affecting the 'image' of the city and elites' 'enjoyment' of specific spaces within it. The electoral politics of the trend require more research. Why should governments seemingly be more interested in their poor urban constituents (who do form the majority in towns) in the 1990s, and less so or not at all by the 2000s? The first multi-party elections often delivered a strong vote to the winning (but until then, opposition) party, including the towns. Yet there is often a strong anti-ruling party sentiment evident in the towns in the election geography of Africa now. Perhaps this further helps to explain the state's cynicism and antagonism towards the IS in the towns today. In Zimbabwe, most analyses of OM have stressed the significance of the cities' strong support for the opposition MDC and the fact that ZANU(PF) has scarcely won a single seat in the urban areas in the last few elections, and considerable gerrymandering and political manipulation of urban government has resulted in a desperate attempt by the ruling party to 'get back in' (see Kamete 2006).

Urban Incomes and Employment: Rural-Urban Migrants are *Not* to Blame

One assumption often made by governments and some scholarship is that the major contributor to the urban workforce and its consequent need for employment is rural-urban migrants. The next step is to 'blame' the migrants for urban problems and the size of the IS so the issue is directly related to the fate of this sector. This characterization of Africa's urban problems is old and tired but it will not lie down. Some of the rhetoric accompanying Zimbabwe's OM clearly adopted this characterization and then followed to the next 'logical' step which is to order these inconvenient migrants to go 'home'. There are a large number of misunderstandings involved in these conceptualizations, some of them due to insufficient or poor data, and some from wilfulness (ie because migrants are such an easy, and voiceless, target). Space precludes anything but a brief set of pointers to the issues (see Potts 1997, 2006 for details). First, most annual additions to the urban population, to its workforce, and to the unemployed, are urban-born nowadays (and have been for some decades). Second, so economically unattractive have conditions become in many towns that circular migration, and urban-rural migration, have become more significant in many countries – Zambia is an extreme case but there is evidence from a range of other countries, and also from West Africa (Beauchemin and Bocquier 2004). Third, evidence from trends in employment characteristics among Zimbabwean in-migrants to Harare from the 1980s to early 2000s has found that married migrant household heads were becoming increasingly likely to be formally employed. Although seemingly counter-intuitive, it appeared that the very low incomes characteristic of the IS were insufficient to maintain migrant households in town, because they could not avoid a set of costs that longer established households often could (e.g. market rents, rather than being owners and/or landlords), were less likely to be farming in town, and the essential help

[13] Interviews with a range of NGOs and advocacy groups in Harare, August 2006, by the author.

from kin which has assisted generations of migrants to establish themselves in town had atrophied in the face of shrinking real incomes. In-migrants who could not command a certain income, and were not dependents of others, were thus ‘forced’ to leave Harare, and all the migrants surveyed by the 2000s were extremely uncertain about their future in town, and for those prepared to specify how long they might stay, the time specified has become shorter and shorter as the urban economy declined.

The Informal Sector in South Africa: dualism revisited?

As mentioned earlier in this paper, SA’s urban IS has a different history from much of the rest of sub-Saharan Africa. Also, although SA has adopted an economic policy path which is broadly neo-liberal in character, it has a larger and more mature economy than other African countries and has not been forced to adopt all the tenets of the ‘Washington consensus’- it retains some room for manouevre. Its population is also mainly urban, rather than rural. It has sufficient resources and government commitment to have some element of social grants which provide a very limited ‘safety net’ for the very poorest and old. These are very significant differences for an analysis of the role of the IS in livelihoods and related government policies.

