Work, development and refusal in urban Ethiopia
Di Nunzio, Marco

Document Version
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

[Link to publication on Research at Birmingham portal](#)

MARCO DI NUNZIO
University of Birmingham

Work, development, and refusal in urban Ethiopia

ABSTRACT
Marxist autonomists and postwork theorists argue that work ought to be refused. Refusing work, they say, is the first step toward breaking the moral nexus between work, entitlement, and citizenship that constrains people from imagining progressive political projects. In this theorization, the refusal of work is a strategy for revolution. But ethnographic research shows us that acts of refusal can also take place outside the conjunctures of revolutionary change. They can be ordinary, individual, and often invisible. In urban Ethiopia, acts of refusal occurred during an economic boom, when work seemed as if it might have delivered on its promise of collective and individual empowerment. In these circumstances, refusal was less about the possibilities of a revolution and more about the terms of poor people's adverse incorporation through work. Acts of refusal consisted of workers' individual and ordinary attempts to recapture some ownership over their lives in a moment when work both integrated and marginalized workers. [*work, refusal, development, inclusion, Ethiopia*]

amrat's favorite café is located inside a petrol station on the western fringes of Addis Ababa's city center. It provides an impressive view of the city's development: the new traffic junctions of the ring road and a train line soaring overhead. Tamrat and I met here several times over three years, from 2013 to 2016.[1] When we first met, Tamrat was 28 but looked older. He was a *ferraio*, an old-fashioned and quasi-dialectal Italian term that people in Ethiopia's capital, Addis Ababa, use to denote a steel fixer, a tradesman who positions and secures the steel rebars that are the skeletons of concrete structures. He began working in construction at the age of 18, soon after finishing 12th grade. Both his parents had just died. With his low grades, university seemed a distant dream. It receded further as family responsibilities fell to him.

It was the first decade of the 21st century, and Addis Ababa was seeing the first signs of the construction boom. Tamrat worked as a day laborer for Ricolfi, an Italian family-run contractor that has been active in Ethiopia since the Italian occupation in the mid-1930s. He worked at a construction site near his home, loading and unloading building material on a wheelbarrow. He was young and eager to learn. One of the engineers spotted him and moved him to work alongside a steel fixer. Over two years at Ricolfi, Tamrat grew in technical knowledge, but his salary remained low: in 2005, he earned 20 birr a day (US$2.30) or 600 birr (US$69) a month.[2] He next worked for a Chinese company on the ring road extension, receiving 2,500 birr (US$297) a month in 2006, and then for a Korean company in eastern Ethiopia, earning 3,500 birr (US$392) plus expenses in 2007.

When the contract with the Korean company ended, Tamrat returned to Addis Ababa, hoping for the higher wages his experience deserved. But things had changed. Construction activities had grown, but an ever-increasing number of young men were entering the sector, lowering salaries. He found a job at Grand Construction, then the sector's leading company in Ethiopia. In 2008 he worked on a construction project for a large hotel for only 1,600 birr (US$164) a month. He endured this until he helped organize a union. This would have created a formal union presence and established a

commxon agreement, based on Ethiopia's labor law, to which the company would have to commit. When the formal request reached the management office, with Tamrat's name as the head of the proposed union, he was fired instantly.

I first met Tamrat in 2013, two years after this incident, and 15 days after he was dismissed again for the same reason, this time by a foreign-owned company, ZAF. At ZAF, daily laborers earned 35 birr a day (US$1.90) while semiskilled workers like Tamrat were paid 75 birr a day (US$4). Lack of safety equipment was a major issue: the company did not provide helmets, uniforms, or work boots. Workers paid for their own food and transport. Employment, even during the project, was not secure, because management fired at will. For instance, 80 daily laborers were dismissed during the 45-day probationary period when they were paid lower wages and lacked the right to compensation if dismissed. This made other workers wonder if ZAF was using the probationary period instrumentally, employing and firing laborers every 45 days.

By the next year, 2014, Tamrat was working for a Chinese company on a real estate project on the eastern outskirts of Addis Ababa. This was an elite project, aimed at rich and diaspora Ethiopians and expatriates who could afford to pay US$160,000 for a two-bedroom apartment or US$600,000 for a penthouse. Daily wages were higher than at ZAF: 100 birr (US$5) for experienced workers like Tamrat, and 45–50 birr (US$2.20–22.50) for daily laborers. But he felt that workers were not cared for or given their "fair share." Tamrat knew companies constantly tried to deny workers the benefits and care they were entitled to. "Look at that guy," Tamrat told me, pointing at a man passing a few meters from our table. "He works for a Chinese company for sure. Sure, he has a helmet, he has a uniform. But he is walking home. No [transport] service."

Tamrat's contract ended after about a year. He found work with another Chinese contractor on a major airport-expansion project (*Ethiopian Herald* 2015). He was fired again after six months. Tamrat organized a union when he got the job, and the management did not mind at first, understanding that this was legal in Ethiopia. He was dismissed for another reason. When I returned to Addis Ababa in October 2015, Tamrat showed me the letter he had received from his employer on a Monday, stating that workers had not shown up at work on the previous Friday without informing the competent authorities of the strike. The missed day of work, the letter stated, had caused substantial financial damage, and Tamrat and his colleagues on the union board were held responsible.

I asked Tamrat what had happened. On Thursday evening, he said, an Ethiopian had been badly beaten by three Chinese workers. On Friday, Ethiopian workers refused to go to work without a formal apology. The letter arrived on Monday. The company was correct in complaining that it had not been informed of the strike, yet it could not fire workers at will and give such short notice.

On my return eight months later, in May 2016, I expected Tamrat to have found another job thanks to his experience and strong work ethic. But this time, I discovered, he was determined not to go back to work. Since being fired by the Chinese contractor in October 2015, he had received offers but turned them all down. I tried to understand why. "Are you planning to go back to work?" I asked. "No," he said with a grimace. "It is not worth it. There is God. He will provide for me."

His insistence on staying out of work struck me as contradicting the Tamrat I knew. "Your next research should be about workers," he had told me back in 2013 as I described to him my previous work on the Addis Ababa street economy (Di Nunzio 2019). "Bozene," he said, distancing himself from Addis Ababa's "lazy" loiterers, as he described street hustlers, "don't have a goal in life. They just drink and chew khat."

"Work," he had continued, "is good. It is good for your body. It is good because you get something for yourself. You pay for your own food, for your own house. […] If you work, your friends, your wife, your neighbors respect you, if you don't work, they don't." But it was not just the social recognition that Tamrat appreciated; he enjoyed the work itself. "I like plans, making plans," he told me, sketching out a complex structure of interconnected squares representing the rebars he worked on. "When I walk around the city," he said, "I look at the buildings around me. I ask myself, 'Who did that?'"

Tamrat's disaffection had grown. The city was exploding with construction sites, but salaries remained low, and demands for better working conditions remained unaddressed or were openly repressed. In 2015, a few weeks after his dismissal from the airport project, his disaffection became more evident. "What do you think when you walk around Addis?" he asked me. "I think it is very impressive. And what do you think?" I asked him back. "When I see these new buildings," Tamrat replied, "I am happy like anyone else here. But there are too many thieves." Expressing his uneasiness with how much money some of the city's wealthiest inhabitants were making, he added, "If you are rich in Addis, it is good. But if you are poor, it is bad."

