

INFORMAL LABOR IN THE GLOBAL ECONOMY

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COURSE OVERVIEW

Improving the political power and material conditions of informal workers, the invisible majority of the global workforce, is arguably the most pressing challenge facing the global labor movement today. Once seen as a transitory phenomenon soon to be erased by economic development, the informal economy today employs most workers in developing countries and increasing numbers in industrialized countries as well. Women, people of color, and immigrants are overrepresented in informal jobs, which are not regulated by the state, and are often characterized by low incomes and grueling conditions. Labor scholars and unionists have long dismissed informal workers as too weak and fragmented to collectively contest and reshape policies that impact their lives. Nonetheless, over the past quarter century, millions of informal workers—such as domestic workers, street vendors, and waste pickers—have begun collectively organizing on the local, national, and transnational levels. What are the origins, dynamics, and outcomes of this unexpected upsurge of mobilization among the world's most vulnerable workers? And what forms of collective organization and policy are most likely to improve the livelihoods of informal workers?

Organized informal workers and their allies typically frame their demands in essentializing discourses, as if an unequivocal set of best practices for improving labor standards existed. Yet the reimagining of formal work as “decent work” is an immensely creative, contested, and contradictory project, which may favor some worker groups over others or lead to perverse outcomes. Policy interventions aimed at improving informal work are often implicitly or explicitly informed by three schools of theory, which we will analyze in the first portion of this seminar. The first school, dualism, treats informal workers as superfluous survivalists engaged in marginal economic activities with few links to the formal economy. The second, structuralism, sees them as hyper-exploited workers who provide cheap inputs to formal businesses. The third, legalism, views them as intrepid entrepreneurs who work in informality in order to avoid cumbersome government regulation. We will also discuss the three broader traditions of development theory from which these schools derive: modernization, dependency, and neoliberalism.

Traditionally, scholars focused on informality in the Global South, but in the second portion of this course we will shift our focus to the Global North, where informal work also plays a central and expanding role. We will examine case studies on the working conditions and labor rights movements of US day laborers, street vendors, domestic workers, and gig workers. We will pay close attention to the intersection of class with race, gender, and transnational migration, topics that were overlooked and undertheorized by early scholars of the informal economy. Then, in the third portion of the seminar, we will shift focus to a topic that scholars of informal labor have generally overlooked, an “elephant in the room” so to speak: professions that produce illicit goods and services. To this end, we will analyze debates around drug dealing and sex work, as well as case studies of sex worker organizing campaigns. Then, in the fourth portion of the seminar, we will examine individual and collective strategies that informal workers use to advance their interests. We will hunt for both similarities and divergences in the discourses, targets, demands, organizational forms, and alliances of informal worker campaigns across industrial and political contexts. Finally, in the fifth portion, we will engage in a “search for solutions,” looking for large-scale policy fixes to the “decent work deficit” in the informal economy (spoiler alert: there are no silver bullet solutions).

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

CLASS PARTICIPATION (20%)

Students are required to attend seminar each week *and participate* in discussion. This means paying attention and having thoughtful things to say. The quality of your participation is more important than the quantity. But I expect that all students will participate in discussions, and that no students will dominate. You are allowed one unexcused, no-questions asked absence. *For each additional unexcused absence, your attendance/participation grade will decrease by a full letter grade.* You must email me as far in advance as possible if you expect to miss a class and have a valid reason for doing so or a doctor's note. Arriving to class late three times will count as an absence. Please discuss with me at the beginning of the semester any major issues that you anticipate will affect your attendance.

WEEKLY READING MEMOS (20%)

Each week, you will receive a memo prompt. Over the course of the semester, you must submit seven memos. The purpose of these assignments is to guide your reading, prepare you for class, and prepare you for the final paper. *No late memos will be accepted!* These assignments are graded on a pass/fail basis.

Memos should be 400-500 words and include at least two citations from the text. By "citation" I either mean a *very short* quote and page number or just a page number. You don't have to come up with the "perfect answer" (as if such a thing existed) to receive credit, but you must demonstrate that you have read and rigorously grappled with the text.

RESEARCH PROJECT (60%)

Throughout the semester, students will conduct field research in small groups on informal workers in the Bay Area. Each group will use a combination of observations, interviews, and reviews of secondary literature (e.g., journalistic and scholarly articles) to research one informal worker category (e.g., street vendors, domestic workers, day laborers, recyclers, rideshare drivers).

