

“Beyond informal economy: Street vending as a culturally creative practice in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania”

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Dar es Salaam, Tanzania

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Introduction

Street vending is arguably one of the most vibrant economic spheres in many African cities and elsewhere. The centrality of self-organised economic practices such as street vending in the lives of millions of citizens renders the denomination of such practices as “informal” absurd. The concept of the “informal economy”, despite its widespread use even in very sensitive studies into “informal” milieus, has negative connotations of the “abnormal” as opposed to “formal” and thus “proper” ways of doing things and earning a livelihood (cf. Rottenburg 1995). Most definitions render it in entirely negative terms: The informal economy is characterised by a *lack* of appropriate business permits, the *violation* of zoning codes, the *failure* to report tax liability, *non-compliance* with labour regulations, the use of *illegal* means to produce legal products, and so on (Brown, et al. 2010: 667). Apart from such negative associations, however, the term informality in itself has no analytic value whatsoever. It is instead a descriptive term that is only meaningful when juxtaposed with its opposite, formality. The notion of societal life as formal in some respects is arguably related to an idea of the rationalisation of society in modernity. As such, it mistakes cultural notions and representations of ordered social arrangements and practices for what people actually do in their everyday life. Even formal and rational organisations such as state bureaucracies have been revealed to be permeated by socio-culturally constructed relationships and practices that contradict the Western cultural ideal of rational and formal organisation (Johnson 1970; Ogundiran 2002; Rottenburg 1995). Thus, while formality is a cultural ideal that has overtones of a Weberian idea of rationalisation, informality denotes “the absence of form” and a “lack of established regularity” (Hart 1992: 217).

Street vending in Dar es Salaam, to be sure, is not informal at all in this sense. It is a highly demanding task that requires complex social organisation and a culturally creative one as well. Street vendors do not merely orient their practices by the interstices of a formal system. They create their very own cornerstones by which they orient their practices. As I will show with reference to a study with shoe vendors in the streets of Dar es Salaam, street vendors produce through their active involvement with the city an epistemic landscape that

renders their practices within it meaningful. More precisely, they create a market that only exists in the specific ways they perceive and act on different spaces, temporalities, encounters and experiences.

A brief history of street vending in Dar es Salaam

Dar es Salaam, situated on a natural bay on the East African coast, is Tanzania's largest and fastest growing city. Compared to its some 5.000 inhabitants at the time of its inception by Sultan Majid in the 1880s, roughly 130 years later the city's population has increased almost a *thousandfold*: In the 2012 census conducted by the National Bureau of Statistics, the population of Dar es Salaam was estimated at 4.36 million people and its growth rate at 5.6 per cent (National Bureau of Statistics Tanzania, et al. 2013). Dar es Salaam has grown rapidly throughout its short history primarily due to an incessant stream of rural-urban migration. Despite increasingly harsh living conditions for urban populations, the city has remained a magnet for hopeful youths who willingly exchange a life of hard manual labour in the countryside for the prospect of a meagre income in cash, some basic amenities such as electricity and running water, and a chance to better their overall social position in the long run. From the beginning of the city's history, incoming migrants mostly engaged in self-organised economic activities such as the production and peddling of foodstuffs, like coffee, milk, *vitumbua* (rice cakes), fish, vegetables and charcoal (Burton 2005: 65). The rapid growth of the city thus was coterminous with the rapid growth of what later became labelled the informal economy of the city (Brennan and Burton 2007; Burton 2005; Burton 2006; Burton 2007; Iliffe 1979; Leslie 1963). Both the colonial administration of the city and later the postcolonial administration continuously struggled to curb what to them constituted "poorly comprehended means to subsist" (Iliffe 1979: 36) of large segments of the city's population. For colonial officials, this "second economy" on the streets was generally regarded as suspicious since it proved to be difficult to control. Several policies to remove "undesirable persons" from the city were implemented over the decades. But these policies were part of a more general discourse about the morality such "undesirables" represented in the colonial imagination. They were depicted as "drones and SPIVs": people who lived off of the work of others, just like male honeybees (drones), or "Suspected Persons and Itinerant Vagrants" (SPIVs), who lived from their "wits, without doing any regular work" (Mbilinyi 1985: 89). In colonial commentaries and policies, urban Africans were mostly depicted as "unattached" and out of (colonial and tribal) control, living a "thug