Thinking work and refusal

The Marxist Left and the liberal tradition have historically shared an appreciation for work as central to ethics and one's place in the world. Work ethic and hard work have been mobilized both by socialist and capitalist regimes to celebrate the heroic determination of the individual to link his or her fortune to collective advancement. Whether as a celebration of the entrepreneur's Calvinist

ethos or the heroism of the Stakhanovite, hard work supports imaginations of both individual ethics and collective advancement.

For both liberal and Marxist thinkers, however, work must be liberated if it is to fulfill its promise of emancipation. For example, the work of neoliberal economists such as Theodore Schultz and Gary Becker concerns liberating work and workers from wage labor (Foucault 2008, 220–27). They argue that by expanding the boundaries of the market, work can be transformed into a realm of entrepreneurship, on in which workers build capital, move freely, and realize the potentialities of work. Meanwhile, left-wing labor politics centers on liberating "work," more broadly, from "labor." For Marx, the task is to free concrete "work" from abstract and alienated "labor," namely to liberate humankind's unique ability to transform nature through work from the capitalist logics of profit and surplus value (Marx 1959). The relations of force and production that shape and constrain workers' experiences of capitalism—"labor"—must be challenged and subverted for "work" to express its full potentialities (Holloway 2010).

In partial continuity with this tradition, Italian Marxist autonomist thinkers, in particular Negri (1977), contend that refusing work can enable working-class subjectivities to emancipate themselves from labor and disrupt capitalism. Refusing work disrupts capitalism's ability to reform itself, often through concessions to labor, and to survive crises of overproduction. Refusing work enables a process of self-valorization through separation, via a withdrawal from "exchange value"—labor—and the reappropriation of "the world of use values" (Negri 1977, 11): work.

Tamrat's initial dedication to work might be seen to confirm Marxist and liberal distinctions between work and labor. Tamrat loved doing "fine work," as he put it, but disliked his labor conditions. Seen from this perspective, his refusal of labor was an attempt to "liberate" work. Yet one can also propose another interpretation of his trajectory. Tamrat's biography shows that work is enmeshed in labor and that there is no work without the relationships of force that shape labor experiences. The refusal of labor is inevitably also the refusal of work. As I will show below, Tamrat was not just giving up on "labor." He was also trying to separate the ways "work," and the compulsion to work, defined his existence.

Tamrat's refusal was not a foregone conclusion but the outcome of a long journey. At first, he engaged in construction work to get by. He moved up the ranks of the trade, then became involved in labor union struggles for better working conditions. Ten years later, he refused to go back to work. Tamrat pursued "survivalist" strategies in the informal economy: running errands, doing odd jobs, hustling, and simply making do (Davis 2006; Meagher 2013; Wacquant 1998). Engaging with economies of getting by does not imply a refusal of work per se (Di Nunzio 2019;

Hart 1973; Mains 2012b; Meagher 2013). Informal economic practices, including hustling, are not in opposition to the mainstream economy. They are "productive" and "work intensive," often key to making cities work (Simone 2004) and to shaping local, national, and global capitalist economies (Venkatesh and Levitt 2000). That hustling is work (*sira*) is common to both street hustlers and ethnographers of the informal economy (Di Nunzio 2019; Thieme 2018), yet Tamrat did not share this view. Nevertheless, like the other refusers whose stories I will tell in this article, he saw hustling as a better deal than backbreaking work for slightly higher pay but at the mercy of companies that exploited him, treated him with contempt, and ignored his demands for better working conditions.

Arguing that Tamrat was refusing work, and not just labor, might sound like an exaggeration. In the literature on "waiting" across the world (Honwana 2012; Jeffrey 2010; Mains 2012b), work, even when refused, still constitutes the key terrain where expectations of progress and aspirations of prestige and status are defined. Young people refuse work to "wait" for better social opportunities to materialize in their lives. But as we will see, Tamrat's journey was not one of "waiting" and expectations. Construction work did not enjoy the same level of prestige commonly associated with the white-collar employment to which educated young men and women aspire in urban Ethiopia and beyond (Jeffrey 2010; Mains 2012b). Right after his parents died, Tamrat could not afford to "wait" for employment that matched his aspirations. He had to take what was on offer to support himself and his siblings. From that moment, his life was defined by the compulsion to hard, backbreaking manual work. Work constituted the coordinates of his oppression. The organization of his labor, revolving around low wages and lack of safety or protection, only shaped how he experienced it.

Seen in this way, Tamrat's biography echoes recent critical assessments of work in capitalism, along with theories of postwork futures, that have sought to go beyond the distinction between the exchange values and use values of work (Frayne 2015; Rancière 2012; Srnicek and William 2015). According to Weeks (2011), for example, the distinction between "work" and "labor" is embedded in a misleading belief in a primordial form of work that is emancipating and fulfilling, but one that capitalism has violently hijacked through "labor." For Weeks, there is no "work" without, before, or below "labor." The task is to understand how the social organization of work has become the terrain for elaborating and enforcing technologies of power, control, and discipline that shape our sense of the possible and the impossible, the necessary and the inevitable (Postone 1993). "The problem with work" is work itself: it is how a compulsion to be productive constrains our lives and our sense of purpose. For both anti-work and postwork theorists, we ought to refuse work, challenge its ethics and

its false promises (Frayne 2015; Srnicek and William 2015; Weeks 2011).

This is a daunting task. Work not only occupies our lives and time, but it also shapes our imaginations of society, the economy, and even justice. "Job creation," for instance, promises to enable young and poor people to participate in the economy while redistributing resources. Work includes the poor. But the promise of inclusion, like the promise of work, cannot be taken at face value. Inclusion, integration, and participation do not straightforwardly guarantee emancipation. They can also instrumentally produce marginality, subjugation, and oppression (Di Nunzio 2019; Levitas 1996; Perlman 1976). Low wages, lack of labor protection, precaritization, and insecurity at work reinforce oppression and subjugation as the terms of poor people's inclusion in society (Standing 2011). Thus, refusing work is not just about labor. It is about refusing certain ideas of inclusion and redistribution. Hence, it is no coincidence that "refusing work" is often a corollary to current debates about "basic income" (Ferguson 2016; Standing 2011). Refusing work is seen by anti-work and postwork theorists as the first step toward breaking the moral nexus among work, entitlement, and citizenship, which informs social policy and welfare worldwide and constrains the radical imagination of more progressive policies of provision and inclusion (Frayne 2015; Weeks 2011).

Though intellectually powerful, the critique of work remains a theoretical argument against domination and the logic of capital. The refusal of work is more an imagined strategy for revolution than something witnessed in the making. In this regard, it is revealing that Negri (1977) himself, the father of contemporary debates on the refusal of work, wrote extensively about the political potentialities of refusing work but rarely talked about refusers themselves. By telling the story of Tamrat, a once-hardworking construction worker and labor union activist who gave up work because it was simply not worth it, this article seeks to fill this gap by contributing to a burgeoning ethnographic literature that documents and analyzes refusal (McGranahan 2016; Weiss 2016) and the refusal of work (Dawson 2022).

