

# GLOBAL INFORMALITY: BOTTOM-UP TRADE AND TRANSNATIONAL REALIGNMENTS

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The recent period of accelerated globalization and liberalization has seen new forms of informal economic activity that have shifted informality much “closer” to centres of power.<sup>1</sup> This shift involves a two-way dynamics: on the one hand, global flight and migration are being met with urban segregation in Western cities while, on the other, global corporations are persistently extending their market interests into “developing” countries. In different parts of the world informality has become viral and is tied to political agendas in ways that seem to elude the explanatory frameworks offered by prevalent structuralist and legalist approaches. This expanding grey zone of informal economic activities in which an ever increasing number of regions, groups of people and areas of life are becoming involved cannot be explained solely by structural unemployment and income inequality — as the International Labour Organization (ILO) tends to argue — or by the legal barriers that advocates of micro-entrepreneurship argue are necessitating an immersion in informality. From the new ethos of experimental, self-generated enterprise in the Western world to flexible approaches to land-use rights and nation-state affiliation, from financing platforms based on social media to mobile-phone-based microtrade between Asia, Africa and Latin America, we are seeing a spread of technologies that are creating new relationships between spaces, people and cultures. As a result, informal systems have attained a dimension that spans the world, one that encompasses the structuring of social relationships, the configuration of living environments and participation in political and social processes, as well as the generation of individual incomes and cultural production.

Such bottom-up strategies, which emerge wherever the forces of the institutionalized economy are unable to operate directly, indicate not only changes in scale but also changes affecting critical conceptual, institutional and operational levels of what we commonly understand as “economic transactions”. The symptoms of this shift include new citizenship arrangements and the production of a diverse spectrum of migrant subjects as well as the “worlding” practices of neoliberal urbanism, the consequence of which is an accelerated circulation of models, protocols and practices of city-making.<sup>2</sup> With this expandable repertoire, the metropolis is replacing the factory as the primary spatial reference for a globalized production of goods, ideas and values.<sup>3</sup> In this context, urban growth and informal patterns of trade are mutually reinforcing one another. Influential actors in this world-spanning space of informality include new financial institutions in developing economies established

to provide financing for infrastructural development that is not tied to loans from the world's leading economic powers. An example found at the highest level is the New Development Bank set up by the BRICS countries as an alternative to the IMF and the World Bank, which serves an economic area containing almost half of the world's population.

Such applications of informality as a grey area, reserve capacity and infrastructural frontier circulate across different domains and pervade social life with imperatives of informal production such that everything, including the independent-minded realm of the arts, becomes infested with a new kind of "economic thinking" distilled in innumerable "laboratories" that engage an ever-willing audience in their operations. The allurements of informal lifestyles binds existing desire smoothly and inconspicuously to the promise of economic returns. This process is increasingly being steered by remote control rather than direct action: whether in the form of remote diagnoses of violations of commercial agreements, which are used by governments to apply political pressure, state surveillance of immigration areas and border regions using remotely controlled drones, or the current planning rhetoric of urban "acupuncture" in informally settled urban areas. In the context of the neoliberal politics of globalization, the art of controlling informality, as discussed below, consists in maintaining a distance from its "natural" development while selectively siphoning off the returns it can bring.

In an interview with architects Urban-Think Tank (U-TT) a couple of months before they were awarded the prestigious Golden Lion at the Venice Architecture Biennale 2012 for their project *Torre David/Gran Horizonte* about the — now evicted — community that squatted Venezuela's third-tallest but only half-built skyscraper in downtown Caracas,<sup>4</sup> I asked them how they felt about the fact that in recent years a specialized repertoire of spatial practices seemed to have developed that was able to link very different experiential worlds with one another — local populations with urban expertise, the "one-to-one laboratory" of the Global South with the academic sphere. They replied that their own experience had shown them how little will there was for genuine cooperation and that they therefore had no illusions that the relationship between the Global North and South would fundamentally change except as a result of the economic shifts that are now directing our attention to cities like Caracas, São Paulo and Mumbai, in which U-TT and other like-minded actors are aiming to realize the urban experimental field of the twenty-first century.<sup>5</sup> Whether or not we will see some changes in the global world order as a result of economic shifts, it seems to be the very act of spatializing informality as a globally distributed patchwork of unfettered urban frontiers that is driving the spread of contemporary myths of informal entrepreneurship, self-financing and self-employment. Responding to the expansionary practices of capitalist market relations, this spatialization entails systematic and well-placed operations, techniques of interruption and evasion, accumulated protocols and rituals, radical gestures and expressions, coded values and aesthetics. Any attempt to trace the current frontiers of global informality will therefore need to take into account the role in transnational realignments being played by experimentation with entrepreneurial schemes, aesthetic trends, organizational techniques and civic enterprises.

