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Service and Solidarity: Domestic Workers, Informal Organising and the Limits of Unionisation in Zambia

Sacha Hepburn
(Department of History, University of Warwick)

This article examines the varied forms of collective organising pursued by domestic workers in Zambia from the 1930s to the 2010s, from struggles to establish formal associations and trade unions to participation in informal strategies of joint action. The article demonstrates that, despite the efforts of successive groups of domestic workers and labour activists, formal workers' organisations have failed to secure broad support among the labour force or achieve significant improvements in domestic workers' rights. This resulted from the limited financial and organisational capacity of such organisations, the dismissive attitude towards domestic workers of colonial and post-colonial governments and the failure of workers' organisations to tailor their interventions to the broad, complex realities of domestic service. The formal labour movement model has been unsuccessful as a means of organising domestic workers both because of these limitations and because domestic workers could pursue alternative solutions to their grievances at work, from individual strategies of resistance to informal collective organising. Through informal relations of solidarity, domestic workers created accessible and popular spaces to share grievances and tangible sources of material and emotional support. These findings are relevant to academic research and to policy on both domestic service and work in Africa, highlighting the ways in which Africa's urban working poor have used alternatives to the formal labour movement model to address exploitation at work, economic hardship and political grievances.

Keywords: domestic workers; labour; formalisation; trade unions; solidarity; Zambia

Introduction

*'My mother was a kitchen girl,
My father was a garden boy,
That's why, I'm a unionist, I'm a unionist, I'm a unionist'.¹*

¹ This song was performed by the United House and Domestic Workers Union of Zambia (UHDWUZ) at a march in Lusaka on 16 June 2014. The lyrics were adapted from a song that has been used at marches and rallies by various trade-union movements in the southern African region. Observations by the author, Lusaka, 16 June 2014.

On 16 June 2014, a group of domestic workers marched through the backstreets of central Lusaka to commemorate the recent passing of an international convention on domestic worker rights. Members of the United House and Domestic Workers Union of Zambia (UHDWUZ), they were commemorating the International Labour Organisation's 'Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189)', which had come into force the previous year. Convention 189 sought to establish international labour standards for domestic workers for the first time and promised to bring significant changes to the lives of domestic workers in Zambia and elsewhere across the world.² At the march, UHDWUZ members carried placards bearing ILO slogans, wore union-branded T-shirts and sang songs that proclaimed their commitment to this agenda of formalisation. But the language of the songs that UHDWUZ members sang at the march, an example of which can be seen above, betrayed the challenges inherent in organising and formalising domestic service through such mechanisms. The labour relations of domestic service are often highly personalised, informal and, in post-colonial states like Zambia, grounded in a history of racialised and gendered socio-economic inequality. Supporters of the formalisation agenda have struggled to address these challenges, both today and in the past.

The image of domestic workers coming together and marching to demand greater rights stands in stark contrast to the common stereotype of these workers as atomised and passive, incapable of organising collectively because of the private and personalised nature of their work. This stereotype doesn't represent domestic workers in the contemporary world, nor does it characterise their experiences in the past. From Pariser's work on domestic workers in colonial Tanganyika to Ally's study of domestic service in post-apartheid South Africa, studies of domestic service in Africa have variously drawn attention to the capacity of domestic workers to formally organise, to ally themselves with other workers and to pursue legislative reform.³ In Zambia, domestic workers have engaged with the formal labour movement since at least the 1930s, with small groups of workers seeking to establish worker associations and trade unions beginning in the early 1950s. Formal organisations for Zambian domestic workers emerged during the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, though these were short-lived and intermittent. Zambian domestic workers had more success with formal organising from the late 1990s, culminating in the registration of UHDWUZ as an official trade union in 2000. Although existing studies have done much to highlight African domestic workers' engagement with collective organising, several issues warrant further examination. There is, particularly, to expand understandings of the challenges facing formal worker organisations

² For further information about Convention 189 and the broader 'Decent Work for Domestic Workers' campaign, see Asha D'Souza, *Moving Towards Decent Work for Domestic Workers: An Overview of the ILO's Work* (Geneva, International Labour Office, 2010); International Labour Organisation (hereafter ILO), *Convention No. 189. Decent Work for Domestic Workers* (Geneva, International Labour Office, 2011); ILO, *Promoting Decent Work for Domestic Workers: ILO in Action* (Geneva, International Labour Office, 2014).