Reading the refusal of work ethnographically is not just a matter of empirical precision. It expands our shared understanding of how ordinary acts of defiance shape experiences of work, making scholarly inquiry relevant to how workers themselves seek to transcend the circumstances that marginalize and subjugate them (Burawoy 2012; Frayne 2015; Nash 1993). In concrete terms, it can help us see workers' struggles and subjectivities beyond the work-labor dichotomy and the utopian thinking of revolutionary theory, to instead document workers' ordinary attempts at recapturing some ownership of their bodies and carving out space and time for themselves (Rancière 2012, ix; Scott 1985, xvi).

Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork conducted from 2013 to 2018, the ethnography that follows is structured to tell Tamrat's story and situate his refusal. While in telling Tamrat's story the article moves between the individual, the historical, and the collective, at its center remains Tamrat and his "work" biography. This focus on an individual, the reader might object, hinders the representativeness of this analysis. Yet Tamrat's story is relevant because it is eloquent. While the particular bundle of actions and experiences are specific to Tamrat's experience, with its particularities of gender, age, and upbringing, it also tells much about the conditions and the circumstances of that uniqueness (Arendt 1958). Tamrat's story is *good to think with*.

Tamrat's refusal of work matured at a moment of promise. By the time he had turned his back on work in 2015, Ethiopia had gained the status of a paradigmatic African success story (Schuman 2014). Under the impact of economic growth, the landscape of the capital, Addis Ababa, was radically reshaped by large infrastructural projects, new housing facilities, and high-rise steel-and-glass buildings. This renewed urban landscape not only promised an abundant future but delivered opportunities: by 2018 the building sector employed over 1.8 million people countrywide (Bilal Derso 2018). Tamrat's refusal of work might appear to contradict the sense of progress pervading narratives and achievements of economic success. Yet it offers a glimpse of how work, even under conditions of economic growth, falls short of opening up avenues of emancipation and social mobility for the poor. As we will see, Tamrat's refusal was an attempt to disengage from the ways "inclusion" in corporate and governmental visions of development has reinforced hard work, low-wage labor, and political subjugation as the terms of poor people's membership in society (Peng 2011; Perlman 1976; Wacquant 1998). By refusing work, Tamrat did not challenge his condition of marginality and oppression—which he understood as impossible. He sought, rather, to navigate the terms of his "adverse incorporation" (Phillips 2011) into his country's development.

Teleologies of growth

After the downfall of the socialist military Derg (1974–91) and the victory in 1991 of the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF)—a coalition of regional ethnic and multiethnic parties led by the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF)—the Ethiopian economy went through a process of liberalization, which boosted construction in Addis Ababa. Land remained in the hands of the state, as it had been under the Derg, but a new leasehold system provided more land to private investors and real estate developers. Construction activities grew steadily, and Addis Ababa's growth became a boom by the first decade of the 21st century. This emerged from the government's

new focus on urban development and the influx of private, public, and international investment in the built environment that followed. The focus on urban development represented a significant shift in the EPRDF's political agenda, which, during the party's first decade in power, was primarily concerned with rural constituencies (Vaughan and Tronvoll 2003). It signaled the government's view of urban development as a launching pad for economic growth and strengthened political legitimacy (Fassil Demissie 2008).

By 2015, Ethiopia's construction sector counted over 3,000 contractors (Construction Proxy 2015). Smaller contractors were employed on government-subsidized housing projects, while larger companies were engaged in real estate development and the construction of high-rise buildings. International construction companies, mainly from China, as well as the Middle East and East Asia, along with a small club of politically connected and technically capable top-tier local contractors, concentrated on large infrastructural projects: roads, dams, railway lines, stadiums, and industrial zones.

While Addis Ababa boomed and the construction sector continued to grow, private and state investments in the Ethiopian capital failed to trickle down to produce direct benefits for the urban poor. Wealth remained concentrated in the hands of a closed domestic business community, the workings of which are largely opaque beyond the evident connections between politics, power, and capital accumulation (Weis 2016). High-rise buildings, office blocks, and real estate developments mainly served the upper-middle classes, the superrich, and Ethiopian returnees from Europe and America (Knight Frank 2017). Meanwhile, overall poverty levels decreased in Addis Ababa during the late 1990s and 2000s, yet increasing costs of life, low wages, and deepening experiences of spatial inequality affected the severity of exclusion (Bigsten and Negatu Makonnen 1999; Solomon Mulugeta 2006; UN-Habitat 2010, 2017).[3] Evictions targeted poor communities in the inner city and peri-urban areas to make room for urban regeneration and expansion (UN-Habitat 2017). The construction of "affordable" government housing, especially in the suburbs, provided home ownership to a burgeoning middle class but trapped poorer homeowners in vicious cycles of indebtedness (Planel and Bridonneau 2017). Construction provided employment to the urban poor, yet, as the case of Tamrat will show, most were paid low salaries, lacked protections and safety, and faced the possibility of sudden dismissal.

Deepening experiences of exclusion have not always provoked unequivocal critiques of Ethiopia's development. On the contrary, Ethiopia has been widely described as a political and developmental laboratory for growth in Africa. For many observers, the central role of the state as the pacesetter of the country's economic growth and development signaled the emergence of an alternative to neoliberal market orthodoxies and a corrective to dominant narratives on Africa's "weak" and "fragile" states (De Waal 2013; Kelsall 2013).

But the centrality of the state in Ethiopia's "success story" was a double-edged sword. The EPRDF's ability to influence the economy and secure political stability for over two decades was historically grounded in a pervasive form of authoritarian politics, which repressed opposition parties, activists, and journalists and limited ordinary citizens' ability to shape policy (Human Rights Watch 2010). Over its 28 years in power, the EPRDF built an effective apparatus of political mobilization and control at the grassroots of urban society. The EPRDF had inherited from the Derg a state structure that reached down to urban communities through the offices of *kebelles* (now called *woredas*), or the state's lower administrative unit, which became the center of the party's political machine. *Kebelles* issued identity cards and managed access to basic services, but they also coordinated the political work of the ruling party, from organizing meetings and rallies, liaising with mass associations, and monitoring opposition members and activists through a network of informants and "peace-keeping" committees (Aalen and Tronvoll 2009; Di Nunzio 2019; Eyob Balcha Gebremariam 2018).

In November 2019, the EPRDF was formally dissolved by Abiy Ahmed, a former EPRDF member who had been appointed prime minister over a year earlier after years of street protests throughout the country. It is beyond the scope of this article to address the impact of the EPRDF coalition's disbandment; the establishment of Abiy Ahmed's political vehicle, the Ethiopian Prosperity Party (EPP); or the military confrontation between Abiy Ahmed's government and the TPLF, the party that had formerly led the EPRDF and that had refused to merge into the EPP. Suffice it to say that the EPRDF's apparatus of political mobilization and control at the grassroots of urban society remains largely in place, now under the aegis of the EPP.