In light of these territorial and conceptual mobilizations, my intention in this essay is threefold: first, to situate urban informality at the intersection of economic, political and cultural vectors that reference a global struggle over the constitution of subjects as citizens; second, to locate informal markets within the manifold ways in which space is produced in relation to new arrangements between state and non-state technologies; and, third, to focus on some of the transnational practices mobilized by different actors to intervene in this fabric. An important reference point in this context is the postcolonial world order and the production of transnational spaces associated with it, spaces characterized by a precisely calculated but apparently boundless mobility of labour power, worldwide data traffic, the uninhibited flow of capital and the proliferation of hybrid lifestyles. These cross-border flows are steered by the economic calculation of "location intelligence", outsourcing and geomarketing, supported by economic and trade agreements, and brought about by labour migration, the flight of business and politically-motivated expulsion. New worlds emerge wherever these flows are bundled — at the numerous nodes of advanced capitalism, where human capacities are combined with physical and intellectual capacities to form hybrid resource agglomeration and massive infrastructural concentrations that facilitate the worldwide dissemination of goods. An important role in the rhythms of these circulations is played by high-growth metropolitan regions, whether classic global cities orientated to the virtual management of financial capital or super-sized urban agglomerations in emerging world regions. These entities all constitute chess pieces in the contest for the best location, newly formatted territories whose particular and capricious logics endeavour to bring state and private stakeholders under control in order to achieve success in the global competition between "city-worlds."

#### Citizenship Arrangements: From Territorialized Rights to Exchange Values

In recent years, these dynamics have brought to the fore a new kind of urban system that has arisen from the multi-directional movements of transnational urban deregulations and realignments: the "extended city" as a cluster of networked sites produced by technology, laws, political pressures, migratory movements, disciplinary measures, and other translocal forces that are acted out locally. These landscapes of "lateralized market power" are not purely an effect of accelerated globalization but a set of situated cultural practices and interactions between particular emergent assemblages.<sup>6</sup> They have become manifest as a range of trans-territorial spatial articulations that fuse multiple politico-economic interests with processes of subject formation. Sites as diverse as special economic zones, informal border markets, squatted building complexes, refugee centres and migrant workers' camps have begun to populate both physical and mental landscapes on a global scale. On a conceptual level, this has highlighted a critical shift in our understanding of notions of mobility, citizenship and land use, which are now seen as interrelated, flexible and contingent practices rather than as defined by administrative or regulatory means. It also demonstrates how new modes of citizenship are being produced at the intersections of international corporate interests, the differentiated exercise of state power and the contingent struggle of citizens themselves, and thereby extending the concept of citizenship beyond the idea of the enjoyment of territorialized rights.

“Before the law all citizens were equal, but not everyone, of course, was a citizen.”<sup>7</sup> — Robert Musil’s concept of the citizen is only applicable in modified form to the strangely unresolved hybridities confronting us today: the “man without qualities” of the twenty-first century is characterized by the question not of whether someone counts as a citizen but of *which components* of citizenship are part of an individually claimable package. The life without qualities can no longer hope for stability especially given the permanent erosion of the prospect of overcoming crisis situations by means of a decisive event. Mobility has become a fundamental constant of globalization and with it the compulsion to be constantly cognizant of the accumulation of strategic values that make one a worthy citizen. A discourse of citizenship has thus taken shape that is almost exclusively orientated to the ability of citizens to contribute to economic growth. Central to this transformation is the destabilization of previously exclusive links between nation-state territories and citizenries in favour of a “contractualization” of citizenship aligned to the *quid pro quo* principles of market relations<sup>8</sup> — economic viability, efficiency requirements, competitive pressures and terms of trade. In the context of the ongoing economic crisis, the way in which labour forces are absorbed into economically successful regions is increasingly orientated to the profit that can be generated with them. The creation of zones governed by various forms of sovereignty, the flexible bestowal of graduated legal titles and the specification of immigrant contingents based on professional qualifications are some of the consequences of this development.<sup>9</sup> A new variant is represented by the immigrant investor programmes (IIPs) being offered by an increasing number of states, which promise wealthy immigrants the accelerated granting of comprehensive citizenship if they are prepared to invest in the national economy.