³ S. Ally, *From Servants to Workers: South African Domestic Workers and the Democratic State* (Ithaca NY, ILR Press, 2009); R. Pariser, 'Masculinity and Organized Resistance in Domestic Service in Colonial Dar es Salaam, 1919–1961', *International Labor and Working-Class History*, 88 (2015), pp. 109–29. On domestic workers and trade unionism, see also S. Stichter, 'Trade Unionism in Kenya, 1947–52: The Militant Phase', in P. Gutkind, R. Cohen and S. Copans (eds), *African Labour History* (London, Sage, 1975), pp. 155–74; K. T. Hansen, *Distant Companions: Servants and Employers in Zambia, 1900–1989* (Ithaca NY, 1989), pp. 166–70, 255, 286–7; and J. Bujra, *Serving Class: Masculinity and the Feminisation of Domestic Service in Tanzania* (Edinburgh, 2000), pp. 67–72, 156–71, 175.

for domestic workers and the capacity for domestic workers to organise outside of the formal labour movement model, two issues which this article seeks to address.

This article examines the varied ways in which Zambian domestic workers have pursued collective organising, from efforts to establish formal worker associations and trade unions to participation in informal strategies of joint action. In doing so, it both builds on existing studies of domestic service and engages with recent scholarship on work and labour movements in Africa.⁴ I demonstrate that, despite the efforts of successive groups of domestic workers and labour activists, formal worker organisations have failed to secure broad support among the labour force or achieve significant improvements in domestic workers' rights. This resulted from the limited financial and organisational capacity of such organisations, the dismissive attitude towards domestic service of colonial and post-colonial governments and the failure of worker organisations to tailor their interventions to the broad and complex realities of domestic service, including kinship-based labour relations and the employment of children. The formal labour movement model has been unsuccessful as a means of organising domestic workers in Zambia both because of these limitations and because domestic workers could pursue alternative solutions to their grievances at work, from individual strategies of resistance to informal collective organising.

Informal relations of solidarity developed between domestic workers through a range of associations and in the neighbourhoods in which they worked and lived. Through these relationships, domestic workers created accessible and popular spaces to share grievances and tangible sources of material and emotional support from which collective and individual action sprang. Scholars have examined domestic workers' participation in associations and organised social activities but have generally interpreted these in relation to the maintenance of rural-urban connections, particularly through ethnicity, and the building of urban-based communities. In Hansen's work on domestic service in colonial Zambia, for instance, she discussed the importance of ballroom dancing clubs to the development of an 'occupational subculture' among domestic workers.⁵ Delius noted the 'rich variety of associations' which developed among Pedi migrant workers on the Rand in the 1940s and 1950s, including the boxing clubs that were dominated by young male domestic workers.⁶ Preston-Whyte and Bozzoli each examined the friendships that developed among women domestic workers in the white suburbs under apartheid.⁷ I build on such studies by considering the ways in which domestic workers' participation in urban associations and social networks helped to foster labour solidarity and inspire collective responses to workplace exploitation.

My findings are relevant to academic research and to policy on both domestic service and, more generally, on work in Africa, highlighting the ways in which Africa's urban working poor have used alternatives to the formal labour movement model to address

⁴ Examples include, F. White, 'Deepening Democracy: A Farm Workers' Movement in the Western Cape', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 36, 3 (2010), pp. 673-91; B. Rutherford, 'Electoral Politics and a Farm Workers' Struggle in Zimbabwe (1999-2000)', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 39, 4 (2013), pp. 845-62; A. Lichtenstein, 'Challenging 'Umthetho We Femu' (The Law of the Firm): Gender Relations and Shop-Floor Battles for Union Recognition in Natal's Textile Industry, 1973-85', *Africa*, 8, 1 (2017), pp. 100-19.