The recent policy statements on the IS, or 2nd economy, in SA have evidently caused concern, as they contain within them apparent conceptualizations of the sector from a dualist framework. As shown, this potentially carries the seeds of misunderstandings and misdirected policies. The Presidential letter of 2003 which drew attention to the government’s current understandings of the sector and policies to deal with it included phrases such as the ‘”two nations” divide; ‘problems posed by the “third world economy” which exists side by side with the modern “first world economy”; that the two economies are ‘set apart’ and ‘structurally disconnected’, and that ‘interventions… with regard to [the first world economy] … do not necessarily impact on … the “third world economy”’’; that it is necessary to ‘devise and implement a strategy to intervene in the “third world economy” and not assume that the intervetions that we make with regard to the “first world economy” are necessarily relevant to the former”; and that milions suffer ‘entrapment in a marginalised and underdeveloped “third world economy” (Mbeki 2003). It would be quite hard to come up with a greater litany of dualist concepts. The critiques of such conceptualizations have already been discussed in the introduction and will not be further rehearsed here; suffice it to say that any idea that there is a *structural disconnection* between South Africa’s IS and formal sectors, which are here deemed more useful terms, is both wrong and worrying. In 2006, Vice President Mlambo-Ngcuka (2006) talked at a media briefing on South Africa’s latest set of economic growth policies, ASGISA (Accelerated and Shared Growth-South Africa), about ‘eliminating the second economy’ – fearsome words given the examples above of African governments’ campaigns against their informal sectors and the many livelihoods thus destroyed. However, further examination of the statement fortunately yield a more benign set of policy suggestions, some of which might well assist some entrepreneurs in the IS. The terminology contains none of the highly negative rhetoric evident in the latest phase of attacks on the IS further north in Africa, nor any hint of sweeping traders from the streets. In relation to the phases in global policy views on the IS outlined in this paper, many of the SA policies remind one of classic ILO recommendations in the 1970s when attitudes towards the IS were probably at their most benign and often really positive – such as offering training to SMMEs and appropriate credit. These are policies that Kenneth King would surely recognize and, looking beyond Africa, arguably some of the most positive, sustainable, interventions in improving poor people’s livelihoods have been in the realm of *appropriate* credit provision.

The recognition of the founder of the Grameen Bank by the Nobel Prize committee is one that I would applaud.

On the other hand the media briefing did appear mainly to view the 'second economy' as separate and the focus is on interventions within it, with very little about the interrelationships with the 'first economy'. One sentence only stands out, that the government needs to 'ensure that the environment and opportunities for more labour-absorbing economic activities is considerably improved'. With this one can agree. However it is not clear whether these are assumed to be in the formal or informal sectors, or both, or whether it recognizes the global, structural forces that constrain South African performance in this respect? There are obvious limitations to the new policies in broader terms which are not within the remit of this paper to address, although they will affect the capacity to generate the employment which is recognized as necessary – and this is of significance for the IS. A particularly trenchant set of criticisms are found in Frye (2006). The trends in the scale and role of the IS elsewhere in Africa, which have been discussed above, show that at a broad scale there *is* an inverse relationship between the expansion of formal sector employment and informal sector employment. Yet it is not a simple relationship and, as shown, neo-liberal forces favouring the private, formal sector can have devastating consequences for IS livelihoods.

The perspectives on the IS in this paper are evidently largely based on the experiences of countries north of the Limpopo and they lead to some other comments on aspects of contemporary debates on South Africa's IS. South Africa has the great advantage of far better national data on employment in various sectors. According to these data, excluding agriculture, employment in the IS increased from 0.97 million to 1.83 million between 1997 and 2004, while formal sector employment increased from 6.4 million to 7.8 million (Devey et al 2006). As emphasised by Bhorat (2006), there has been formal job growth since 1994, despite some assertions to the contrary, but it has been 'grossly insufficient to generate employment for all work-seekers in the economy' (ibid: 299). This is precisely the situation that caused the expansion of the IS in other African countries, so South Africa has proved to be no different there. Unskilled formal jobs have, in particular, performed very badly, which is very problematic for a country which inherited a legacy of very poor education for the majority. The trends in employment show that the expansion in the IS was particularly strong up to around 2000 and has levelled off since. Unemployment in South Africa has also risen, from 2.5 million to 4.6 million over this period (Devey et al 2006). It is clear that South Africa's capacity to define and measure real unemployment is far greater than in the majority of African countries and there is a real attempt to distinguish between the IS, the formal sector, and unemployment. Nonetheless these distinctions are seriously contested. The official rate of unemployment now excludes 'discouraged' job seekers – those who have given up looking for a job because it seems pointless. Some analysts feel this disguises the unemployment level. Bhorat (2006), for example, estimates that an expanded definition of unemployment would yield a total of 7.3 million unemployed in 2002, 3 million more than the 'official' figure then). While this debate is understandable and important, it does point to a difference between South Africa and much of the rest of Africa since, in their cities, no matter what the absurd unemployment levels cited in agency and media reports, being discouraged from seeking work might well mean your family goes hungry at the end of the day and so most adults with dependents do work, no matter how low the resultant income; and of course so do many children. My own evaluation would be that real unemployment in most African urban areas is far lower than in South Africa, and labour participation rates are higher, but that this is driven largely by absolute need. Absolute poverty is also higher, which by no means denies the existence of absolute poverty in South African towns, but merely draws attention to an important comparison.