While this denationalization of citizenship<sup>10</sup> has pushed the spatial parameters of the relationship between nations and citizens formerly clearly marked by respective state borders into the background, the growing symbolic and political significance of entrepreneurial citizens is spatializing new power relations and exchange relationships. In this transformation of economic contexts, space as such has certainly not become dissociated from the construct of citizenship; however, it is generated anew out of this association as a means of flexibly steering populations. In this process, as Saskia Sassen has argued, the tightly packaged and naturalized multi-component “bundle” of citizenship rights is contested, unbundled and “sold off” in a variety of new configurations as appropriate counterparts to different levels of economic status. *One* space of immigration thereby becomes *many* spaces of immigration, meticulously crafted along specific market demands — spaces of low-wage workers, IMF citizens, IIP citizens, Sans Papiers and “paper citizens”<sup>11</sup>. As a consequence, while firms and concerns are accruing ever more citizenship rights, individuals are increasingly being deprived of them.<sup>12</sup>

In light of this development, migrant subjects now exist in a state of multiply graduated legal situations shaped by the character of informal spaces whose elasticity inspires a sense of the possibility of alternative identity projects and forms of social integration beyond the reach of state control, even though the chances of realizing such alternatives are relatively modest. Such “grey spaces”, as Oren Yiftachel calls

interim spaces that are maintained as informal on an ongoing basis, in which the boundaries of acceptance and rejection are deliberately kept blurred, are forming a new political geography in which urban colonial relationships are recoded.<sup>13</sup> Grey spacing, the associated process of producing new social relationships, which involve not only weak and marginalized communities but also powerful state and private actors, creates locally focussed zones of exception characterized by ongoing conflicts over which relationships are desirable, tolerated or criminalized — conflict spaces whose geographical isolation obscures the fact that they are significant indicators of structural relationships unfolding throughout the world.

The postcolonial theorist Achille Mbembe regards one consequence of these dynamics to be an increasing particularization of the conflicts besetting our epoch. The extension of the informalization of the economic sphere across the entire spectrum of our social and cultural realm of imagination, he argues, has led to durable political processes being replaced by a mosaic of individual struggles.<sup>14</sup> The entwinement of the political concerns embodied by trade union federations, associations and other traditional institutions is disappearing, and questions of spontaneous alliance formation and the improvised coordination of interests are taking centre stage. Informal organization in the form of short-lived, direct and unstable agreements is thus coming to constitute a dominant way of life in which work, culture, education and the social are beginning to orientate themselves to global economic interests and their mechanisms to such a degree that the market orientation of social relations Karl Polanyi saw as a corollary of the industrial and bourgeois political revolution<sup>15</sup> becomes an all-encompassing idea.

#### Government Power and the Economy

The ongoing “growth” of the world (population, urbanization, resource use, etc.) has made space one of the most important subjects of the practices of economic instrumentalization. Issues of land use are at the heart of contestations over the informalization of cities. Informal markets, in particular, play a pioneering role in the appropriation of intermediate times and spaces. Of late, enormous influence over informal urbanism has been exercised by means of banking, financialization and fiscalization. Finance economies have become a powerful motor not only of urbanization in gentrified or segregated areas of major cities, but, more generally, of patterns of growth in the metropolitan fabric. In parallel with this development, the institutions of the global financial markets are propagating a planning policy the purported aim of which is to integrate people from the informal sector into formal environments. In this context, informal urbanity is seen as a challenge for the modern city as such. Corresponding policies operate on the basis of the assumption that informality is to be understood as exclusively temporary, as an auxiliary mechanism whose creativity can be drawn on in order to achieve an improved situation. From this perspective, informality represents a space of exception, one that can only be confronted with the aim of introducing a system-compatible transformation that retrospectively legitimizes existing norms and regulations.

An important influence on this interplay of state, population and market is exerted by the connection between government power and the economy that has been established in the course of the development of Western modernity, a link elucidated

in detail by Giorgio Agamben in his book *The Kingdom and the Glory*.<sup>16</sup> Agamben sees this connection as originally deriving from theology, more precisely from the doctrine of the Trinity. While the concept of governmentality developed by Foucault, whose work Agamben partly builds on, focuses above all on fathoming characteristic rationalities of control,<sup>17</sup> Agamben's frame of reference — government and the Christian doctrine of the Trinity — aims to show how the economic orientation of the Christian Trinity served as a laboratory for the formation of the modern Western machinery of government. According to Agamben, the concept of economy denotes a progressive extension of the (divine) sphere of power's application beyond power's own limits — a force that governs and administers from within. In this sense economy is a praxis that applies outside the realm of politics, a praxis that arranges, divides, represents and implements, and with these processes simultaneously establishes the dominant power.