⁵ Hansen, *Distant Companions*, p. 161-6.

⁶ P. Delius, 'Sebatagomo; Migrant Organisation, the ANC and the Sekhukhuneland Revolt', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 15, 4 (1989), pp. 589-92.

⁷ B. Bozzoli, *Women of Phokeng: Consciousness, Life Strategy, and Migrancy in South Africa, 1900-1983* (Portsmouth NH, Heinemann, 1991), pp. 100-1.

exploitation at work, economic hardship and political grievances. The article draws on a range of sources, including colonial and post-colonial government documents, the papers of trade unions and workers' organisations, reports produced by international governmental organisations, contemporary observations and oral history interviews conducted with domestic workers and labour activists.

Domestic Service in Zambia

In contemporary Zambia, households across the socio-economic spectrum employ domestic workers in a variety of working arrangements. Domestic service first became a formal occupation in Zambia (then Northern Rhodesia) in the early C20th century. African men and boys, and a smaller number of women and girls, went to work in the homes of colonial government officials, missionaries and other white settlers, performing domestic and care labour.⁸ The colonial government estimated that around 12,470 Africans were employed in domestic service by 1930,⁹ increasing to 20,000 by 1944.¹⁰ At independence in 1964, domestic service was the fourth largest area of employment, with an estimated 26,800 men and 700 women employed in the sector.¹¹ In the decades following independence, the sector further expanded as increasing numbers of black Zambian households formally employed domestic workers, and men, women and children sought employment in the sector. An estimated 36,491 men and 1,758 women were estimated to be employed in domestic service by 1968.¹² Regrettably, domestic service was no longer enumerated in official labour reports from 1970, but it is possible to trace the expansion of the sector over time from several sample surveys. For the period 1979 to 1990, figures are available from the Zambia National Provident Fund (ZNPF), a national insurance scheme for Zambian workers. In 1979, 36,115 domestic workers were registered with ZNPF, increasing to 49,286 by 1985, and 55,486 by 1990.¹³ Hansen's estimate of the total number of men and women employed in domestic service in the mid-1980s is much higher, at 100,000. Hansen broke this down by gender, suggesting that just under a quarter of these workers were women.¹⁴ The most recent data comes from a 2013 ILO survey which estimated that 97,652 people were then employed in the sector, of whom 56 per cent were female and 44 per cent male.¹⁵ Taken together, these

⁸ The protectorate of Northern Rhodesia was formed in 1911 after the amalgamation of the British South Africa Company-administered territories of North-Eastern Rhodesia and North-Western Rhodesia. From 1924, it was administered directly by the British government.

⁹ Bodleian Library (hereafter BL), RHO 756.1 s. 2, Northern Rhodesia, Blue Book for the Year Ended 31st December 1930 (Livingstone, 1931).

¹⁰ BL, RHO 756.1 s. 2, Northern Rhodesia, Blue Book for the Year Ended 31st December 1944, (Lusaka, 1945).

¹¹ National Archives of Zambia (hereafter NAZ), MLSS1/23 83, Annual Reports ILO Lusaka, 1959-1968, Annual Labour Report 1964.

¹² NAZ, MLSS1/23 83, Annual Reports ILO Lusaka, 1959-1968, Annual Labour Report 1968.

¹³ These figures included only those workers who were registered for ZNPF coverage by their employers. Central Statistical Office (hereafter CSO), 'Monthly Digest of Statistics January-June, 1989' (Lusaka, 1989); CSO, 'Monthly Digest of Statistics July-October, 1991' (Lusaka, 1991).

¹⁴ Hansen, *Distant Companions*, p. 221.

¹⁵ Miniva Chibuye, 'Magnitude of Domestic Workers in Zambia: Highlights of Domestic Worker Survey' report published for ILO Country Office for Zambia, Malawi and Mozambique (unpublished paper, Lusaka, 2014), p. 2.

figures suggest that the numbers of people employed in domestic service has increased since independence and that the sector has been gradually feminised.