Students will be assigned their groups in the third week of class. They will be required to submit a research proposal by the fourth week of class (2-4 pages). Each student will be required to conduct at least two field observations and/or interviews, and to submit field notes (2-5 pages) on them in the seventh and tenth weeks of class. Students will submit a detailed outline of their final paper. At the end of the semester, each student will write a "white paper" that recommends, with supporting evidence and arguments, an appropriate policy response. Additionally, student groups will present their findings during a "mini-conference" in the last class session. For details, see "Research Paper" handout.

2-page research proposal (7.5%) – Due 9/19

First set of fieldnotes (5%) – Due 10/3

Second set of fieldnotes (5%) – Due 10/20

Outline of final paper (5%) – Due 11/14

Group presentation (7.5%)—During reading week

Final Paper (30%) – Due 12/10

Discussion Guidelines.

Be respectful of others.

1. Do not interrupt another student while they are speaking, or have side conversations while someone is talking (even if you are discussing class material).
2. Do not make personal attacks or make fun of anyone's questions or comments.
3. Don't dominate discussion; let others speak.

Computers. Laptops are welcome in class. However, I ask that you shut off your wireless at the beginning of section, so please have your discussion materials saved on your computer. Checking Facebook or e-mail during section is distracting to you and to those sitting around you. *If I catch you on the internet, or can tell by when you are typing and how you are engaging with discussion that you are online, I will count you as absent.*

Academic Integrity. Read and familiarize yourself with UC Berkeley's Code of Student Conduct regarding academic dishonesty: <http://students.berkeley.edu/osl/sja.asp?id=1143>. Note that plagiarism is not limited to stealing an entire paper. Using quotes without properly citing them or using ideas without acknowledging their source also constitute plagiarism. Any form of cheating and plagiarism will lead to disciplinary action.

Disabled Students Program and Special Accommodations. If you have a documented need for special accommodations in class or on assignments, I will be happy to work out these arrangements with you. If this applies to you, please bring me a letter from your DSP specialist as soon as possible. *Student athletes, parents, and others whose commitments might affect their ability to attend class or complete assignments on time should also speak to me about possible conflicts ahead of time.*

Writing Resources: The UC-Berkeley Department of Sociology has published a writing guide to promote sociologically informed college writing. It includes very useful tips for composing strong and effective analytic papers as well as for improving your general writing skills. While you may purchase a hardcopy at Copy Central, a free online version is available at:
http://sociology.berkeley.edu/documents/student_services/Writing%20for%20Sociology%20Guide%20Second%20Edition.pdf

Student Learning Center (SLC): The Student Learning Center (SLC) Writing Program works under the assumption that all writers, regardless of their experience and abilities, benefit from informed, individualized, and personal feedback on their writing. The program is staffed by professional staff and trained peer tutors who work with writers engaged in any stage of the writing process – from brainstorming paper topics, to formulating and organizing arguments, to developing editing skills. While tutors will not “proofread” students’ papers, they will help students learn to address issues of style, syntax, grammar and usage in their writing. Tutors are trained to work with non-native speakers of English and with writers from a variety of disciplines. For more information call 510-642-7332 or visit <http://slc.berkeley.edu/writing>

Questions? Please come to see me at office hours, or e-mail me at mrosaldo.gsi@gmail.com. *Please only use email to set up appointments, deal with administrative matters, or urgent questions regarding your research projects. All substantive questions about readings should be addressed in class or office hours.*

BOOKS¹

Bourgois, Philippe. *In Search of Respect: Selling Crack in El Barrio*. Vol. 10. Cambridge University Press, 2003.**

Browne, Ginny, Will Dominie, and Kate Mayerson. " *The Informal American City: Beyond Taco Trucks and Day Labor* (2014).**

Chun, Jennifer Jihye. *Organizing at the Margins: The symbolic politics of labor in South Korea and the United States*. Cornell University Press (2011).

De Soto, Hernando. *The Other Path: The Invisible Revolution in the Third World*. New York: Harper & Row Publishers (1989)

¹ You do not have to purchase books, but may choose to do so. I put asterisks next to books that I recommend.

De Soto, Hernando. *The mystery of capital: Why capitalism triumphs in the West and fails everywhere else*. Basic Civitas Books, 2000.

Eaton, Adrienne E., Susan J. Schurman, and Martha A. Chan, eds. *Informal Workers and Collective Action: A Global Perspective*. Cornell University Press, 2017.