In the context of the flexible positioning of informal markets, Agamben's argument is above all interesting in the sense that the process of secularization he speaks of is not to be understood in a Weberian sense as denoting the increasing demystification and de-theologization of the modern world but rather — as in the case of Foucault — as a signature that moves signs and concepts from one field to another.<sup>18</sup> This mechanism helps us to understand how easy it is to transplant forms of power between differently classified economic arrangements (formal/informal, permitted/unpermitted, etc.) without abrogating the existing pattern of meaning. In this way, economy has become the figure that defines the general principle on which all aspects of our public existence are based. Under its influence, the exercise of power rests on a form of substitution that produces not only a separation between being and praxis, within which many forms of urban informality are generated, but also a displacement of classical ontology (i.e. an original, substantive core of power) by an *economic* paradigm in which nothing is original apart from the relationship between power and government. As a consequence there is, as Agamben writes, “no substance of power, but only an ‘economy,’ only a ‘government.’”<sup>19</sup>

Just as government invokes the power for which it deputizes, this power draws its validity from the execution of a substitutive praxis. Making this possible requires a complex coherence between the coordination and simultaneous fracture of being and acting<sup>20</sup> in which praxis in a certain sense becomes liberated and anarchic because it does not operate *according to instructions* but merely *within the framework* of the economy. Free action in the sense of self-determined praxis and free trade in the sense of the unrestricted movement of goods are in this sense not substantively but nevertheless economically controlled. An important role in this control is played by the political space of the border and its confrontation with the economically orientated regulation of transnational space.<sup>21</sup> Many informal markets forge cross-border economies that form crucial corridors for transnational undertakings, made up of the activities, people and goods that circulate within them while also functioning as a means of exerting influence on impenetrable territories. These illicit economies accommodate a multi-level network of “operators”, “intermediaries” and “marketeers” who provide the spatial and political context for access to and control of hitherto untapped markets.

A particularly instructive example of this phenomenon is presented by informal markets in North Korea. Since the beginning of the present century, black markets have been emerging there, especially in Pyongyang and in the northern provinces close to China, where goods are smuggled over the border. In their reports, a range of Western think-tanks, including the Peterson Institute for International Economics in Washington, celebrate groups of people conducting illegal informal street trade in North Korea as “little revolutionaries”, although similar activities in countries such as Paraguay, Mexico and China are condemned as “criminal”. These different assessments of informal marketplaces have less to do with the number or gravity of legal violations than with the strategic-political and economic interests in a particular region. In the case of North Korea, as the Peterson Institute for International Economics writes, there is an interest in transforming the political-economic system of North Korea through the influence of external actors, and, in the longer term, in possibilities for the development of external economic relations with the USA.<sup>22</sup> The hopes being placed in such a development therefore require locally acting “grass-roots capitalists” who are prepared to take risks and who, as the driving force of this burgeoning “second economy”, are prepared to embrace ongoing political changes and manage this developing market informally (or, put another way, “anarchically”).

When in November 2009 the North Korean government radically devalued the official state currency in order to undermine informal markets and the infrastructure associated with them (private snack food stands, taverns, sewing rooms, financial services, etc.), the result was in fact an acceleration of informal economic development. Despite the government's intense efforts, these markets proved resistant to monetary intervention, above all because many people had already begun trading using foreign currencies instead of pricing their goods and services in the national currency. Ironically, it were actually the internationally well-networked traders who profited most from this government campaign, while law-abiding citizens, who had no access to large sums of foreign currency, bore the real burden of these measures. According to constantly updated U.S. military reports, informal markets in North Korea have in the meantime developed into an extremely sophisticated and complex network. This underground structure plays such an important role in the everyday lives of people in North Korea that it has become a source of important information about the changing political situation in the country.<sup>23</sup> Access to this dense web of political and socioeconomic relationships is therefore seen by decision-makers in the USA as a central mechanism of endeavours to gain political and economic influence.

This example illustrates the complex enmeshment of informal marketplaces with the lives of millions of people. One element of this complexity is the development of a specific type of knowledge as the result of engagement in informal trade. The appropriation of this knowledge is in turn part of a political mechanism that probes informal marketplaces in order to identify possibilities for the reconfiguration of global relationships. In the case of North Korea, different processes are contributing to this enterprise. These include direct investigations commissioned by governments, analyses of reports by defectors, think-tank operations as well as scholarly conferences such as the one held in 2011 by the American Institute of Peace in Washington, which was devoted to the question of how informal markets in North Korea could

expand and what role new technologies, particularly mobile telephony, could play in extending the scope of activities of informal markets in North Korea in terms of both type and scale.<sup>24</sup>

All these enterprises point to the fact that this perspective on informal markets is not concerned with legality or illegality per se. It is also not motivated by the goal of improving a certain type of economic praxis or eliminating injustice. And it is certainly not concerned with recognizing the economic efforts made by the local population in a disadvantaged region in order to ensure their survival. Strategic efforts to gain access to informal markets from outside are tied to the exercise of power in the form of an economy. This kind of access entails what Agamben calls the division between a “general” and a “particular” economy, the split between intellectual knowledge and praxis, eternity and temporality, remote authority and governmental action.<sup>25</sup> Put another way, state interventions in informal markets are orientated to a dual form of economy: on the one hand, to a “general” economy from the perspective of which trade operating outside conventions is regarded as a breach of law, and, on the other, to a “particular” economy for which the extraneous represents a space of expansion that can be annexed by substitutive forces. This distinction forms the basis on which power is unfolded and exercised from a distance. Commenting on the apparent contradictoriness of the hegemonic logic of the Western world that rests on this distinction, Agamben writes:

Independently of whether what is at stake is the breakup of pre-existing constitutional forms or the imposition, through military occupation, of so-called democratic constitutional models upon peoples for whom these models turn out to be unworkable, the basic point is that a country — and even the entire world — is being governed by remaining completely extraneous to it.<sup>26</sup>

The introduction of this dual economy into political praxis and the “collateral effects” produced by the economic paradigm are well illustrated in the case of North Korea’s “second economy” by a YouTube clip posted in 2011. The video features a pizza restaurant in Pyongyang serving cans of Coca Cola to a group of international guests. This pictorial “evidence” of a Western presence in North Korea appeared to confirm rumours that the soft-drink concern was already doing business with the communist country. However, because such a step would contravene current U.S. laws and economic regulations, Coca Cola had to deny the rumours reported by many media outlets. On the other hand, in order to avoid completely denying the existence of a potential market for soft drinks in North Korea, local black marketers were deemed responsible for illegally bringing the product into the country.

When it comes to steering public attention towards the incidence of economic “violations”, North Korea is certainly not an isolated case. Providing an overview of such infringements is the aim of the so-called “Special 301 Reports” prepared annually by the Office of the United States Trade Representative under Section 301 of the U.S. Trade Act of 1974. These annual reports contain meticulous descriptions of physical marketplaces referred to as “notorious” because they reputedly violate the intellectual property rights of US companies or citizens. This annually performed assessment of selected informal marketplaces as “notorious markets” follows a predictable pattern,

which centres on corporate interests and is driven by a combined effort of industry sponsored research and state institutions. While informal markets in growth regions such as the tri-border area linking Paraguay, Argentina and Bolivia, and Bangkok’s “red zones” regularly appear on the list of “notorious markets”,<sup>27</sup> no attention is paid to the equally notorious underground markets in Cuba and North Korea.

This praxis involving political instruments such as the Special 301 Report clearly illustrates the construction of informal markets as a territory under observation, the assessment of which takes place remotely and in more controllable spaces such as the offices of the United States Trade Representative in Washington, where each year a public session draws on evidence that has been collected and comprehensive witness interviews to determine which countries should be listed as offenders. Such accessing of informal markets in legal-political terms is opening up a transnational arena for activities by means of which informal business can be seamlessly linked to political speculation and strategies. In this way, the policies of the world’s leading power are able to exert a direct influence on the structure of the many local publics connected with informal market trading. Every incident noted in the country descriptions contained in the Special 301 Report becomes an individual conflict with the ever vigilant “world authority”. As a result, a report that officially has only a recommendatory status has become one of the politically most influential instruments used to steer hundreds of nodal points of informal trade and to model the dependence of many thousands of people whose existences are inseparably bound up with these markets.

#### Worlding Practices: The Counterpublics of Informal Markets

A decisive requirement for the informal economic instrumentalization of global relationships is the availability of spontaneously structurable and easily accessible spaces in which material and social capital is exchanged and a transfer of values can take place. Neither integrated nor eliminated, these spaces represent not merely defenceless peripheries but also sites at which new mobilizations and innovative tactics of resistance emerge to combat contempt, expulsion and the withdrawal of citizenship rights. In these zones of intersection between globally effective (de) regulations and locally emerging bottom-up processes, informal markets assume a special place. They are at once delinquent space, application zone and production facility. The way informal markets “become world” is orientated not to a universally applicable doctrine of world-making — to global branding, product placement, marketing and endorsement — but to the reciprocal influence of different forces that rub against one another and generate new and various forms of change when they come into contact. As AbdouMaliq Simone writes, these erratic movements constitute a way of urbanizing relationships by foregrounding “the dynamic that is created when different histories and logics of urban operation are allowed to work. This bouncing off things is movement, and it is a rough-and-tumble game, and not the smooth fantasies of easy circulation where everything blends and moves on.”<sup>28</sup>

The informal market lives from a plurality of possibilities, which different actors can access to different degrees. It relies not on uniform expectations, logics and mechanisms but rather on situational needs, initiatives and opportunities. In this way, informal

markets illustrate how little a single concept can determine the make-up of urban worlds, irrespective of how seductive the promises inherent in commercial images of modern urban lifestyles are. The capacity of informality to embrace a multiplicity of structural connectivities and the reciprocity of possibilities of exerting influence anchored in real-life conditions opens up an ethical perspective on global interaction that Rosi Braidotti has termed “becoming-world”<sup>29</sup> — a renunciation of moral and cognitive universalisms in the conception of world in favour of a process-orientated perspective in which the multiple relationships and uniqueness of every subject is seen as a building block of complex world structures. These transactions, which are sustained by an urge for change, and the geographies traced by them are, as Aihwa Ong has argued, “experiments with the future” situated in everyday life, spatializing and signifying gestures that create alternative “worlds” — different forms of being global.<sup>30</sup> The ambition of “worlding” practices orientated to alternative configurations renders informal marketplaces and the agglomerations emerging around an important arena for insights into global transformations but also a setting and target of different “worlding” projects.