Throughout the nearly three decades of EPRDF rule, the language of development pervaded explanations of Ethiopia's economic growth, justified its inequalities, and silenced dissenting, critical accounts of the country's "success story." Admirers of Ethiopia's development success consistently responded to critics by arguing that time was needed to realize its potential. Informed commentators like De Waal (2013) invited scholars critical of the EPRDF's record on inequality and democracy to give the party's developmental vision a "fair hearing" and to wait for it to be realized. Government officials agreed with De Waal's plea. For Tegegne Berhanu, a former city manager and a government adviser on urban issues under the EPRDF, development was necessarily incremental. "Today is better than yesterday," he told me, and the future could be better than today.

Such invitations to "wait" for development to take its course are embedded in the logic of the trade-off. As "success stories" were made, praised, and celebrated,

political authoritarianism and growing social inequalities were pushed into the background while the benefits of economic growth were enumerated and emphasized. Authoritarianism in the present was thus endorsed as an inevitable step toward democracy, just as growing social inequality was described as an inevitable effect of economic growth.

Such teleological and normative accounts of development were not just a matter of representation. They materialized in policy and directly affected the livelihoods of those at the bottom of urban society (Andreas Admasie 2018). Specifically, they justified persistent low wages as necessary and inevitable disruptions to achieve development, de facto making workers' demands and labor politics irrelevant to imaginations of Ethiopia's economic growth. Ethiopian government officials, for instance, recognized that unfair dismissals and bad working conditions were an issue. They argued, however, that the existence of a national labor proclamation and employment regulations was sufficient proof that the government was committed to improving workers' conditions. When companies broke labor laws, officials pointed out, the government went after them. Sure, they told me, wages were low, but this was a consequence of the state of Ethiopia's economy. "These are a problem," a senior government official at the Addis Ababa Road Authority told me. "But if you look at the salary levels 15 years ago, the situation has improved."

Teleologies of growth were shared well beyond the walls of government offices. CEOs and managers of construction companies also used the language of necessity to explain why worker salaries were low. Rising wages, for instance, were simply perceived as incompatible with the state of the economy and the health of the construction sector. By arguing that low wages were what Ethiopia could afford, government officials and corporate actors alike claimed that growth and development would lead to better wages and labor conditions. They (willingly or unwillingly) accepted that low wages were inevitable and necessary for more jobs, more investment and more development.[4] For Mario Ricolfi, for instance, the owner of the eponymous construction company where Tamrat began his career in construction, wages were a matter of what is economically sound for a company:

> You could ask me, "Why don't you raise the salary yourself?" But if I just do it, the cost of my project will go up, and then what do you do when you need to deal with your competitors? Of course, there are single cases when you can increase a salary, but when you are thinking about big numbers, this is when it becomes more difficult.

Doing what is economically sound to keep your company alive is what the late Meles Zenawi (2006), longtime EPRDF prime minister and ideologue, argued was charac-

teristic of the "development-oriented" investor (*lemmatawi bale-habt*) who pursues a business while contributing to collective development. Indeed, "I pay my taxes" and "I follow the law" were sentiments I often heard from CEOs and managers of construction companies. Such statements enabled them to claim a moral status, because they supported the country's development, while denying responsibility for their workers' well-being (Young 2011). Low salaries, they said, were a consequence of the economy; in claiming this, they not only narrowed their social obligations, reducing them to paying taxes and obeying the law, but also shielded themselves from criticism of the working conditions at their construction sites.

Unfortunately for Tamrat and his colleagues, workers did not enjoy the same moral standing as construction companies and government institutions. Their demands for higher salaries and better working conditions were described to me as selfish or undeserving. "If they want to earn more, they can work more. We pay overtime!" the human resources manager at TIGIST Construction, a leading Ethiopian company, told me. His counterpart at IDIL Construction took a similar tone: "You know, workers are not educated. They do not have much understanding!" Contractors, architects, and government officials all echoed these sentiments when I interviewed them, complaining that slow and incompetent work is a liability to development.

Eng (Engineer) Said, the business manager of Grand Construction (part of a multibillion-dollar corporate conglomerate), summed up how a company could take a moral stand while stigmatizing its workers. "The owner of this company," he told me, "is totally a development-oriented investor. He provides jobs for thousands of people, and he is helping sustain development." Hence, he said, "the aim of construction is to contribute to the general development of the country by creating a habitat for people." Prompted about the responsibility of companies toward workers, Eng Said reminded me that companies are not philanthropic organizations and that salaries result from broader economic conditions. In his view, "if the workers just think about themselves and not the financial situation of the company, we will all fail together."

Situating Tamrat's refusal

Despite low wages and bad working conditions, Tamrat's refusal of work was neither predictable nor inevitable. Over a million others still work on Ethiopia's construction sites. For many construction workers I interviewed, the promise of work was to go beyond it to become an independent construction contractor, employing others to work for them. Tamrat himself could rattle off the steps needed: develop your technical skills, quit your job, and do some freelance work, build contacts and work to save the 100,000 birr

(US$4,696) in capital needed to become eligible to register as a grade 10 contractor, before buying basic equipment and employing a fresh engineering graduate to be your technical eye.

To borrow Appadurai's (2013) term, Tamrat and many of his colleagues had a developed "capacity to aspire." They knew the paths they would need to take in order to fulfill their aspirations of social mobility. Yet, though they could envisage such a trajectory, they recognized that it was unlikely or even impossible. Saving 100,000 birr was impossible for a construction worker. His salary of 100 birr a day (US$4.60) could not help Tamrat achieve anything beyond his condition of poverty. "Work is for poor people," he often told me.

Because the dream of becoming an independent contractor seemed impossible, most construction workers settled for low wages, hoping to achieve long-term, stable employment. Lemma, for instance, a steel fixer in his 40s, worked for Grand Construction, the same company as Eng Said. After years of moving from company to company chasing contracts, he eventually settled for Grand Construction—one of the country's wealthiest companies—because it granted him a permanent employment contract, though on a low monthly salary of 1,900 birr (US$89).

Others kept moving from one contract to another, hoping for a higher salary, as Tamrat and his friend Farid had done. Farid, a *ferraio* in his 40s, had worked with Tamrat on the ring road project. When I met him in 2016, he was working on an extension of the same project, this time with KOKOB Construction, a star Ethiopian company with alleged links to the EPRDF. Farid shared Tamrat's frustrations about wages and lack of safety. His monthly salary of 5,000 birr (US$234) was considered relatively good for construction, but it seemed inadequate to meet rising food, housing, and transport costs in Addis Ababa. Yet he stayed at work. He had a family to support, he emphasized.

A relative minority of people went freelance (*bagil*). When I interviewed Biniam and Brehane, respectively a bricklayer in his 50s and a plumber in his late 30s, I expected to hear the story of a businessman and a private contractor in the making. "That one is false [*wushet*]," Biniam told me after I mentioned that others had described freelancing as a first step to wealth and success in the construction industry. Biniam had been a freelancer for over a decade. Freelancing made you a freelance worker, not a contractor who employs others to work for him. Brehane and Biniam appreciated working for themselves, without a boss checking on them and, Brehane told me, it could undoubtedly pay better, more than 700 birr (US$32) a day. But any freelance job is precarious. You might work constantly for three months, then be without work for the next three, Biniam said. When I met them, both were jobless and struggling. If you are a bachelor, Biniam told me, it is fine, but if you have a family, it becomes challenging.