life” in a state of “anomie”. Young urban Africans created their own ways of life on the streets, which colonial commentators such as John Leslie commented on in the most insulting way: “They are unformed *Hitlerjugend* [...] waiting for a *Fuehrer* to give respectability to their longing to be admired, to be feared, to have a place in the sun” (Leslie 1963: 113; Mbilinyi 1985: 93-94). The social processes that such comments condemned, Marjorie Mbilinyi argues, should be alternatively understood as the creation of a new social order and a new popular culture for an urban African class waking to aspirations of African nationalism (Mbilinyi 1985: 94).

And the post-independence administration willingly assumed the colonial perspective and consequently continued to vilify the economic strategies of Tanzanian citizens. Despite the fact that rural-urban migration remained to be one of the most influential forces shaping the city’s social, economic and political life, and that self-employed economic activities remained to be the only viable source of income for most of the city’s inhabitants, the official approach to the informal economy was one of purification: The modern city needed to be cleansed of people who were incapable of productively engaging in the project of developing the city and the nation. Colonial strategies to tackle this “problem” thus found a continuation in the post-colonial administration of Dar es Salaam, with its large-scale repatriation campaigns *Kupe* (1973; literally “tick”), *Kila Mtu Afanye Kazi* (1976; “Everybody should work”), and the Human Resource Deployment Act, better known in Tanzania as *Nguvu Kazi* (1983-1984; “labour force”) (cf. Burton 2007). Most policies proposed by the Tanzanian state ever since aimed either at the “ormalisation of petty trade (by imposing unrealistic registration procedures) or at the eradication of the problem through raids, persecution, and the imprisonment of petty traders. The war against poverty, in these instances, really is a war against the poor.

Against this backdrop, therefore, using the term informal in reference to self-organised businesses in settings such as Dar es Salaam amounts to a form of complicity with this vilification of people—albeit couched in neat intellectual terms. And besides its hegemonic connotations, the term belies the fact that self-organised economic activities are not a marginal aberration of the norm, but in fact remain the only viable source of income for large proportion of many African cities. For the case of Dar es Salaam, for example, Michel Lyons and Colman Msoka estimated the street-vendor population in Dar es Salaam at 700,000 people (cf. Lyons and Msoka 2010: 1082). Such numbers may easily be contested,

since estimates of *per definition* unregistered informal businesses can only be approximations at best. What can be stated without doubt, however, is that self-organised economic activities in Dar es Salaam remain the most vibrant economic sphere in the city. This fact challenges scholarly discourse to go beyond an understanding of street vending and other economic practices in terms of informal economy and instead to take a close look at how these practices constitute full-fledged urban life-worlds in many African cities. In the following, I will present an attempt to do so.

Crowd round the market: Sociality among Wayao street vendors

The argument I develop here is based on 15 months of fieldwork with a group of street vendors in the inner city of Dar es Salaam. I worked with about forty-five young men who established their little workshop in a backyard in the inner city, where they prepared the second-hand shoes they bought in the market before they sold them in the streets. The group of shoe vendors was tightly knit since the majority of them had originated from the same village in the southern region of Mtwara, were related through kinship ties and identified themselves as Wayao, as members of the ethnic and language group Yao. But despite the fact that they had a shared history of rural upbringing and had helped one another to migrate to the city and to gain foothold in street vending, solidarity among them was astonishingly low and their sociality was continuously contested by their individual aspirations to autonomy. The reasons for the precarity of their sociality lay in a shared self-image according to which they, as Wayao from the village, were badly educated and were ill-prepared for life in the city. This self-image resulted in a general unwillingness to trust one another and an egalitarian ideology according to which none of them was equipped to be more successful to anybody else (Malefakis 2015). Suspensions, accusations, fraud and fights were not uncommon in the shoe vendors' working day. Yet despite these continuous frictions, the shoe vendors depended on one another in an implicit way, since they jointly created specialised ways of understanding the city and life in the streets and highly complex forms of knowledge about the market that way indispensable for each one of them.