While this raises the prospect of inscribing anew and transforming prevailing power relations, it has to be remembered that prevailing power and representational interests are also always involved in every new inscription. The idea that informal trade takes place on “empty ground” is at best a naïve one but also one that is often instrumentally deployed as a means of “worlding” that, as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak has argued, masks the privileging of First-World perspectives that inscribing oneself on a supposedly unscripted territory entails. “Worlding” in this sense denotes the way in which colonized space is brought into the world in the form of narratives, policies and representations, “the reinscription of a cartography that must (re)present itself as impeccable.”<sup>31</sup> It follows that precisely those regions in whose economic dependence the influence of the colonial past is deeply inscribed repeatedly stand out as arenas of a frontier mentality that regards informal markets as an “undiscovered” space in need of more precise knowledge and description because it is ultimately of interest as an emerging market. Informal market worlds are in this sense the locus and expression of a struggle between one’s own and other interests, historical and contemporary influences, and globally and locally determined forms of exchange.

In the face of this type of “economic instrumentalization” of informal markets, what possibilities are available for the creation and cultivation of self-determined transnational spaces? Decisive for these sites of congregation is the supra-individual character of the efforts made to shape market environments in which trustworthiness, security and solidarity are paramount principles. This development is often founded on a close interweaving of economic and social interests. Based on a common struggle to survive and a shared historical experience, numerous informal markets are so tied to the existing social fabric of the areas in which they operate that their trading activities cannot be separated from other aspects of daily life. One example of this phenomenon is Tepito in Mexico City, a centrally located neighbourhood that emerged from structures of self-organized trade at the beginning of the twentieth century in the wake of the Mexican Revolution. Informal production, trade and retail continue to constitute an important aspect of community life and class

consciousness within this quarter, although or precisely because the traded goods are often counterfeit articles, pirate copies and recycled products. In the U.S. Trade Representative’s “out-of-cycle review of notorious markets” Tepito is consequently classed as a central storage and distribution node for illegal products destined for numerous other markets throughout Mexico.<sup>32</sup>

However, it is precisely this collectively practised way of dealing with *originals* — the appropriation of forms of cultural capital such as music CDs and feature-film DVDs — that constitutes a source of pride for the residents and traders of Tepito. They are part of a dense social fabric that has developed here around work and culture that locals have collectively taken into their own hands, both in spite of and because of the hostility they experience from the system of norms and values imposed by the global economy. This makes Tepito more than just a marketplace whose informality is an expression of collective self-determination and political resistance. It is also a place where all this is structured into its public facilities, institutions, rituals, forms of behaviour and relational patterns — resulting in what can be described as a counterpublic.<sup>33</sup> Sites such as the local Centre for Tepito Studies play an important role in shaping this counterpublic by offering institutional support, helping to explain political and economic contexts and thereby ensuring orientation within the fleeting world of informal trade over the longer term. In a similar way, art and literature contribute to the cultivation of an expanded perspective on local informality, for Tepito is also known for its many self-initiated literature circles, newspapers and galleries that engage creatively with the everyday culture of the neighbourhood and have in the process developed their own forms of artistic expression. This public-orientated and at the same time extra-economic engagement not only forms a focus within the emergence of the complexly structured reality regime of informal markets but also creates a level of negotiation that can be utilized in cases of conflict between traders and government authorities.

Such extra-economic processes also play a role in the generation of a level of communication between market traders. Radio stations are often found at informal markets with interactive programming that provides news about what is happening in the market as well as a mouthpiece for people involved in the market’s operation. By such means, alliances can be built and the different interests involved in the market can find a public form of expression without triggering an escalation of latent conflicts. Along with the organization of such public services, the competence of collective self-organization on informal markets is also expressed in enterprises that include the establishment of communally used infrastructure such as sanitary facilities, water supply, electricity connections and street lighting. Not all markets are equally well equipped in this respect, but community facilities in which information is exchanged, techniques are learned and advice is acquired are found at many markets that have existed over a longer time. Trade union premises and improvised venues for religious assemblies are just as often part of this repertoire in larger market areas as are special spaces for gatherings of women, young people and other groups.