Among these trajectories, Tamrat's disaffection and refusal were not entirely exceptional. A few years in construction work appeared in the biographies of many street hustlers (Di Nunzio 2019). Ibrahim, for instance, was just a little older than Tamrat. His life, as he often told me, had been long and intense. He had been a street fighter, a hustler, a manager of informal video parlors, and for a short time a successful shoe seller. But he had constantly been looking for a way out of the street economy. During the early 2000s, in his mid-20s, Ibrahim began working for Grand Construction, first as a daily laborer and then as a steel fixer. A few years later, he was unjustly accused of stealing from his workplace and fired. After a succession of short-term contracts, he became a night guard until an explosion at his workplace nearly killed him. Looking back, Ibrahim reckoned that returning to hustling was a better deal than badly paid, insecure, and dangerous employment on construction sites. Over a decade on, he was determined to never return to construction work.

Ibrahim's refusal of work meant a return to street life, to a terrain of shared practices and meanings that revolved around ideas of street smartness, locally characterized by the notion of *being Arada* (Di Nunzio 2019). Arada is the name of Addis Ababa's inner city, and *being Arada* conveys the fascination that generations of inner-city people in Addis Ababa have had with how hustlers make do, and with their capacity to live through marginality and exclusion. For Ibrahim, the return to street life, and hustling, was not just a calculation over wages and labor conditions. It came out of a long-term embrace of an urban identity on which he ultimately grounded his wider sense of respect (*kibur*). Tamrat did not see himself as an *Arada* and continued to despise hustlers as loiterers (*bozene*). Yet this is not what made his refusal different from Ibrahim's. Both men were concerned with reinstating a sense of respect in the face of exploitation at work. Ibrahim's refusal, however, rested on a belief that street life was a valuable alternative to demeaning work. By contrast, Tamrat refused work not in order to find alternatives. Rather, he did so after realizing that work provided him no respect and no entitlements.

The politics of insignificance

When I first met Tamrat in 2013, fighting for labor rights and better working conditions was integral to his identity as a worker. Then, three years later, his involvement with labor unions had hardened and perhaps radicalized his disaffection with work. I met Tamrat through *Ato* (Mr.) Girma, the chairman of the industrial federation of construction workers' union. Mr. Girma told me there were 95 company-level unions, with 30,000 members countrywide. But, he added, they composed a tiny part of the workforce: only 3 percent of those working in construction were unionized. Tamrat was exceptional

among those 30,000 in understanding his union work politically. When, back in 2013, I asked Mr. Girma if he knew anyone I could talk to for my research, he replied without hesitation, "Tamrat!" For Tamrat, union membership was about active militancy. He was a formidable union organizer. Of the 800 workers employed at ZAF, Tamrat had unionized 437, including several day laborers, which was rare in the sector.

Yet, as I followed Tamrat and Mr. Girma, I could see that their work was far from sustaining or advocating for a workers-led politics or labor-centered development (cf. Selwyn 2014). Mr. Girma's work at the union was mainly about damage control. The aftermath of Tamrat's dismissal in 2013 from ZAF offers an illustrative case. In 2015, two years later, a judge ordered compensation of 13,500 birr (US$658), the equivalent of six months' salary, to be paid to workers, including Tamrat, dismissed because of their involvement in the union. Tamrat felt vindicated, but he could hardly claim that his situation had changed. Just a few months before the judgment, Tamrat had been fired again, this time by a powerful Chinese contractor. Moreover, he knew that 13,500 birr would not enable him to pursue a trajectory of social mobility. It was just a fraction of the cost of a secondhand minibus—220,000 birr (US$10,500) in 2015—which could be rented out for a fee, had he wanted to move into the city's burgeoning transport sector; it wasn't even close to the 100,000 birr (US$4,864) needed to register as an independent contractor—the dream of many construction workers.

Nor could unions do much to challenge working conditions. At the time of my research in 2016, there existed labor regulations on unlawful dismissal.[5] Thanks to these regulations, Mr. Girma claimed a 75 percent success rate in court, but this concealed a fundamental predicament. First, labor cases could take two or three years to be resolved, when workers might have moved on to working in similar conditions at other companies. Workers thus often declined to start a lengthy litigation process. The only advantage was the hope of cashing in, if successful, on whatever compensation the company agreed to pay. Second, the union's emphasis on judicial and legal work reflected how little workers' demands reshaped working conditions or challenged government and corporate practices.

Wooden scaffolding often caused deaths, and safety equipment was usually distributed only to permanent employees, such as engineers, foremen, and high-level technicians, who were given higher pay and greater benefits. Mr. Girma told me in a resigned tone that for years the unions had tried to push for a national construction workers' agreement, but strengthening the regulation of work conditions did not seem to be on the government agenda. What unions could do, he continued, was promote agreements at the company level and hope management would follow through, or help workers when they were fired for

making demands. Mr. Girma filed court cases when companies fired workers without following the rules. He stepped in to ensure that labor laws were respected. His work was more juridical than political.

In 2013 and 2016, I interviewed managers of the boards of employers' associations and senior officials at the city government and the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs. During these interviews, it became clear that they knew about the working conditions at construction sites and knew that workecls emphasized to me the importance of out-of-court arbitration as a way of solving labor cases. The manager of Addis Ababa Road Authority told me that he constantly advised companies on how to behave with workers. And Mr. Saul, the manager of the Ethiopian Employers' Federation, explained that if arbitration did not work, companies might be taken to court.

The emphasis on arbitration and labor law in officials' and employers' narratives did not necessarily concur with a tightening of labor protections. Indeed, labor on construction sites remains underregulated. For instance, the manager of the Ethiopian Contractors' Association pointed out a fundamental contradiction in the government's emphasis on labor law and in its approach to working conditions. Showing me a list of the criteria that construction companies must meet, he told me,

> Providing safety material is not compulsory to win a bid. So, since it is not a requirement, contractors do not often include it in their budget. When there will be a regulation and it will be compulsory, all the contractors will need to comply.

While the state underregulated the sector, the preponderance of judicial and legal procedures in labor unions' work constrained workers' collective ability to make claims. As a result, labor unions might win in court and companies might pay compensation, but the latter's modi operandi continue unchallenged. Tens of thousands of birr in compensation to a handful of workers when laws are breached is nothing compared to the multibillion-birr budgets of top-tier companies.