Although the available data on domestic service in Zambia provides some insight into the growth and composition of the sector over time, these are conservative estimates at best. Firstly, the data collected by the colonial Labour Department didn't include African households even though officials knew that significant numbers of Africans employed domestic workers.¹⁶ After independence, while this racialised approach to data collection was abolished, the government still based its figures on estimates rather than accurate enumerations of persons employed in the sector. The available sample surveys similarly rely on estimates. A more fundamental problem is that the available data largely excludes a range of 'informal' domestic service arrangements, such as kinship-based labour relations or arrangements involving children. Several studies demonstrate that junior kin and children have long provided domestic services in Zambian households.¹⁷ The labour of children and young women has arguably become even more significant since the 1970s as declining incomes have prevented many people from hiring domestic workers in formal, cash-based arrangements in numerous African states, including Zambia. The 2013 ILO survey provides a conservative estimate of the scale of such arrangements in the contemporary period, with 15 per cent of female domestic workers and 11 per cent of male domestic workers aged between 10 and 19 years.¹⁸

In my research, I examine the employment of men, women and children in formal and informal domestic service arrangements to capture the breadth of such labour practices that Zambians have engaged in over time.¹⁹ By utilising a broad definition of domestic service, the limitations of the formal labour movement model for organising these workers comes to the fore. Can labour movements represent and address the needs of such a wide range of workers, including adult men and female children? How have trade unions sought to organise workers engaged in 'informal' and highly personalised working arrangements, including those between kin or involving children? The following sections attempt to grapple with these and other questions, highlighting the immense challenges facing formal worker organisations and the possibilities offered by informal strategies of collective organising.

Collective Organising from the 1930s to the 1960s

¹⁶ There were, for instance, references to African employers in debates surrounding child labour during the 1950s. NAZ, MLSS1/17 12, Employment of Women, Young Persons and Children Ordinance 1949-1959; letter from Senior Labour Officer to all colleagues in the Labour Department, February 1950.

¹⁷ S. Hepburn, "'Bringing a Girl from the Village': Gender, Child Migration and Domestic Service in Post-Colonial Zambia", in M. Rodet and E. Razy (eds), *Children on the Move in Africa: Past and Present Experiences of Migration* (Woodbridge, James Currey, 2016), pp. 69-84. See also G. Wilson, *An Essay on the Economics of Detribalization in Northern Rhodesia. Volume 2* (Livingstone, Rhodes-Livingstone Institute, 1942), pp. 27-8, 75-6; K. T. Hansen, 'Labor Migration and Urban Child Labor during the Colonial Period in Zambia', in B. Fetter (ed.), *Demography from Scanty Evidence: Central Africa in the Colonial Era* (Boulder CO, Lynne Rienner, 1990), pp. 219-34; H. Moore and M. Vaughan, *Cutting Down Trees: Gender, Nutrition and Agricultural Change in Zambia* (Portsmouth NH, Heinemann, 1994), pp. 193-7, 222-6.

¹⁸ Chibuye, 'Magnitude of Domestic Workers', p. 2.

¹⁹ See S. Hepburn, 'A Social History of Domestic Service in Post-Colonial Zambia, c. 1964-2014' (DPhil thesis, University of Oxford, 2016).

Zambian domestic workers have engaged with the formal labour movement since at least the 1930s. Under colonial rule, master-and-servant legislation officially regulated the relationship between African domestic workers and their employers. A punitive set of rules, this legislation stipulated the obligations of employers towards their employees and established the penalties for workers if they were thought to have violated the terms of their employment.²⁰ From the mid 1930s, domestic workers repeatedly participated in collective action to advance demands for higher wages, better working conditions and reductions in racial and economic inequality. Numerous domestic workers took part, for example, in the mine workers' strikes on the Copperbelt in 1935 and 1940, offering support to fellow urban workers and passing on information about the strikes that they overheard in the homes of their European employers.²¹