The constant threat to informal markets from business associations, local authorities, private investors and the real-estate industry is consequently also experienced as a threat to self-created niches in which autonomous communities are able to form.

In order to guard against these dangers, numerous local organizations have been established that lobby for the continued existence, protection and infrastructural improvement of informal markets. At the national level there are also organizations in many countries that not only regulate disputes between individual market actors and lobby for the social recognition of informal markets but also present concrete proposals to governments on how informal street trade can be better integrated into the use of public space. Associations such as the Kenya National Alliance of Street Vendors and Informal Traders (KENASVIT), the National Alliance of Street Vendors of India (NASVI) and the National Federation of Korean Street Vendors (NFKSV) work together with authorities and government representatives to formulate, among other things, guidelines for cultivating a better dialogue between informal markets, street traders and other urban actors. A genuinely transnational level of action has only emerged very recently with the founding of international organizations that, as umbrella associations, are able to influence other bodies such as the ILO and international trade unions. For instance, the StreetNet International alliance, which was founded in South Africa in 2002, comprises dozens of member organizations, most of which are based in African, Asian and Latin American countries.<sup>54</sup>

One of the central concerns of StreetNet International is the implementation of the *Bellagio International Declaration of Street Vendors*, which was drawn up in Italy in 1995 at a meeting of street vendor organizations, activists, lawyers and researchers from 11 countries. A key focus of the declaration is the development of national strategies to protect and strengthen the rights of street traders. These strategies should improve the legal status of vendors, ensure their access to urban space, increase the level of consideration given to informal trade in urban development planning and, not least, develop adequate mechanisms for ensuring that street vendors are included as equal partners in discussions about claims to the use of public space with other public agents (governments, administrative authorities, NGOs, police, etc.). In terms of its tone and content, the street vendors' declaration formulated in Bellagio is aimed at state and city government forces. However, it also seeks to contribute to the generation of a public in order to expose deficits of prevailing policies pertaining to legality and to lend weight to the concerns of street vendors. Thus, while the direct addressees of the declaration are state actors and the international policies connected to them, the statements contained therein are also addressed to social actors whose attitudes, relationships and actions have decisive implications for the genesis of transnational publics: social networks and movements, NGOs and similar associations as well as numerous other platforms of engagement by civil society that are increasingly structuring the transnational space. A declaration of this type is thus both an appeal directed at political decision-makers (i.e. elected representatives of the public) and a constitution of publicness wrought by the declaration itself. As such, the *Bellagio International Declaration of Street Vendors* sets its sights not only on the articulation of political demands but also on the formation of a public sphere in which these demands are supported and implemented. Aspects raised for discussion in this process include relationship structures, spatial configurations and transnational trajectories of different kinds of informal trade as well as their relationship to other economic models, whether

these be solidarity economies, gift economies, resource-based economies or economic experiments in the context of artistic and cultural production.

All these facets of the struggle around spaces for political action make it clear that the development of alternative economic alliances in the shadow of the global economy is not a uniform movement but a process that is being driven forward by many actors, both hegemonic and non-hegemonic. Insofar as the interplay between economic interest groups and local informants, governmental forces, juridical authorities and media reports exerts an influence on our concepts of socially useful production, legitimate goods traffic and honest commercial behaviour, dissident ideational worlds and alternative political spaces can also develop in the transnational collaboration of street vendors with trade unions, activists, researchers and many other groups that are part of a global pursuit of social and economic justice. International conferences, education circles, demonstrations, cultural and artistic production<sup>55</sup> number among the many ways in which these intertwinements are currently taking form.

This dynamic is being accompanied by decisive changes in the paradigms, reach and conditions of economic power. One of the most important experiences engendered in this context is that of the increasing economic instrumentalization and unassailable negotiability of relationships on every level. In this particular economy, everything is put into circulation: people, policies, principles. The quest for economic power furthers a kind of informal politics in which all market constituents are subjected to situation-based modification: from market-driven political discourse to the flexibilization of citizenship as a means of managing the mobility of people to the fragmentation and commodification of life itself. A skilful handling of indeterminacy becomes key to success in these regimes of infinitely adaptable interests. The seizure of opportunities momentarily up for grabs forms an endlessly malleable fabric in the fashioning of transient arrangements that influence the form, diffusion and distribution of social interaction. Informal markets are a ubiquitous expression of these dynamics. Their everyday realities yield a plethora of creative ways of making use of whatever resource they can get hold of that is potentially tradable. Yet, despite, or because of, their embracing of a market mentality, informal markets are drawn into fierce struggles around their *raison d'être*. From local issues to international diplomacy, a broad range of fronts link up to oppose and dissolve attempts to establish such bottom-up economic relationships. Informal markets may not produce an alternative political economy all by themselves, but it is precisely through their contested existence that they point to the necessity of such a political economy.