In their volatile urban environment, the street vendors countered their perceived subjection to the coincidences, accidents and chances they encountered in the streets by developing ways to anticipate their work routines and thus to gain a degree of control. In conversations and interviews, they often described their business as basically being a matter of luck: Everything depended on who one would meet out in the streets. And while the shoe

vendors had some control over their choice of commodities and the effort they took to revamp them, they had little control of the attitudes and moods, tastes and buying capacities of the people they encountered in the streets. And, above all, they frequently encountered city police troops who somewhat worked the streets as well since they extorted small bribes under threat of confiscating their commodities or imprisoning them right away. Therefore, in some respect the shoe vendors had to individually navigate the rapidly shifting and dynamic social environment they encountered in the streets (cf. Vigh 2010).

But the shoe vendors did not only *navigate* the opportunities and constraints they found around them in the social and urban landscape; their praxis rather was culturally productive in that it demarcated and constituted points of orientation, in a spatial and temporal way, according to which they in turn organised their praxis. As I will show in this article, the street vendors cumulated their diverse experiences in the streets and transformed them into a technical jargon, consisting of slang expressions that metaphorically denoted different types of customers and commodities, different spatio-temporal spaces in the city and the appropriate rhetorical and corporeal tactics to approach these customers and spaces successfully. Taken together, these verbal sedimentations of the wealth of experiences and knowledge constituted the market for the vendors, a market that was not a demarcated area in the city, but existed only in their epistemic approach to the city's streets. As a side-effect of their joint creation and reference to this epistemic landscape, the shoe vendors' sociality gained an integrative moment, despite individuals' aspirations to autonomy and independence.

Spaces of agglomeration and the rhythms of street vending

Field notes, July 17, 2012

11.30 a.m. I accompany Daudi on his tour. At 11.45, we stop at the corner of Sokoine Street and arrange the shoes on the narrow pavement in front of the bank there. Hamis comes by (11.55). Daudi asks him, "*Umeona mitaa kweupe?*"—Have you seen the "white" [empty] streets? Musa comes along and joins us. Daudi says: "*Umeona mishe ya leo?*"—Have you seen today's tour? Musa answers, "*Hamna kati leo*"—There was nothing "inside" today. The four of us stay silent for three or four minutes. Hamis buys a cigarette from a

passing vendor and lights it. After a while, a new conversation topic comes up: soccer.

Besides the British Premier League and the German *Bundesliga*, what went on “inside” was naturally the abiding theme in conversations among the shoe vendors. After they had bought their shoes in the market for second hand clothes in the early morning, had washed, repaired and polished them in their little workshop in the backyard, the shoe vendors individually entered “inside”, *kuingia kati*, as they said. But while they preferred to walk through the streets individually, to avoid direct competition with their colleagues, there was a striking similarity in the routes they took through the streets, and encounters along the way or, as in the above excerpt from my field notes, in established locations added to the structure of a shoe vendor’s working day. Different from the way I tried to orient myself by memorising street names while I walked with them, the shoe vendors organised their *mishe*, their tours, by particular locations that were dispersed not only in space, but also in time, and that were associated with certain expectations of encounters, forms of attentiveness, practices and profits. Starting from their *kijiweni*¹, the backyard that was both their workshop and major hang-out spot, a shoe vendor’s *mishe* might lead him to *NMB* and *Mariedo*, past *Posta* and on to *Georgie*’s and *Wizarani*, down to *Magogoni* and back via *Mahakama Kuu*, and so on and so forth. Although these names denoted particular locations, such as a parking lot near the National Microfinance Bank (NMB), the central bus station *Posta* or a college for public servants (*Magogoni*), for the shoe vendors these names constituted not simply a geographical map but an epistemic landscape through which they moved and which they in turn, by moving through it, created. In this epistemic landscape spatial locations were dispersed in time and associated with particular expectations which kind of customers one would meet there and then, with knowledge about which styles of shoes these particular customers most likely would demand, what rhetorical tactics and which corporeal demeanour was most likely to lead to successful sales and, finally, what profits one could expect.

