agency of the oppressed is either celebrated for its capacity to resist or seen to reproduce marginality. The emphasis on resistance, defiance and protest, he argues, limits our capacity to understand resistance as something more ambiguous and limited, such as the everyday practice of maintaining self-worth and respect in the face of sustained marginality. It also perpetuates a conception of history as a series of events that happen *to* people rather than something people *make* within the powerful constraints they operate within.

The book does not use E. P. Thompson's work directly, but Di Nunzio's argument echoes Thompson's challenge to scholars who treat history as a 'process with no subject'.[3] Thompson's frame of 'making' sought to capture the interplay between conditioning and agency. He also prioritized lived experience in accounts of social and historical formations, conceptualizing lived experience as the mediating element between making the world, on the one hand, and being made by the world, on the other. Yet, despite Di Nunzio making the case for viewing everyday acts of living as central to the 'imagination of the political' (p. 224) and an 'important and often unaccounted part of making history' (p. 4), the book is vague on how ordinary people's attempts to transcend their constraints shape political imaginaries or impact historical processes. How does 'the act of living' not only refashion ways of being in the world but shape forms of political life? Why does the individual quest to 'live otherwise' not constitute a collective claim to distribution? In what ways does the 'embrace of uncertainty' undermine the articulation of a political claim to redistribution?

Di Nunzio's insightful analysis of the way in which the project of domination is contingent upon people's everyday acts of living is crucial for beginning to imagine the world 'otherwise'. Yet the book's focus on individuals rather than (collective) experiences and (class) consciousness begs the question: in the absence of social expectation and a sense of entitlement, what social forces are required to bring about the 'politics of redistribution' (p. 225) the book calls for?

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Caught in The Act of Living*: socialities, history and positionality in an ethnography of Addis Ababa's street life – a response*

How do we narrate the complex entanglement of hustling, development, marginality and existence? Does engaging with the street economy make street hustlers co-producers of their condition of marginality, locked in by their networks and modes of action? Or is this engagement a challenge to their marginality? While writing *The Act of Living*, I was determined to go beyond these two potential explanations to make sense of how men who are engaged in Addis Ababa's street economy seek to be something other than the constraints of their oppression, albeit from within a condition of marginality and exclusion. My key concern was to situate ethnography and theory, and accounts of Ethiopia's growth, within an appreciation of that tension. This tension remains fundamentally unresolved, yet is a fertile terrain for the elaboration of existential and moral concerns about open-endedness, respect, chance, the self and the future.

[3]Thompson, E. P. (1963) *The Making of the English Working Class*. London: Gollancz.

I wholeheartedly thank the reviewers for their important questions on making sense of this tension, in particular the relation between solidarity and economies of prestige on the streets (Beuving), the interaction between individuals and collectives in shaping history and the political (Dawson), and the positionalities from which we appreciate the unfolding of lived experience (Howard).

The street economy of hustling and getting by is a place where this tension unfolds. Beuving argues that the book falls short of making sense of how hustling produces hierarchies of prestige, and of the kinds of solidarities that encompass the trajectories of individual street hustlers. I politely disagree with this assessment and argue that 'prestige' and 'solidarity' are fragile realizations on the streets. In the specific case Beuving refers to, the book shows that tourist guides acted as if Prof John was worthy of respect because they could make money out of his pretentions to prestige. Similarly, the solidarity that emerged in street conflicts was grounded in recognition that both parties engaged in hustling and cheating for the same reason: to get by. This was not just a tacit understanding: my interlocutors in the book called this thug realism *bammilo*, meaning 'yes, I know it is not good, but I am doing this for a living'.

On another scale, the economies of the street are not a bounded reality, as Beuving perhaps unintentionally seems to suggest. Socialities, solidarities and economies are deeply affected by the ways in which street hustlers engage with other segments of the urban economy and how other actors, including government officials, interact with the street economy. Recognizing this entanglement means appreciating how geographies of inequality produce disconnections between the terrains of the urban economy. As the book shows, there is a fundamental discontinuity between the economies of street hustling and the sources of wealth accumulation in Addis Ababa. As witnesses to this fundamental discontinuity, the discourses of hustlers were not only a language about and within the streets (Chapters 1, 2, 5 and 6), but a way of making sense of the radical incommensurability between official visions of Ethiopia's economic growth and their own experience of exclusion and marginality (Chapters 3, 4 and 7).

It is from this vantage point that the book narrates acts of living. I agree with Howard that the book could have been written from a myriad of perspectives – in particular those of women. I could have tried to break the gendered boundaries of sociality and sociability on the streets in which I found myself carrying out my research. Yet I did not. Partly, this was in recognition of the many accounts that could be and, more importantly, have been written about poverty and exclusion in urban Ethiopia, and on women's experiences of exclusion, such as Laketch Dirasse's sociological work[4] and Bethlehem Tekola's excellent account on sex workers.[5] I carried out my research aware that my account would inevitably be a partial one, and a complement to the accounts of other scholars.

My decision to restrict the field of research is also about recognizing that a scholarly demand to represent realities in their totality is not only epistemologically but also ethically problematic. Over my ten years returning to the streets of Addis Ababa, I was invited to join in the lives and struggles of my interlocutors, but as a friend, not a researcher. As I say in the book, what I included and what I did not was affected by my positionality. The partial reality our narrations seek

[4]Dirasse, L. (1992) *The Commoditization of the Female Sexuality: prostitution and socio-economic relations in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia*. New York NY: AMS Press.