Grant, Melissa Gira. *Playing the Whore: The Work of Sex Work*. Verso Books (2014).**

Kabeer, Naila, Ratna Sudarshan, and Kirsty Milward, eds. *Organizing women workers in the informal economy: beyond the weapons of the weak*. Zed Books Ltd., 2013.

Manuel Castells, Alejandro Portes, and Lauren Benton, eds. *The Informal Economy: Studies in Advanced and Less Developed Countries*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press (1989).

Milkman, Ruth, and Ed Ott, eds. *New labor in New York: Precarious workers and the future of the labor movement*. Cornell University Press (2014). **

Nadasen, Premilla. *Household Workers Unite*. Beacon Press, 2016.

Standing, Guy. *A Precariat Charter: From Denizens to Citizens*. A&C Black (2014).

Tripp, Aili Mari. *Changing the Rules: The Politics of Liberalization and the Urban Informal Economy in Tanzania* (1997).

COURSE SCHEDULE AND READINGS

PART I: CLASSIC THEORIES OF INFORMAL LABOR

WEEK 1: INTRODUCING INFORMALITY

Chen, Martha Alter. "The informal economy: Definitions, theories and policies." *Women in informal economy globalizing and organizing: WIEGO Working Paper 1* (2012).

WEEK 2: THE DUALIST SCHOOL

Rostow, Walt Whitman. *The Stages of Economic Growth: A Non-communist Manifesto*. Cambridge university press, 1990 (1961): Chapter 2 (4-16).

International Labour Office. *Employment, Incomes and Equality: a Strategy for Increasing Productive Employment in Kenya*. International Labour Office (1972): Introduction (5-8)

Hart, Keith. "Informal income opportunities and urban employment in Ghana." *The Journal of Modern African studies* 11.1 (1973): 61-89.

WEEK 3: THE STRUCTURALIST SCHOOL

Castells, Manuel and Alejandro Portes. "World Underneath: The Origins, Dynamics, and Effects of the Informal Economy" in Manuel Castells, Alejandro Portes, and Lauren Benton, eds. *The Informal Economy: Studies in Advanced and Less Developed Countries*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press (1989): 11-40.

Birkbeck, Chris. "Self-employed proletarians in an informal factory: the case of Cali's garbage dump." *World Development* 6, no. 9-10 (1978): 1173-1185.

WEEK 4: THE NEOLIBERAL SCHOOL

De Soto, Hernando. *The Other Path: The Invisible Revolution in the Third World*. New York: Harper & Row Publishers (1989): xi-xxi, 3-15.

De Soto, Hernando. *The mystery of capital: Why capitalism triumphs in the West and fails everywhere else*. Basic Civitas Books, 2000. Chapter 2.

PART II: WORKER GROUP CASE STUDIES

WEEK 5: DAY LABORERS AND INTERSECTIONALITY

Purser, Gretchen. "The dignity of job-seeking men: Boundary work among immigrant day laborers." *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 38.1 (2009): 117-139.

Purser, Gretchen. "'Still Doin' Time:' Clamoring for Work in the Day Labor Industry." *Journal of Labor and Society* 15.3 (2012): 397-415.

WEEK 6: STREET VENDORS AND "THE RIGHT TO THE CITY"

Kettles, Gregg. "Crystals, Mud, and Space: Street vending informality." *The informal American city: Beyond taco trucks and day labor* (2014): 227-42.

Browne, Ginny, Will Dominie, and Kate Mayerson. "Keep Your Wheels On: Mediating Informality in the Food Cart Industry." *The Informal American City: Beyond Taco Trucks and Day Labor* (2014): 243-60.

Dunn, Kathleen. "Street Vendors in and Against the Global City: VAMOS Unidos." *New labor in New York: precarious worker organizing and the future of unionism*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, NY (2014).

WEEK 7: DOMESTIC WORKERS—WHEN THE SHOP FLOOR IS THE LIVING ROOM

Tronto, Joan. 2002. "The 'Nanny' Question in Feminism." *Hypatia* 17(2): 34-51.

Goldberg, Harmony. "'Prepare to Win': Domestic Workers United's Strategic Transition Following Passage of the New York Domestic Workers' Bill of Rights." *New Labor in New York: Precarious Workers and the Future of the Labor Movement*, edited by Ruth Milkman, and Ed Ott (2014): 266-87.