Broadly speaking, the shoe vendors I worked with oriented their work routines by the timing of economic and social life in the inner city. Opening hours of offices, lunch breaks, closing times and rush hours afforded them the best opportunities to encounter well-off

¹ Colloq. Swahili: Hang-out spot, literally „at the little stone“.

customers in certain areas and on particular street corners. The city for them constituted a metronome of external *zeitgebers* (Ballard, et al. 2008: 330-333; Bluedorn 2002: 150) for the organisation of their work routine, and they oriented themselves by this outward grid of time. In that way, attractive vending locations for them were interspersed in time.

Magogoni, for instance, was to be frequented around lunchtime when students were leaving the building, whereas *Mahakama Kuu* was preferable at closing time around 4 p.m., just before rush hour. People crowded around the central bus terminal *Posta* at 4 or 5 p.m., and the *Mariedo* opposite offered a convenient spot to display shoes on the pavement and to lie in wait for customers. From the outward imposition of the *Zeitgebers* a qualitative differentiation immediately arose in that way: Different time frames and locations were associated with qualitatively different expectations and practices. Names such as *Mariedo* in that way constituted much more than merely points of geographical orientation in the city. They were complex spaces of agglomeration in which diverse expectations, forms of experience, knowledge and practices were associated with one another.

Moving along their path from one such space to another, the shoe vendors continually had to change their cognitive and corporeal approach to their social surroundings, according to their understanding of what was required in the different spaces. *NMB*, for example, required heightened attention to one's immediate surrounding. Pedestrians in the inner city liked to evade the dense traffic in the street in front of the National Microfinance Bank by instead walking over the parking lot, where they could relax their attention without being at risk of getting hit by a speeding motorcycle. For a shoe vendor, *NMB* by contrast required him to heighten and focus his attention and to switch from scanning the street and pavement ahead to focusing on the rather restricted area through which he was now drifting; he would turn his head to both sides, look behind himself instead of only ahead; rotate his upper body in the direction of passing ladies so as to present his merchandise head-on; if a passer-by for a split second lingered with her eyes on the shoes in his hands, he would abruptly turn around and walk a few steps alongside her, address her and raise his hands to her eye level, and so on. The cognitive and corporeal tensions built up in such quick encounters mostly were resolved immediately, as most approaches to pedestrians were unsuccessful. The vendor would then stop walking by her side, turn around again and start scanning the oncoming pedestrians for a new opportunity. Circling *NMB* for several minutes meant to focus on a rather confined area in which pedestrians might be susceptible to their

offer. After a couple of rounds over *NMB*, the vendor would move out of that area and back into the street, and accordingly change his walking pace and attentiveness to his surroundings. Other spaces, such as *Magogoni* or *Mahakama Kuu*, were associated with other forms of cognitive and corporeal practices, according to the kinds of passers-by the vendors expected to meet there and their experiences they had made with their tastes, moods and willingness to indulge in a sales pitch.