The labour movement grew in size and strength in Northern Rhodesia from the late 1940s, with a number of trade unions for African workers being granted official status. During the early 1950s, groups of domestic workers in Lusaka and in the mining towns of Kitwe and Broken Hill (now Kabwe), inspired by these reforms, sought to formally organise into associations and trade unions. These early efforts at formal organisation, however, largely failed. The domestic workers' associations that were established in both Kitwe and Lusaka appear to have dissipated during the later 1950s, while the workers in Broken Hill do not seem to have ever registered as an official union.²² It is likely that the relative isolation of domestic workers, their lack of free time and the personalised nature of many domestic service arrangements each played a role in limiting the success of these formal organisations. The dismissive attitude of officials in the colonial Labour Department also significantly limited the effectiveness of domestic workers' attempts to formally organise, as argued above. The Department's stance towards domestic workers' demands for union representation remained inflexible until independence and, while an increasing number of occupations came to be covered by regulations stipulating minimum wages and working conditions during the 1950s, domestic service remained excluded.

Domestic workers finally succeeded in forming a registered trade union during the early 1960s. The National Union of Catering, Hotel and Domestic Workers (NUCHDW) was founded around 1960, and continued to be active on the Copperbelt and in Lusaka until 1965. The records of NUCHDW do not appear to have survived, but those of the Labour Department offer some insight into the scope and scale of the union's activities. NUCHDW membership seems to have expanded quickly, with colonial records suggesting an increase from 7 members in 1960, to 1,145 by 1961 and 7,027 by 1962.²³ Membership of NUCHDW was open to workers in various hospitality and service industries, and the proportion of members who were domestic workers is unknown. But several sources suggest the seriousness with which the union campaigned for domestic workers' rights. In 1963, for instance, NUCHDW published an article in Northern Rhodesia's leading newspaper, the

²⁰ See D. Hay and P. Craven (eds), *Masters, Servants, and Magistrates in Britain and the Empire, 1562-1955* (Chapel Hill NC, University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

²¹ Hansen, *Distant Companions*, pp. 158-60.

²² *Ibid.*, pp. 166-9.

²³ NAZ, MLSS1/23 86, Department of Labour Annual Report 1960; NAZ, MLSS1/23 92, Department of Labour Annual Report 1961; NAZ, MLSS1/26 73, National Union of Hotel, Catering and Domestic Workers 1952-1965; return for the year 1962.

Northern News, criticising the low wages and poor conditions of employment for domestic workers. The article specifically criticised European mine workers, arguing that these employers should provide free medical care to their domestic workers.²⁴ On the eve of independence in 1964, NUCHDW put sustained pressure on the government to introduce an official minimum wage, using press coverage and regular correspondence with government officials.²⁵ The timing here is significant, for although the colonial government had excluded domestic workers from labour laws, the context of imminent independence likely made union activists hopeful about the legislative gains that might be achieved for domestic workers in the coming years.

NUCHDW remained active after independence and appeared to be in a strong position into 1965, with international ties linking it to workers' movements around the world. In May 1965, Dulizani Banda, NUCHDW's Lusaka Regional Secretary, even travelled to Cuba to meet with Fidel Castro.²⁶ The origins of this Cuba connection are unknown but it is possible that the visit was arranged through either left-leaning unionists within the Zambian labour movement or through one of the southern African liberation movements in exile which were resident in Lusaka in the 1960s and had connections to Cuba.²⁷ Although NUCHDW clearly achieved a degree of longevity and prestige that eluded its predecessors, it also faced a number of challenges. By mid 1965, NUCHDW had collapsed amid rumours of alleged misappropriation of funds by its officials, reflecting a tendency towards fission that such nascent worker organisations have consistently struggled to overcome. The union's campaign to introduce minimum wages for domestic workers and improve working conditions was ultimately unsuccessful in legislative terms, illustrating my argument about the limited effectiveness of workers' formal organisations.