Nadasen, Premilla. *Household Workers Unite*. Beacon Press, 2016. Ch 2.

WEEK 8: UBER, TASKRABBIT, AND THE GIG ECONOMY—FLEXIBILITY OR FLEXPLOITATION?

Rogers, Brishen. "The Social Costs of Uber." *University of Chicago Law Review Dialogue* (2015).

Friedman, G. Workers without employers: shadow corporations and the rise of the gig economy. *Review of Keynesian Economics*, (2), pp.171-188 (2014).

King, Martha. "Protecting and Representing Workers in the Gig Economy: the Case of the Freelancers' Union" in Milkman, R. and Ott, E. eds., 2014. *New labor in New York: Precarious workers and the future of the labor movement*. Cornell University Press.

PART III: ILLICIT PROFESSIONS

WEEK 9: SEX WORK—IS SEX WORK?

Grant, Melissa Gira. *Playing the Whore: The Work of Sex Work*. Verso Books (2014): 1-48.

MacKinnon, Catharine A. "Prostitution and civil rights." *MICH. j. gender & L.* 1 (1993).

WEEK 9: SEX WORKER ADVOCACY AND ORGANIZING

Vijayakumar, Gowri, Shubha Chacko, and Subadra Panchanadeswaran. "'As Human Beings and As Workers': Sex Worker Unionization in Karnataka, India." *Global Labour Journal* 6.1 (2015).

Grant, Melissa Gira. *Playing the Whore: The Work of Sex Work*. Verso Books (2014): 111-32.

WEEK 10: ARE CRACK DEALERS INFORMAL WORKERS TOO?

Bourgois, Philippe. *In search of respect: Selling Crack in El Barrio*. Vol. 10. Cambridge University Press, 2003. (selections TBA)

PART IV: STRATEGIES OF WORKER RESISTANCE

WEEK 11: WEAPONS OF THE WEAK

Tripp, Aili Mari. *Changing the Rules: The Politics of Liberalization and the Urban Informal Economy in Tanzania*. Berkeley: University of California Press (1997): 1-28, 136-170 [Chapters 1, 6]

WEEK 12: BEYOND WEAPONS OF THE WEAK

Kabeer, Naila, Ratna Sudarshan, and Kirsty Milward, eds. *Organizing women workers in the informal economy: beyond the weapons of the weak*. Zed Books Ltd., 2013. Ch 1.

Eaton, Adrienne E., Susan J. Schurman, and Martha A. Chan, eds. *Informal Workers and Collective Action: A Global Perspective*. Cornell University Press, 2017. Ch 1.

WEEK 13: IDENTITY AS A FORM OF RESISTANCE

Chun, Jennifer Jihye. *Organizing at the Margins: The Symbolic Leverage of Labor in South Korea and the United States*, Cornell University Press, 2009: [Chapter 1, Conclusion]

Rosaldo, Manuel. "Pimp my Carroça: From Disposable People to Environmental Superheroes." *The Berkeley Journal of Sociology* (2015).

PART V: THE SEARCH FOR POLICY SOLUTIONS

WEEK 14: CRITICAL URBAN PLANNING

Roy, Ananya. "Urban Informality: Toward an Epistemology of Planning." *Journal of the American Planning Association* 71.2 (2005): 147-158.

Watson, Vanessa. "'The Planned City Sweeps the Poor Away...': Urban planning and 21st century urbanisation." *Progress in planning* 72.3 (2009): 151-193.

WEEK 15: IS FORMALIZATION THE ANSWER?

Hansenne, M. "The dilemma of the informal sector: Report of the Director General (Part 1)." International Labour Conference 78th Session. Geneva: International Labour Office, 1991: selections TBA.

Trebilcock, Anne. *Decent work and the informal economy*. No. 2005/04. WIDER Discussion Papers/World Institute for Development Economics (UNU-WIDER), 2005. Pp. 1-18.

Chen, Martha Alter. "Informalization of Labour Markets: Is Formalization the Answer?" in *The Gendered Impacts of Liberalization: Towards Embedded Liberalism?*, Razavi, Shahra, ed., Routledge (2009)191-215.

WEEK 16: BEYOND WORKER RIGHTS? THE PRECARIAT CHARTER

Standing, Guy. *A Precariat Charter: From Denizens to Citizens*. A&C Black (2014): Chapters 1 and 2

Paret, Marcel. "Towards a Precarity Agenda." *Global Labour Journal* 7.2 (2016).