For the shoe vendors, to enter *kati* meant setting oneself in motion and heightening or lowering one's cognitive and corporeal tension according to what they knew about the areas they moved through. Although the names referred to particular locations that existed prior to the shoe vendors' specific engagement with them, the crucial aspect was the way in which certain expectations, experiences, and practices were synthesised (cf. Löw, et al. 2007: 64) in the shoe vendors' approach to them and thus agglomerated in the specific slang expressions with which they named the landmarks in their epistemic landscape. For the shoe vendors, the spaces thus labelled stood in contrast to other forms of attentiveness and practices that were required while walking from one such space to another. Being *kati* in that way denoted not merely a geographical localisation of the shoe vendor, it denoted a state of mind and physical feeling that changed as one moved through *kati*. Being *kati* was a rhythm.

Significantly, with rhythm I do not mean an ordered temporal sequence that is produced by the repetition of events or practices (cf. Klaeger 2012: 538). Rhythm is not periodicity, but the human experience of periodicity. A regularly ticking clock is not in itself rhythmic, but the rhythm only exists for a listening ear and a human mind that organizes the succession of equal ticks into a temporal form (Langer 1953: 126). What I mean by the term rhythm is not merely an ordered system of quantitative time intervals, but the experience of being pushed and pulled, compressed and decompressed, of building up tension within oneself and subsequently releasing it (Ingold 2007: 197), of the bodily experience of differential expenditures of energy (Lefebvre 2004: 5-18). In that way, the rhythms of *kati* were constituted by the building up of cognitive and corporeal tension when approaching spaces of agglomeration and the relative release of this tension and its substitution by other forms of attentiveness. Only through their active engagement with the rhythms of *kati* did the shoe vendors experience and know where and how the "market" in the streets was.

These experiences were simultaneously synthesised into the qualitatively different expectations associated with the different spaces they moved through (cf. Löw, et al. 2007: 64).

The constitution of the market therefore was a dialectical process: It came into being only through the shoe vendors' active engagement with their social environments, and in turn it shaped the way they engaged with these environments. And in addition, the creation of the market was not an individual, but a social process. The spaces of agglomeration were grounded in individual experiences, but they were established as landmarks in the epistemic landscape through their transformation into metaphorical expressions.

The social creation of the market

By moving through the market, the shoe vendors made diverse cognitive, corporeal and social experiences which they shared with their colleagues during the morning and evening hours, when they gathered at the *kijiweni*. In the morning hours, the shoe vendors would comment on the shoes their colleagues had brought with them from the market to the *kijiweni* by categorising them according to the kind of customers they would appeal to. Shoe then became, for instance, *kibibi*, or *kisista duh*. These categorisations entailed evaluations of the marketability of their colleague's choice, hinted at probabilities which kinds of customers these shoes would appeal to, the profits they could expect and, most crucially, the tactics appropriate to sell them. *Kibibi*, Swahili for "grandmotherly", denoted a shoe of modest style, unadorned and simple, that most likely would appeal to an elderly lady in the streets. Elder customers were known to respond to a vendor's offer only if they really had the intention to buy something. Therefore they were rather forthcoming in sales conversations and would avoid wasting their own and hence the shoe vendor's time, which made selling shoes of the *kibibi*-type attractive to the vendors, who had to manage the limited time of lunch breaks and rush hours to realise their profits. The disadvantage of catering to elder customers, on the other hand, was that they would not pay high prices for simple shoes. Profits in that segment therefore were rather reliable, but low. *Kisista duh*, on the other hand, associated a pair of shoes with young and fashionable girls (colloq. Swahili *sista duh*). Such shoes usually had high heels, fancy materials and dainty ornaments and a shoe vendor would have to buy it at a considerably higher price in the market than he would have to pay for a shoe of the *kibibi* style. But ultimately he would be able to sell it for a high

price in the streets as well, since young and fashionable girls were inclined to pay more for a particularly fanciful shoe than an older lady would. Yet his vending skills would require him to engage eagerly in the sales pitch and to spend more time and energy in convincing his customer than he would have when talking to an elder lady. The shoe vendors knew that younger customers, college students for example, often would stop a passing shoe vendor and look at his offer, try on a couple of pairs of shoes, indulge in lengthy discussions with their fellow student about its looks and its compatibility with her dressing style – but ultimately would rarely really buy a pair. For such customers a sales pitch would offer entertainment during a lunch break. And the shoe vendors knew that with a choice of *kisista duh*-shoes they ran the risk of investing their little money in only a few pairs of expensive shoes they then would have to invest much energy and time to resale during the day.