Alongside efforts to formally organise, domestic workers came together through various associations and organised social activities in Northern Rhodesia's urban centres. These included savings and burial societies, religious organisations and dance clubs.²⁸ Hansen has highlighted the social and economic importance of ballroom dancing clubs to their members, most of whom were domestic workers. Established in most towns during the 1930s and 1940s, these clubs organised weekly practices and monthly competitions. The clubs also served a broader purpose, providing members with access to various forms of financial support, including payment of funeral expenses, funding towards travelling home on leave or for moving to another town. While Hansen acknowledges the social and economic

²⁴ NAZ, MLSS1/26 73, National Union of Hotel, Catering and Domestic Workers 1952-1965, 'Free Medical Aid Sought by Union', *Northern News*, 14 November 1963.

²⁵ NAZ, MLSS1/26 73, National Union of Hotel, Catering and Domestic Workers 1952-1965; 'Wages Move But Mass Sackings Feared', *Northern News*, 18 August 1964.

²⁶ NAZ, MLSS1/15 126, Labour Officer Monthly Reports- Lusaka, 1963-1965, Department of Labour Monthly Report- Labour Officer, District: Lusaka, May 1965.

²⁷ On the history of liberation movements in exile in Lusaka, see S. Ellis, *External Mission: The ANC in Exile, 1960-1990* (London, Hurst & Company, 2012); and H. MacMillan, *The Lusaka Years: The ANC in Exile in Zambia, 1963 to 1994* (Auckland Park, Jacana Media, 2013).

²⁸ Such organisations and groups were important to urban workers and labour migrants across the region. See Delius, 'Sebatagomo', pp. 588-99; D. James, *Songs of the Women Migrants: Performance and Identity in South Africa* (Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 1999), pp. 50-2, 58-61; R. Lee, *African Women and Apartheid: Migration and Settlement in Urban South Africa* (London, I. B. Tauris, 2009), pp. 128-54; L. Phillips and D. James, 'Labour, Lodging and Linkages: Migrant Women's Experience in South Africa', *African Studies*, 73, 3 (2014), pp. 420-4.

functions of ballroom-dancing clubs, she stresses that these were ‘first and foremost dance clubs’.²⁹ Thus her analysis does not consider the extent to which these clubs or other urban associations provided spaces for domestic workers to come together to discuss workplace grievances. That club members supported each other with funeral costs and other personal expenses shows that ballroom-dancing clubs fostered collective action. It is clearly possible that domestic workers shared stories about the challenges they faced at work and that they collectively developed solutions to such problems, for example sharing information about alternative jobs or offering advice on how to manage difficult employers. James’ work on *Kiba* dance societies, for instance, points to the potential for domestic workers to share such information with fellow members.³⁰ The support that domestic workers provided to each other through such organisations may also have lessened their interest in establishing or joining a formal workers’ organisation; these were, by all accounts, less than successful in the colonial context. I will discuss further issues of domestic workers’ engagement in informal strategies of collective action in the final section of this article.

Collective Organising After Independence

The state’s approach to domestic service shifted after independence. The newly elected United National Independence Party (UNIP) government took a more detached approach to domestic service than its colonial predecessor, exemplified by the explicit exclusion of the sector from labour reports after 1970. This shift clearly suggests that interest in domestic service as a topic for official concern declined after independence. For the colonial state, monitoring and intervening in domestic service relationships was part of a broader effort to maintain order and police social boundaries. After independence, although racial factors continued to distinguish domestic workers and employers in certain households, domestic service increasingly became an institution grounded in class-based and gendered inequality, two issues in which the state seemed largely reluctant or unwilling to intervene. UNIP’s neglect of domestic service likely also resulted from the dramatic decline in Zambia’s economic fortunes from the 1970s onwards. The oil shock of the early 1970s and subsequent decreases in the price and export-value of copper, Zambia’s primary export commodity, had a profound impact on the economy and led the country into a prolonged, devastating economic decline.³¹ In this context, various government departments were forced to reduce staffing levels and budgets. The government’s decision to scale back its monitoring of domestic service must also be understood against this background and the need to deal with widespread labour unrest provoked by the economic downturn.