The inability to challenge working conditions tired, disappointed, and frustrated Tamrat. Back in 2013, when I first met him, he had sung the unions' praises and lauded their commitment to defend workers' rights. He had dreamed of organizing a rally of all construction workers marching through the city, he told me. By 2016, he could not stop pointing out the absurdity of unions' modest victories against companies that were underpaying and endangering workers. This sense of insignificance also visibly affected Mr. Girma. When I met him in 2013, he had spoken the language of defiance. He had introduced me to Tamrat and given me a long list of workers he thought I should talk to, telling me that more attention was needed on the issues

faced by workers. Three years later, in 2016, he appeared resigned and fatalistic, concerned mainly with bureaucratic procedures. When I mentioned Tamrat, Mr. Girma lacked his earlier enthusiasm about the former's insurgent work. It seemed that Mr. Girma did not want trouble. "Do you know any workers in the unions I could talk to?" I asked him in 2016, as I had in 2013. This time, Mr. Girma's response seemed to signal a growing sense of defeat. "You should ask the companies," he said. "I can't give it to you."

The politics of refusal

For Tamrat, turning his back on work was difficult. Work had shaped his sense of self and had defined his life since he was 18. True, Tamrat was known to be a rebel. "He likes fighting the companies," Farid told me. But Tamrat was not a loner. During the struggle with ZAF management in 2013, Tamrat was joined by colleagues who believed that work entitled them to ask for certain rights and benefits. As Jemal, a 65-year-old carpenter at ZAF, said, "Working is necessary, but also asking is necessary. If you work, you can ask!" At the time, Tamrat nodded in approval at these words. But three years later he turned away from construction work and union politics. His refusal was moved by the bleak recognition that work did not, in fact, entitle one to ask. As a worker, he was expected to work hard, stay in his place, and patiently wait for development to be realized.

By refusing work, Tamrat was not trying to reinstate his ability to ask, nor did he expect to gain leverage. Instead, he tried to disengage his sense of self from what he regarded as the source of his condition of subjugation and oppression. His act of refusal was not really "political" in the sense of a quest for change through organizing a collective action (Arendt 1958). Yet it was about politics. Over the years, our discussions had often turned to politics and the consequences that government policy had on the lives of workers. For Tamrat, the workers' predicament resulted from the EPRDF's policy of allowing companies to determine the rules of the game at construction sites, rendering workers' claims insignificant. Refusing work was a refusal of the way politics shaped his life, and so it was, in itself, a political act.

Tamrat's refusal may be contextualized within the recent history of dissent in Ethiopia. In April 2001 student demonstrations at Addis Ababa University called for more political freedom; after the police entered the campus to violently repress them, they spread throughout the city (Balsvik 2007, 143–56). In the months after national elections in May 2005, young people took to the streets to support the opposition and to protest an election that many believed was rigged (Abbink 2006). In 2014, and more dramatically from 2015 to 2016, demonstrations erupted in the Addis Ababa's peripheries and the neighboring Oromia region. Protesters feared that the planned revision of Addis Ababa's urban master plan would expand the city's administrative boundaries and effectively dispossess Oromo's farmers in favor of national and international investors seeking land near the capital (BBC News 2016). Demonstrations snowballed, triggering a countrywide wave of protests that eventually led to the resignation of then Prime Minister Hailemariam Dessalegn and the appointment of Abiy Ahmed as prime minister in April 2018 (*Guardian* 2018).

On all these occasions, the government responded with heavy-handed repression. In 2001, 30 people were killed during student protests. In 2005, 200 more died in clashes with the police in Addis Ababa, while 30,000 were detained countrywide (Human Rights Watch 2010). From 2015 to 2016, about 500 died, and tens of thousands were detained.

But repression was not the EPRDF's only response. In the years after the 2005 riots, the EPRDF implemented large-scale entrepreneurship programs, which often revolved around small-scale trade, municipal services, and the construction of cobblestone roads. The aim was to address what the government considered the main reason for political unrest among young people: lack of employment. It allocated 5.2 billion birr (US$300 million) to support 1.2 million beneficiaries by 2010 (MWUD 2006) and later revised its commitment to support 3 million people by 2015 (MOFED 2010, 28). During the protests in Oromia from 2014 to 2016, the government promised to further expand its entrepreneurship and microfinance programs (*DW Africa* 2017). A year after becoming prime minister, Abiy Ahmed emphasized expanding job opportunities as a pillar of his reformist agenda (Samuel Gebre 2019).

Policies of employment provision have long been at the heart of the EPRDF's attempts to tackle the predicaments of marginalized urban youth and, in doing so, to co-opt them (Di Nunzio 2019; Eyob Balcha Gebremariam 2018). These initiatives have helped the government expand its reach at the bottom of urban society. Entrepreneurship programs, for instance, created a network of small-scale enterprises that, while being autonomous entities with no formal links to the state and the ruling party, were de facto directly or indirectly dependent on the EPRDF's local administration to gain access to business opportunities, ranging from access to facilities, funding, business support, and market linkage. Within this context, as members of small-scale enterprises pointed out to me already in 2010, behaving as a loyal supporter of the EPRDF and showing up at political meetings and rallies was key to receiving that crucial support (Di Nunzio 2019; Eyob Balcha Gebremariam 2018).

While the EPRDF expanded the reach of its apparatus of political mobilization and control, the government's focus on employment failed to provide opportunities for social mobility. In inner-city Addis Ababa, small-scale enterprises quickly failed or provided incomes of no more than

US$50–75 a month (Di Nunzio 2019). Construction work paid better but not enough to support trajectories of social mobility. Factory work, especially in the booming garment industry, paid even less than construction or the small-scale enterprises (Barrett and Baumann-Pauly 2019).

Tamrat's refusal was moved by the recognition that being a hard worker, wittingly or unwittingly, reinforced the topographies of power that continued to subjugate him. *Pace* Ferguson (2016), Tamrat understood that dependency on the state or corporations for survival was not a solution to his predicament and that of other urban poor. By refusing work, he tried to reimagine a life beyond the constraints imposed on him by the political economy of development, capital, and "inclusion," a political economy that reinforced his condition of oppression. Ultimately, his refusal expressed a radical but simple demand: to be left alone (Scott 2009).

Conclusion: The refusal of work

In anthropology, there has been a recent attempt to rethink "ethics" through the ordinary, to understand action beyond rigid categories of "structure, power and interest" (Lambek 2010, 1), and to appreciate how people understand what is right and how they act. In a similar way, I have sought to narrate Tamrat's refusal of work, and the sense of political rebellion that inspired it, as an invitation to rethink anthropological accounts of workers' subjectivities and, in doing so, to examine the individual and the ordinary (Bayat 1997; Das 2011; Mahmood 2011).

Tamrat's refusal was neither unique nor exceptional. It was part of a wide repertoire of individual and ordinary acts of rebellion that proliferate under the surface, only rarely coalescing in collective moments of disruption and protest. Tamrat's refusal of work may well be temporary. Driven by necessity, he might eventually return to construction work. Nevertheless, even a temporary refusal is revealing. Tamrat's story teaches us that we need to go beyond the distinction between work and labor to appreciate workers' experiences. While this distinction has helped the Marxist scholarly tradition make sense of the historical specificities of capitalism and the forms of alienation that characterize it, it falls short of exploring how workers experience subjugation at work and try to resist it (as discussed in Nash's [1993] study of Bolivian miners). Tamrat's story reminds us that the intellectual task of critical theory and an anthropology of work is not just to document how workers seek to liberate "work" from "labor," reappropriating and reconfiguring meanings of work as a site of identity, dignity, and respect (Durrenberger and Martí 2005; Kasmir and Carbonella 2008; Mains 2012a). We should also recognize how resistance at work is often an attempt to refuse work and to imagine a life beyond it (Barchiesi 2011; Cooper 1996; Pierce 1979; Taussig 1980; Weeks 2011).