In a similar way, experiences with particular forms of encounters were categorised and metaphorically marked in the shoe vendors' communication at the *kijiweni*. A shoe vendor might recount to his colleagues how he had bumped into a *mzungu* in the streets, literally a “white” person, and had sold him a shoe for a ridiculously high price. Such a *mzungu*, however, did not necessarily have to be of “white” skin colour, but exhibited the demeanour of a person who is unaccustomed with the art of a sales talk and agreed to the first price the vendor had told him – which usually was far higher than the price the vendor expected his customers to agree to. A different kind of encounter may have been with *chavichavi*, a “hairy caterpillar” that causes awkward itches when one touches it – really meaning the City Police who notoriously hunt street vendors to either arrest them or confiscate their commodities. The usual “remedy” for this itch was to offer them bribes to evade arrest or the loss of one's shoes. Or one might have wasted his time trying to sell his shoes to a *mchawi*, literally a witch, who would embroil the shoe vendor into lengthy sales pitches and elaborate price negotiations – only to eventually lose the interest and move on without further comment, leaving the shoe vendor standing in the streets profitless.

The shoe vendors had created an elaborate jargon that was far more than merely a kind of street-slang that set this sphere of social life apart from, say, the domestic sphere. The terms they used to communicate experiences and evaluations with their colleagues entailed complex forms of knowledge derived from myriad experiences. And, significantly, these terms always involved a practical dimension in that they referred to the appropriate practices with which to approach the named spaces of agglomeration, kinds of customers

and encounters. The market the shoe vendors created through their active involvement with the urban social environment thus was accessible through the metaphorical language they used to classify and evaluate. A new and inexperienced shoe vendor who had just come from his village to learn the business from a relative had to obtain access to the market by picking up the names his shoe vending colleagues had given to different areas in the city, different kinds of commodities and customer. The market thus was the result of an ongoing process of communication and interaction among the shoe vendors that led to the creation of an experiential landscape that organised specific forms of space, time, knowledge, experience, and practice.

The market as an epistemic landscape

Street vending is a culturally creative practice because it creates highly specific understandings of the city that, in turn, inform the practices of street vending. Instead of merely navigating the dynamics of the urban social environment and reacting to emergent situations that occurred, the street vendors rather created points for orientations in this volatile environment that, taken together, constituted the market through which they moved. To understand, categorise and act according to what was going on in the streets of the city was what constituted the market for the street vendors. In that respect, when they moved through the streets of the city, the street vendors walked through an epistemic landscape, through a landscape in which different forms of knowledge were mapped over space and time symbolically by means of the street vendors' jargon.

The market of the street vendors therefore was, in some respect, a "complex and culturally organized information maze", similar to what Clifford Geertz has argued for the Moroccan bazaar of Sefrou (Geertz 1979). And arguably, in any market setting marked by relative non-transparency concerning the quality and appropriate valuation of goods the "[p]roblems involving knowledge, information [...] characterize the process of circulation and exchange itself" (Appadurai 1986: 43). The significant difference between Geertz' Suq of Sefrou and the shoe vendors' *kati* however was the fact that while vendors and customers in Sefrou were looking for information in permanent trading quarters, periodic markets, and established business districts (Geertz 1979: 126), the shoe vendors of Dar es Salaam did not relate to any kind of market system that was spatially set apart from the broader social context and thus "accessible" by entering it physically. Instead, they had to figure out where and when the market was in the first place and then determine what went on "inside" of it.