During the 1970s, UNIP increasingly sought to control the labour movement. The activities of trade unions and their members were increasingly constrained, including through the creation of a new government-sanctioned trade union federation, the Zambia Congress of

²⁹ Hansen, *Distant Companions*, p. 162.

³⁰ James, *Songs of the Women Migrants*, pp. 56-7.

³¹ On the economic situation in Zambia since the 1970s, see J. Ferguson, *Expectations of Modernity: Myths and Meanings of Urban Life on the Zambian Copperbelt* (Berkeley CA, University of California Press, 1999); J. Gould, *Left Behind: Rural Zambia in the Third Republic* (Lusaka, The Lembani Trust, 2010); M. Larmer, ‘Reaction and Resistance to Neoliberalism in Zambia’, *Review of African Political Economy*, 32, 103 (2005), pp. 29-45.

Trade Unions (ZCTU). Such actions occurred amidst a broader closing down of political space. During 1971 and 1972 UNIP ruthlessly suppressed its political opponents, detaining members of the United Progressive Party who had received considerable support from workers in the mines of the Copperbelt.³² Zambia officially became a one-party state in 1972, after which it became increasingly difficult to express criticism of state policy, on labour or otherwise. Although workers continued to organise and to pursue their grievances, this commonly took place outside formal union channels.³³ Despite this increasingly repressive political environment, domestic workers continued to pursue formal methods of organisation. In 1973, a group of domestic workers in Lusaka formed the National Domestic Houseservants' Association of Zambia (NDHAZ). The association campaigned for higher wages and better working and living conditions, and encouraged employers to register their domestic workers with the ZNPF. NDHAZ struggled, however, to build a broad membership and to establish a sound structural base. Moreover, although the association's name stated that it was a national body, it failed, like earlier organisations for domestic workers, to expand its activities beyond the capital. NDHAZ collapsed in 1979 after its leader left the organisation, reflecting the tendency towards fission discussed above.³⁴

In 1991 Zambian politics changed dramatically, with multi-party elections bringing the one-party state to an end and ousting UNIP from power. The recently established Movement for Multi-Party Democracy (MMD) won the national elections having promised to reform Zambian politics and liberalise the economy. The MMD owed much of its support to labour-movement activists and workers. Once in power, however, the MMD government pursued extensive and aggressive economic liberalisation policies that severely weakened trade unions. Although the MMD had promised to shift to a free-market economy in its election manifesto, its policies were more ruthless and wide-ranging than anything previously attempted in Zambia. Such policies were implemented under the pressure of international donors and, though they aimed to revitalise the devastated Zambian economy, led to massive losses in industrial and public-sector employment and a continued decline in urban and rural living standards. Trade union membership and revenue declined substantially because of formal-sector job losses, undermining both the demographic and financial base of the labour movement.³⁵

A new organisation for domestic workers emerged during the late 1990s, despite the challenges facing the broader labour movement. The UHWDWUZ, discussed at the beginning of this article, grew out of a smaller association for domestic workers that was founded in Lusaka in 1998. This association has an unlikely beginning, developing out of a friendship between a retired engineer, Edward Chitalu, and a widowed clerical worker, Joyce Phiri.

³² M. Larmer, *Rethinking African Politics: A History of Opposition in Zambia* (Farnham, Ashgate, 2011), pp. 78-80.

³³ M. Larmer, *Mineworkers in Zambia: Labour and Political Change in Post-Colonial Africa* (London, 2007), pp. 110-14. On the challenges facing the labour movement in post-colonial Zambia, see also, R. H. Bates, *Unions, Parties and Political Development: A Study of Mineworkers in Zambia* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1971); M. Burawoy, *The Colour of Class on the Copper Mines: from African Advancement to Zambianisation* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1972); and F. E. Mulenga, 'Fighting for Democracy of the Pocket: The Labour Movement in the Third Republic', in J-B. Gewald, M. Hinfelaar and G. Macola, *One Zambia, Many Histories: Towards a History of Post-Colonial Zambia* (Leiden, Brill, 2008), pp. 243-58.