Notes

1. Interlocutors' names have been changed to protect their privacy.

2. Since the value of the birr to the US dollar has changed significantly in the past 10 years, the dollar equivalent is calculated according to the exchange rate applicable to the relevant year.

3. Since mid-1990s, real incomes in Ethiopia's urban areas have increased, but only for the wealthiest households have they risen significantly (Bigsten and Negatu Makonnen 1999). While poor households have experienced increased availability of goods and services in an expanded market, their ability to access them has decreased (Solomon Mulugeta 2006).

4. These narratives are not just specific to Ethiopia. Talking about employment creation and industrialization in Africa, a report by Fine et al. (2012) makes a similar argument: low wages need not be tackled immediately, since they offer opportunities for investors and governments to boost growth.

5. Proclamation No. 377/2003 Labour Proclamation, Federal Negarit Gazeta of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, 10th Year No. 12, 26 February 2004, Addis Ababa, p. 2453. A new labor proclamation was eventually issued in 2019 under the auspices of making the country's regulations more conducive to private investment (Proclamation No. 1156/2019 Labour Proclamation, Federal Negarit Gazeta of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, 25th Year No. 89, 5 September 2019, p. 11691). The new proclamation has worsened labor conditions, doubling the period of probation and expanding the legal remits of dismissal without notice if a worker is late and absent for work.

References

Aalen, Lovise, and Kjetil Tronvoll. 2009. "The 2008 Ethiopian Local Elections: The Return of Electoral Authoritarianism." *African Affairs* 108 (430): 111–20. https://doi.org/10.1093/afraf/adn066.

Abbink, Jon. 2006. "Discomfiture or Democracy? The 2005 Election Crisis in Ethiopia and Its Aftermath." *African Affairs* 105 (419): 173–99. https://doi.org/10.1093/afraf/adi122.

Andreas Admasie. 2018. "Amid Political Recalibrations: Strike Wave Hits Ethiopia." *Journal of Labor and Society* 21 (3): 431–35. https://doi.org/10.1111/wusa.12350.

Appadurai, Arjun. 2013. *The Future as Cultural Fact: Essays on the Global Condition.* London: Verso.

Arendt, Hannah. 1958. *The Human Condition.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Balsvik, Randi R. 2007. *The Quest for Expression: State and the University in Ethiopia under Three Regimes, 1952–2005.* Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University Press.

Barchiesi, Franco. 2011. *Precarious Liberation: Workers, the State, and Contested Social Citizenship in Postapartheid South Africa.* New York: SUNY Press.

Barrett, Paul M., and Dorothée Baumann-Pauly. 2019. *Made in Ethiopia: Challenges in the Garment Industry's New Frontier.* New York: New York University Stern Center for Business and Human Rights.

Bayat, Asef. 1997. *Street Politics: Poor People's Movements in Iran.* New York: Columbia University Press.

BBC News. 2016. "What Is behind Ethiopia's Wave of Protests?" August 22, 2016. http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-36940906.

Bigsten, Arne, and Negatu Makonnen. 1999. "The Anatomy of Income Distribution in Urban Ethiopia." *African Development Review* 11 (1): 1–30. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8268.00001.

Bilal Derso. 2018. "Ethiopia: Transforming Construction Industry." *Ethiopian Herald*, March 28, 2018. https://allafrica.com/stories/201803280594.html.

Burawoy, Michael. 2012. "The Roots of Domination: Beyond Gramsci and Bourdieu." *Sociology* 46 (2): 187–206. https://doi.org/10.1177/2F0038038511422725.

Construction Proxy. 2015. Web page, updated May 7, 2015. https://constructionproxy.com/catalog/contractors-in-ethiopia.

Cooper, Frederick. 1996. *Decolonization and African Society: the Labor Question in French and British Africa.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Das, Veena. 2011. "State, Citizenship, and the Urban Poor." *Citizenship Studies* 15 (3–4): 319–33. https://doi.org/10.1080/13621025.2011.564781.

Davis, Mike. 2006. *Planet of Slums.* New York: Verso.

Dawson, Hannah J. 2022. "Living, Not Just Surviving: The Politics of Refusing Low-Wage Jobs in Urban South Africa." *Economy and Society.* Published ahead of print, May 5, 2022. https://doi.org/10.1080/03085147.2022.2058742.

De Waal, Alex. 2013. "The Theory and Practice of Meles Zenawi." *African Affairs* 112 (446): 148–55. https://doi.org/10.1093/afraf/ads081.

Di Nunzio, Marco. 2019. *The Act of Living: Street Life, Marginality, and Development in Urban Ethiopia.* Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Durrenberger, Paul E., and Judith Martí, eds. 2005. *Labor in Cross-Cultural Perspective.* Oxford: AltaMira.

DW Africa. 2017. "Ethiopia's New Employment Plan More Politics Than Jobs." February 21, 2017. https://www.dw.com/en/ethiopias-new-employment-plan-more-politics-than-jobs/a-37657851.

Ethiopian Herald. 2015. "New International Airport to Be 'as Big as Heathrow.'" March 6, 2015.

Eyob Balcha Gebremariam. 2018. "The Politics of Youth Employment and Policy Processes in Ethiopia." *IDS Bulletin* 48 (3): 33–51.

Fassil Demissie. 2008. "Situated Neoliberalism and Urban Crisis in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia." *African Identities* 6 (4): 505–27. https://doi.org/10.1080/14725840802424097.

Ferguson, James. 2016. *Give a Man a Fish.* Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Foucault, Michel. 2008. *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978–1979.* Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan.

Fine, David, Arend van Wamelen, Susan Lund, Armando Cabral, Mourad Taoufiki, Norbert Dörr, Acha Leke, et al. 2012. *Africa at Work: Job Creation and Inclusive Growth.* McKinsey Global Institute. https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/middle-east-and-africa/africa-at-work

Frayne, David. 2015. *The Refusal of Work: The Theory and Practice of Resistance to Work.* London: Zed.

Guardian. 2018. "Ethiopian Prime Minister Resigns after Mass Protests." February 15, 2018. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/feb/15/ethiopia-prime-minister-hailemariam-desalegn-resigns-after-mass-protests.

Hart, Keith. 1973. "Informal Income Opportunities and Urban Employment in Ghana." *Journal of Modern African Studies* 11 (1): 61–89. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022278X00008089.

Holloway, John. 2010. *Crack Capitalism.* London: Pluto.

Honwana, Alcinda. 2012. *The Time of Youth: Work, Social Change, and Politics in Africa.* Sterling, VA: Kumarian.

Human Rights Watch. 2010. *"One Hundred Ways of Putting Pressure": Violations of Freedom of Expression and Association in Ethiopia.* New York: Human Rights Watch.