To do so, they had to actively engage with their social environment, and yet they would never really *find* what they were looking for; rather, they *constructed* the market they were looking for as a unique and dialectic object. This market did not exist as a specific location with a particular social organisation marked off from other locations and spheres of social life, but only as specific forms of perception, experience, knowledge and practice that the vendors created as a kind of unintended consequence of their engagement with that same market. In the usage of the shoe vendors, the proper Swahili word for market (*soko*) always referred to Karume Market. The market on the streets, on the other hand, had many names for them, all of which referred to their active involvement with and movement within it. Taking to the street market was *kuingia kati*, to “go inside”, or it was *kupiga misele*, “hitting the rounds”, or *kuwa kwenye mizunguko*, “being in rotation”. *Kati* or “inside” was therefore a dialectic creation. It only came into being by actively engaging with it. Thus, the metaphors and symbols the shoe vendors used did not *represent* the market but actually denoted the different forms of knowledge, experience, and practice that *constituted* it. They referenced particular forms of active engagement with the inner-city environment through which the market came into existence for the vendors in the first place. Anyone else walking the same streets as the shoe vendors, who did not perceive, classify, and act according to the metaphors and categories the vendors lived and worked by, would not have considered themselves to be “in a market”. For other pedestrians, there really was no market and no “inside”; only the shoe vendors (and, arguably, their street hawking colleagues of other trades) were in the market.

In other words, by classifying encounters, places, times, and commodities, the shoe vendors themselves actually *created the market* itself as an epistemic thing (cf. Knorr Cetina and Bruegger 2000: 145), as an object constituted by specific forms of knowledge to which they related in specific ways, while it remained entirely unknown and non-existent for others who neither had access to these concepts nor were involved in the practices of the vendors in any way. What the shoe vendors did therefore bears a striking resemblance to what Karin Knorr Cetina and Urs Bruegger found in the international financial market they ethnographically analysed on the trading floor of a Swiss bank. As they argue, for the traders sitting in front of the computer displays that constantly fed them the latest information about movements in the market, prices, demand, and so on, the market was not at all an entity or a place “out there” in the “real world” but was constituted as an epistemic thing

precisely in and on the multiple computer screens that confronted them at their work places. Instead of understanding these screens as tools representing deals and activities that were taking place somewhere else in physical space, the researchers argue, for the traders all of these deals and activities actually took place on these screens: “The market composes itself in these produced-and-analysed displays to which traders are attached” (Knorr Cetina and Bruegger 2000: 146). The shoe vendors obviously were not attached to any computer screens, but their relation to the market constituted a dialectic similar to the one that Knorr Cetina and Bruegger described for financial market traders. For the shoe vendors, *kati* was something they themselves created in and through their specific approach to their social environment that was instructed by the conventionalised concepts and practices they themselves continually produced, re-produced, and transformed through their engagement with it.

Conclusion

Practices of shoe vending in the streets of Dar es Salaam are far from arbitrary and even farther from constituting any informal activity in the sense of “lacking form”. Through their practices, the shoe vendors I worked with produced very specific forms of knowledge that synthesised spatio-temporal and experiential-practical aspects into an epistemic landscape by which, in turn, they organised these practices. Significantly, their reference to and active engagement with this matrix constituted a market that for others did not exist. The epistemic landscape of the market organised the vendors’ practical and experiential temporality in that they deduced from past experiences and practices certain patterns of practice that were sedimented into the metaphorical expressions that denoted different aspects of the market. In the temporal dimension, therefore, the pooled forms of knowledge into which the vendors tapped by taking reference to the discourse of what went on “inside” made their future predictable to a certain degree. This predictability was crucial for a vendor, since the social environment in which he conducted his business was complex and continually shifting. By categorising encounters, merchandise, and spaces of agglomeration and by naming the appropriate practices associated with these categories, a vendor could reduce the volatility and ambiguity of the dense inner-city environment and attain a degree of spatio-temporal orientation. Above all, through their joint creation of the market as an epistemic thing the shoe vendors’ sociality attained a degree of stability despite the general unwillingness of individuals to commit substantially to any kind of cooperative group.

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