The definition of ‘work’ is incredibly problematic in these discussions, as is the concept of a ‘job’. Even in South Africa one suspects that there is some blurring of underemployment, where people are working part-time and casually for small amounts of income in cash or kind, with unemployment. As I have argued elsewhere,

> ‘if unemployment merges into underemployment almost seamlessly [in analyses of employment trends] then obviously any figure for unemployment could be doubled or halved depending on assumptions made about the cut-offs and there is little point in trying to measure and analyse <u>unemployment</u> at all! It is also all too easy in such a situation to dismiss any data which do not fit in with preconceived notions about the nature or scale of unemployment in any one sector’ (Potts 2000).

There are also contestations over what constitutes the IS in South Africa. These are also prevalent elsewhere and it is quite probably a debate that will last forever (creating some employment thereby)! The multivariate nature of the classical ILO, or any other, definition lends itself to academic critique. For policy recommendations, however, it is rather important that those involved are singing from the same song sheet, or there may be real misunderstandings about the scale of the problem, who are the ‘targets’ for policy interventions, and the resource implications. The current South African debates, as outlined in Devey et al (2006), suggest the following points from a broader Africanist perspective. First, the point made above about how easy it is to switch ‘jobs’ between categories is upheld by their discussion of the odd ‘surge’ in SA IS employment recorded in February 2001 which, at 2.7 million, was 35% higher than the number recorded 5 months beforehand. It then fell right back to the original level in a later survey in 2001. It appears this was caused by a one-off change in the manner of the survey which, possibly, made better distinctions between the various categories. Thus, while SA’s statistics are better, they still require cautious use. Devey et al also suggest that the use of ICLS (International Conference for Labour Statistics) definitions, which rest on whether activities are *registered*, possibly combined with small size of workforce, may not work well for SA. Instead they argue that the definition should focus on the characteristics of the worker (rather than the work/enterprise), and refer to an ILO definition of 2002. Although their discussion of these issues in relation to SA is interesting, this particular debate is not particularly relevant to much of Africa. Conditions of service, such as pension and health benefits, paid leave, and unionization are important issues, but they are not the key characteristics that currently separate the formal sector from the informal in most African towns. In fact, there are also swathes of *formal* employment in Europe and North America that do not have these conditions and the debate is thus probably seguing into a rather different set of issues about contemporary capitalism which are vital, but detract from a focus on the reality of the IS, *per se*. In Africa, even regular *pay* is far from guaranteed in the formal sector, particularly in the public sector, let alone any meaningful benefits. As Ferguson’s (1999) work among Zambian miners has shown, obtaining your pension was hard enough, and its value was far too tiny to allow most to stop working – the question was whether retired miners went on to urban or rural livelihoods. In most of Africa, the Castell and Portes’ (1989; cited in Devey et al 2006) view that the IS is best treated as a ‘common sense’ notion, where small-scale combines with eluding ‘certain government requirements’ actually *does* make sense. All the examples in this paper about how states can interfere with IS livelihoods, with all the resultant distress and deepening poverty, rest on ‘illegality’ (although, as emphasised earlier, this must not be confused with ‘criminality’ if a logical path about the current state of the IS is to be pursued). The issue of non-registration, of *not* complying with regulations and by-laws and so on, has been at the heart of the attacks on the IS It is this that separates it, most crucially, in most of Africa, from the ‘safe’ formal sector and what makes it so vulnerable to state action. Zimbabwe did not knock down formal dwellings in the townships; they remained, forlorn, in the middle of the rubble of their surrounding backyard shacks. Kenya did not stop the sale of legal, bottled, formal sector beer to enhance South African brewery profits – it hammered the ‘illegal’ female *buzaa* brewers. Zambia has not stopped wholesale and retail traders operating from the ‘legal’ stalls and spaces of Soweto market in Lusaka (the city would starve if they did), but has swept away illegal street traders when it suits.