- 1 For a detailed description of this development in the context of Latin American, Southeast Asian and Middle Eastern countries see, for example, Nezar AlSayyad, "Urban Informality as a 'New' Way of Life," *Urban Informality*, ed. Ananya Roy and Nezar AlSayyad (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2004), 7–30.
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- 10 Saskia Sassen, "Towards Post-National and Denationalized Citizenship," in *Handbook of Citizenship Studies*, ed. Engin F. Isin and Bryan S. Turner (London: Sage, 2002), 277–291.
- 11 Kamal Sadiq, *Paper Citizens: How Illegal Immigrants Acquire Citizenship in Developing Countries* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).
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- 14 Achille Mbembe, "Sovereignty as a Form of Expenditure," in *Sovereign Bodies: Citizens, Migrants, and States in a Postcolonial World*, ed. Thomas Blom Hansen and Finn Stepputat (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 153–154.
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- 16 Giorgio Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory: For a Theological Genealogy of Economy and Government — Homo Sacer 11.2* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011).
- 17 Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1977–1978* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009) and *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978–1979* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).
- 18 Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Pantheon, 1970), 24–29.
- 19 Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, 139.
- 20 *Ibid.*, 66.
- 21 For a more extensive analysis of informal cross-border economies, see also the introductory text to the section 'Border Markets' in the sister volume of this publication, the *Informal Market Worlds Atlas*, 132–135.
- 22 Stephan Haggard and Marcus Noland, *Witness to Transformation: Refugee Insights into North Korea* (Washington, DC: Peterson Institute for International Economics, 2011), 125.
- 23 Andrew Chack, John V. Farr and James H. Schreiner, "A Systems Perspective of Foreign Intervention with Regards to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea," White Paper 2012-1 (West Point, NY: Center for Nation Reconstruction and Capacity Development, United States Military Academy, June 2012) 14.
- 24 Informal Markets and Peacebuilding in North Korea, international conference organized by the Institute of Peace, Washington, 19 July 2011.
- 25 Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, 141.
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- 27 See the section "'Notorious' Markets" in the sister volume of this publication, the *Informal Market Worlds Atlas*, 24–91.
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- 29 Rosi Braidotti, "Becoming-world," in *After Cosmopolitanism*, ed. Rosi Braidotti, Patrick Hanafin and Bolette B. Blaagaard (London and New York: Routledge, 2013), 8–27.
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- 31 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason. Towards a History of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 228.
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# FIELDS OF INCLUSION: NOTES ON TRADITIONAL MARKETS IN JAKARTA

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## Selling and Buying in the Interstices of the City

The night street produce and meat market at Kebayoran Lama in Jakarta is one of the world's largest, with over 1,000 stalls scattered across the streets and lanes that radiate from the "official" market. This site, perhaps more than any other, embodies the capacity of the poor, the working class, and the "barely" middle class — still the majority of the 14 million people who live in Jakarta and its immediate suburbs — to viably reside there. This is a city that exists on small margins and incremental accumulations, always with the exigency to keep costs down. This is a city where hundreds of thousands of residents exist selling and preparing food.

As such Kebayoran Lama is a site of various temporalities. Premium produce is circulated in just-in-time circuits of delivery to local markets, as various gradations of freshness and quality assume different positions downstream. Thousands of truckers, porters, cleaners, sellers, and brokers have long rehearsed the intricate choreographies and financial transactions necessary to convert this four-square-kilometre area into a vast nocturnal trading floor, with its array of locational advantages, costs, spatial arrangements, words of mouth consumption, and networks of supply and distribution. There can be few mistakes and contestations, few grand manoeuvres for competitive advantage, as a vast number of livelihoods rely upon the market's seemingly seamless performances.

At six in the morning, there are very few traces that this trading floor ever existed. As such, it is one of the few major operations that works in a city that otherwise appears enmeshed in congestion, confounding rules and regulations, and widening class segregation. It is a city desperately in need of efficiencies, planning, and rational land disposition, but also where the confusions and the mess become important guarantees of the city's plurality.

The diversity of markets in Jakarta thus reflects various forms of social heterogeneity — its fault lines, segregations, mixtures, and spatial realignments. Processes of making, selling, discarding, servicing and dissimulating all intersect in various proportions according to a wide range of official and unofficial regulatory mechanisms, spatial and social complexions, and varied sense of economic efficacy. This discussion will look primarily at the operations of two markets, Pasar Tomboka and Pasar Jatinegara. It does so in order to highlight their capacities to generate particular singularities and relational fields, which in turn serve as important mechanisms for intensifying an experience of *cityness* in trajectories of urbanization that would seem