[5]Tekola, B. (2005) *Poverty and the Social Context of Sex Work in Addis Ababa: an anthropological perspective*. Addis Ababa: Forum for Social Studies.

to represent is not just a refusal of epistemological objectivity, but an attempt to tune our research practice through an ethics of care, trust and respect.

The reviewers argue that the message of the book may be undermined by its focus on the lives of just a few people. I politely disagree. My ethnographic appreciation of the act of living is contingent on a particular place – Addis Ababa – and time – the decade of 'Africa rising' – and is specific to two lives, with their particularities of gender, location and upbringing. These specificities characterize my examination of living, not as an undifferentiated and generic description of human existence, but as the narration of one of the many ways of experiencing the tension between becoming and history, action and contingency. Yet, as Hannah Arendt puts it,[6] the uniqueness of a story tells of the infinite potentialities of living. Even while unique, existence unfolds in places, times and modes of being in the world that are shared and resonate with the experiences of others. The book is about Haile and Ibrahim, as much as the urban society – the street life – they were part of.

By exploring the historical making of urban constituencies, and the ways in which individuals engage with it, we can capture that complex entanglement between subjectivities and the political that are silenced as irrelevant by the 'collective' visions of the necessary and inevitable that pervade contemporary development discourses. In response to Dawson's powerful observation, I would say that the book is a challenge and invitation to rethink our imaginations of the political from the streets, as not just a location 'below', but a site of tensions, claims and demands. With Fanon, the book seeks to capture the painful struggle of my interlocutors' willingness to accept 'the possibility of the impossible'[7] as they sought to be something other than their constraints, while living an existence framed by oppression. As I discuss in the conclusion, this struggle generated claims and demands. Over my ten years researching the streets of inner-city Addis Ababa, I witnessed Haile and Ibrahim and others express claims to NGOs and government institutions that remained unaddressed – from giving money to each member of the parking guy cooperatives to launching individual ventures in the 'informal economy', to replacing doomed life-skill training programmes with employment-oriented initiatives focused on cooking or driving. All their claims were cast aside as 'impossible' or 'irrelevant'. The contention of this book is that we should not make the same mistakes as government and NGO officials by silencing or, worse, failing to recognize the importance of these demands.

Besides, the search for 'the possibility of the impossible' not only encompasses the individual but shapes history as a shared experience. Dawson's point on the conceptualization of history is key here. The book questions the ways in which the history of the excluded has been narrated in urban Africa, often written by focusing on only those moments when the poor erupt into the spotlight of 'mainstream history'. Instead, I contend that we need to look at the ordinary, both as situated in history and as affecting the unfolding of history. The succession of generations of young men engaging in the street economy made history, creating an urban constituency that made projects of control and development rarely final or fully successful, but always in need of being constantly reiterated, reworked and, often, violently enforced.

Such an understanding of history can help reshape the politics of writing and ethnography. This book has been inspired by Butler's calls for a politics of

[6]Arendt, H. (1958) *The Human Condition*. Chicago IL: University of Chicago Press.
[7]Fanon, F. (1952) *Black Skin, White Masks*. New York NY: Grove Press, p. 170.

responsiveness,[8] one that would imply questioning the long-held idea that the main objectives of social policy are to change poor people's minds, penalize the unworthy and lazy, and help the deserving poor help themselves out of poverty. I agree with Dawson that while the book calls for a policy of redistribution it does not provide a clear outline of what such a policy might be. *The Act of Living* is instead a plea for shifting the ways in which we think about poverty and exclusion: the first step towards a conversation about inequalities and potential policies of redistribution.

As such, I would disagree with Beuving's use of words such as 'underclass'. The words we use matter, especially if they reinforce criminalizing and stigmatizing narratives of poverty and exclusion. More broadly, *The Act of Living* is a critique of standardized modes of interpretation that tend to find that the marginalized reproduce their condition of marginality through their own actions and even resistance. These narratives wittingly or unwittingly reinforce stigmatizing narratives, while falling short of making sense of the struggles of the marginalized.

If the book has a message, it is an invitation to drop established analytical tropes that straightjacket the experiences of our interlocutors into presumed oppositions between competition and solidarity, agency and structure, resistance and social reproduction, the individual and the collective, the ordinary and the political. It is by seeking to make sense of the ambiguities and tensions, *in their own terms* and as they persist unresolved, that we can make sense of those complex entanglements of existence, politics, morality and history that encompass the lived experience.

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doi:10.1017/S000197202000090X

Mary Njeri Kinyanjui, *African Markets and the Utu-ubuntu Business Model: a perspective on economic informality in Nairobi*. Cape Town: African Minds (pb R250 – 978 1 928331 78 0). 2019, 200 pp.

Mary Njeri Kinyanjui's book makes a convincing argument against the kind of top-down urban planning that disregards the lived realities of urban residents in Africa. As she describes for Nairobi, Kenya, Western notions of urbanity have been transplanted to the African continent since colonial times and today are often advocated by political elites and urban planners. Through the eyes of Western-educated urban theorists, Kinyanjui argues, the living conditions and business practices of many residents in African cities appear as creating deviant or unformed versions of 'proper' urban development. The author opposes this view by arguing that urban citizens have created sustainable and functioning networks, institutions and rules that represent an 'authentically African process of urban formation' (p. 50). According to the author, self-organized work in market places and among artisans follows an 'African logic' of solidarity and community that is opposed to Western capitalism's ideology of individualism and the 'survival of the fittest'. This logic is what the term '*utu-ubuntu*' in the book's title summarizes.

[8]Butler, J. and A. Athanasiou (2013) *Dispossession: the performative in the political*. Cambridge: Polity Press.