This comparative perspective is regarded as significant for SA inasmuch as it is important to remember what makes the IS vulnerable to blatantly negative state action. In fact the ILO 2002 definition cited in Devey et al emphasises very strongly, rightly in my view, the ‘legality issue’ as understood above. There are two other points which are worthy of comment relating to these definitional debates. One is that Devey et al assign nearly all domestics, gardeners and security guards to the informal sector. On the one hand this probably helps to explain part of the overlap in worker characteristics they find between sectors such as unionization, and written contracts. It is also puzzling from a comparative perspective – elsewhere these would largely be regarded as formal workers, albeit horribly low paid. They are enumerated in employment statistics; they are often covered by minimum pay agreements; they are not regarded as ‘illegal’ and they are not swept up in anti-IS campaigns. So here is another difference between SA debates and those further north. Devey et al also argue (p. 310) that, ‘Increasingly, informal activities are the result of formal firms “informalizing”’. This appears to refer to the negative aspects of sub-contracting and outsourcing – practices which are again ubiquitous across the globe, including the developed world. It is seen here as pushing jobs from the formal to the informal sector, understandably, although if the jobs are still registered, the redefinition may be problematic. Without denying the frequently negative consequences for workers’ pay and conditions associated with outsourcing, it is important to bear in mind that poor pay and shocking conditions can occur in the formal sector – as exemplified by the example of the early English textile industry. Thus, caution needs to be exercised before assuming that new employer tactics to cheapen labour are necessarily ‘informalizing’, rather than, say, ‘casualizing’. It is also worth noting that, first, pro-IS policy relating to ‘assisting’ SMMEs often regards sub-contracting links with the formal sector as positive, in terms of spreading opportunity, and the idea has been around since the 1970s. Second, the perspective from other parts of sub-Saharan Africa is again rather different, with much attention being given to the *formalization of the informal,* and its attendant pros and cons. A well known example is Tripp’s (1997) study of Tanzania, *Changing the rules: the politics of liberalization and the urban informal economy in Tanzania*.

Definitions of the IS may differ, for good reasons, between countries but this need not matter as policies tend to be national. It may also, however, be possible to learn from experiences elsewhere.

Conclusions

This paper has reviewed the roots of conceptualizations of dualism and the attendant problems that arise from such frameworks, especially if they are used by policy makers. It has also provided some insights into the changing attitudes of African states, beyond South Africa, and their policies towards the urban IS. There are some worrying trends in this respect. Finally, recent policy pronouncements on South Africa’s IS which use strongly dualistic terms have been reviewed. While the terminology undoubtedly obscures the underlying structural forces which affect both the IS and the formal sector in South Africa, and their interconnections, and is thus problematic for effective policy to address the crisis of decent employment opportunities, as yet there is little evidence that the current government discourse is comparable to those which have led to draconian action against IS livelihoods in countries such as Zimbabwe, Malawi and Zambia.

Finally, there are lessons to be learnt for current South African policy in the words of the ILO report on the IS in Kenya over 30 years ago. This stated, ‘we identify the main problem as one of employment rather than unemployment’ (p. 9); and, ‘the analysis of inequality is fundamental to the explanations of emloyment problems …. Rapid [economic] growth is needed… but economic growth on a pattern which can be sustained in the future, and which generates wider and more productive employment opportunities in the process’ (p. 8).

Table 1: Employment and self-employment* in selected African cities in 1960s and 1970s

	Employees (hundreds)	Self-employed (hundreds)	Self-employed % Total	Male	Female
Freetown 1963	256	130	34	22	69
Accra 1960	787	646	45	26	84
Kumasi 1960	323	488	60	43	91
Douala 1976	686	279	26	20	61
Yaounde 1976	555	159	22	20	34
Brazzaville 1974	334	205	37	27	73
Dar es Salaam 1967	792	159	17	16	23
Blantyre 1977	590	124	17	13	40
Lusaka (Africans) 1969	367	35	10	10	14

* These two categories are approximate surrogates for 'formal' and 'informal' employment.
Source: O'Connor (1983), Table 11. Data are derived from census reports.

Table 2: Contribution of informal sector to GDP in selected sub-Saharan African countries

Country	Year of survey	Informal sector GDP as % of non-agricultural GDP
Benin	1993	43
Burkina Faso	1992	36
Burundi	1996	44
Cameroon	1995/6	42
Chad	1993	45
Ghana	1998	58
Guinea Bissau	1996	30
Kenya	1999	25
Mali	1989	42
Mozambique	1994	39
Niger	1995	54
Senegal	1991	41
Tanzania	1991	43
Togo	1995	24
Zambia	1998	24

Source: ILO 2000, Women and the Men in the Informal Sector: a Statistical Picture, ILO, Geneva.

Table 3: Tanzania: Formal Urban Wage Earners as % Urban Labour Force 1960-1990

	c.1960	1980	1990
Urban labour force in formal sector (%)	90	50	16
Level of urbanization (%)	6	14	c18

Source: data compiled from Jamal 2001 and Potts 2006.

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