Jeffrey, Craig. 2010. *Timepass: Youth, Class, and the Politics of Waiting in India.* Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Kasmir, Sharryn, and August Carbonella. 2008. "Dispossession and the Anthropology of Labor." *Critique of Anthropology* 28 (5): 5–25. https://doi.org/10.1177/0308275X07086555.

Kelsall, Tim. 2013. *Business, Politics and the State in Africa: Challenging the Orthodoxies on Growth and Transformation.* London: Zed.

Knight Frank. 2017. *Africa Report 2017: Real Estate Markets in a Continent of Growth and Opportunity.* London: Knight Frank.

Lambek, Michael. 2010. Introduction to *Ordinary Ethics: Anthropology, Language, and Action*, edited by Michael Lambek, 1–36. New York: Fordham University Press.

Levitas, Ruth. 1996. "The Concept of Social Exclusion and the New Durkheimian Hegemony." *Critical Social Policy* 46 (16): 5–20. https://doi.org/10.1177/026101839601604601.

Mahmood, Saba. 2011. *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Mains, Daniel. 2012a. "Blackouts and Progress: Privatization, Infrastructure, and a Developmentalist State in Jimma, Ethiopia." *Cultural Anthropology* 27 (1): 3–27. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1548-1360.2012.01124.x.

Mains, Daniel. 2012b. *Hope Is Cut: Youth, Unemployment, and the Future in Urban Ethiopia.* Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Marx, Karl. 1959. *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts.* Moscow: Progress Publishers. Translated by Martin Milligan. First published 1932; composed 1844.

McGranahan, Carole. 2016. "Theorizing Refusal: An Introduction." *Cultural Anthropology* 31 (3): 319–25. https://doi.org/10.14506/ca31.3.01.

Meagher, Kate. 2013. "Unlocking the Informal Economy: A Literature Review on Linkages between Formal and Informal Economies in Developing Countries." WIEGO Working Paper no. 27.

Meles Zenawi. 2006. "African Development: Dead Ends and New Beginnings." Unpublished manuscript. http://www.meleszenawi.com/african-development-dead-ends-and-new-biginnings-by-meles-zenawi/african_development-dead_ends_and_new_beginnings_by_meles_zenawi/

MOFED (Ministry of Finance and Economic Development). 2010. *Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP) 2010/11–2014/15.* Addis Ababa: MOFED.

MWUD (Ministry of Works and Urban Development). 2006. *Industry and Urban Development and Package.* Unofficial trans. Addis Ababa: MWUD.

Nash, June C. 1993. *We Eat the Mines and the Mines Eat Us: Dependency and Exploitation in Bolivian Tin Mines.*

New York: Columbia University Press. First published 1979.

Negri, Antonio. 1977. *Capitalist Domination and Working Class Sabotage.* https://antonionegriinenglish.files.wordpress.com/2010/08/capitalist-domination-and-working-class-sabotage.pdf.

Peng, Thomas. 2011. "The Impact of Citizenship on Labour Process: State, Capital and Labour Control in South China." *Work, Employment and Society* 25 (4): 726–41. https://doi.org/10.1177/0950017011419721.

Perlman, Janet. 1976. *The Myth of Marginality: Urban Poverty and Politics in Rio de Janeiro.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Phillips, Nicola. 2011. "Informality, Global Production Networks and the Dynamics of 'Adverse Incorporation.'" *Global Networks* 11 (3): 380–97. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1471-0374.2011.00331.x.

Pierce, Adrian J. 1979. *Choice, Class and Conflict: A Study of Southern Nigerian Factory Workers.* Brighton, UK: Harvester Press.

Planel, Sabine, and Marie Bridonneau. 2017. "(Re)making Politics in a New Urban Ethiopia: An Empirical Reading of the Right to the City in Addis Ababa's Condominiums." *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 11 (1): 24–45. https://doi.org/10.1080/17531055.2017.1285105.

Postone, Moishe. 1993. *Time, Labor, and Social Domination: A Reinterpretation of Marx's Critical Theory.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Rancière, Jacques. 2012. *Proletarian Nights: The Workers' Dream in Nineteenth-Century France.* New York: Verso. Translated by John Drury. First published 1981.

Samuel Gebre 2019. "Ethiopian PM Says Reforms Will Deliver 3 Million Jobs in 2019–20." Bloomberg, July 2, 2019. https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2019-07-02/ethiopian-pm-says-reforms-will-deliver-3-million-jobs-in-2019-20.

Schuman, Michael. 2014. "Forget the BRICs; Meet the PINEs." *Time*, March 13, 2014. http://time.com/22779/forget-the-brics-meet-the-pines/.

Scott, James C. 1985. *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance.* New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Scott, James C. 2009. *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia.* New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Selwyn, Ben. 2014. *The Global Development Crisis.* Cambridge: Polity.

Simone, Abdoumaliq. 2004. *For the City Yet to Come: Changing African Life in Four Cities.* Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Solomon Mulugeta. 2006. "Market Oriented Reforms and Changes in Urban Household Income: A Study in Selected Small Towns of Ethiopia." *Eastern Africa Social Science Research Review* 22 (2): 1–30. https://doi.org/10.1353/eas.2006.0010.

Srnicek, Nick, and Alex William. 2015. *Inventing the Future: Postcapitalism and a World without Work.* London: Verso.

Standing, Guy. 2011. *The Precariat: The Dangerous New Class.* London: Bloomsbury Academic.

Taussig, Michael. 1980. *The Devil and Commodity Fetishism in South America.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

Thieme, Tatiana A. 2018. "The Hustle Economy: Informality, Uncertainty and the Geographies of Getting By." *Progress in Human Geography* 42 (4): 529–48. https://doi.org/10.1177/0309132517690039.

UN-Habitat. 2010. *The State of African Cities 2010: Governance, Inequality and Urban Land Markets.* Nairobi: UN-Habitat.

———. 2017. *The State of Addis Ababa 2017: The Addis Ababa We Want.* Nairobi: UN-Habitat.

Vaughan, Sarah, and Kjetil Tronvoll. 2003. *The Culture of Power in Contemporary Ethiopian Political Life.* Stockholm: Sida.

Venkatesh, Sudhir Alladi, and Steven D. Levitt. 2000. "'Are We a Family or a Business?' History and Disjuncture in the Urban American Street Gang." *Theory and Society* 29 (4): 427–62. https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1007151703198.

Wacquant, Loïc. 1998. "Inside the Zone: The Social Art of the Hustler in the Black American Ghetto." *Theory Culture Society* 15 (2): 1–36. https://doi.org/10.1177/026327698015002001.

Weeks, Kathi. 2011. *The Problem with Work: Feminism, Marxism, Antiwork Politics, and Postwork Imaginaries.* Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Weis, Toni. 2016. "Vanguard Capitalism: Party, State, and Market in the EPRDF's Ethiopia." DPhil diss., University of Oxford.

Weiss, Erica. 2016. "Refusal as Act, Refusal as Abstention." *Cultural Anthropology* 31 (3): 351–58. https://doi.org/10.14506/ca31.3.05.

Young, Iris Marion 2011. *Responsibility for Justice.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Marco Di Nunzio
Department of African Studies and Anthropology
University of Birmingham

m.dinunzio@bham.ac.uk