³⁴ Hansen, *Distant Companions*, pp. 286-7.

³⁵ See Mulenga, 'Fighting for Democracy of the Pocket', pp. 247-9.

Phiri and Chitalu met in 1998, when Chitalu was working in domestic service to supplement his small pension. After conversations about the exploitative conditions that Chitalu and others experienced, he and Phiri decided that they would establish and run an association to represent domestic workers in disputes with employers.³⁶ The association began operating in 1998 and was expanded and registered as a trade union in 2000.³⁷

Through its constitution, UHDWUZ outlined a set of clear aims. The union sought to organise domestic workers, to campaign on their behalf for better wages and working conditions and to put pressure on the state to introduce legislative change in the interest of its members. In the early 2000s, the union focussed on the first two of these aims, with particular attention paid to expanding the membership base. Union officials went from door to door in different areas of Lusaka to inform domestic workers about the union and its aims, to 'educate' workers and to recruit them as formal union members.³⁸ Members were issued with membership cards in exchange for a registration fee, a monthly membership fee and an annual renewal fee.³⁹ From its inception, UHDWUZ also had ambitious plans for expansion beyond Lusaka. The constitution outlined the union's plans to establish branches on the Copperbelt and in Southern Province and to hold regular conferences to bring together branch leaders from across the country.⁴⁰

UHDWUZ's ambitious aims for expansion were not fulfilled. In large part, this was due to sustained financial challenges and staffing issues. UHDWUZ struggled to maintain sound finances from its inception. Due to their low wages, many domestic workers were unable to pay their membership fees or declined to join the union because of the costs involved. The union's difficult financial position limited its capacity to employ the staff needed to conduct recruitment drives in the city.⁴¹ By 2014, UHDWUZ officials were employed solely on a voluntary basis, at best receiving sporadic payments when members made contributions.⁴² The union was also weakened by internal conflicts and, between 2005 and 2006, went through a period of crisis that resulted in a split into two rival organisations. The crisis was the result of a disagreement about the use and control of union funds, the precise details of which were difficult to establish through union documentation or interviews. What is clear is that a small group of union officials left UHDWUZ and founded a breakaway organisation under the leadership of ex-UHDWUZ official Kevin Liywalii. Liywalii and colleagues insisted that they were the legitimate representatives of UHDWUZ

³⁶ Interview with Joyce Phiri, Lusaka, 11 July 2013. All interviews for this article were conducted by the author. Between July 2013 and September 2014, I conducted oral history interviews with over 140 domestic workers, employers, trade union officials and members in Lusaka, and in rural areas of Lusaka province and in Eastern province. All interviews were with adults, approximately two thirds of whom were women and one third of whom were men. Recordings and transcripts are currently in the possession of the author. The names of certain interviewees have been changed to protect their anonymity. The locations and dates of interviews have not been changed.

³⁷ Chitalu was elected President and Phiri was elected Deputy General Secretary for Finance. Papers of the United House and Domestic Workers Union of Zambia (UHDWUZ Papers), letter from P. Simfukwe, Principal Labour Officer of Lusaka, to the Ministry of Labour, 25 February 2002.

³⁸ Interview with Joyce Phiri, 11 July 2013.

³⁹ UHDWUZ Papers, 'Constitution of the United House and Domestic Workers Union of Zambia', November 2000.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ Interview with Joyce Phiri, 11 July 2013.

⁴² Interview with Joyce Phiri, Lusaka, 13 June 2014.

and continued to operate under the same name. The breakaway organisation allied with the Federation of Free Trade Unions of Zambia (FFTUZ), in part to distinguish themselves from UHDWUZ which was allied to ZCTU.⁴³ This distinction will be used to differentiate between the two unions, with the breakaway organisation referred to as U-FFTUZ.

By the 2010s, U-FFTUZ had become the more successful of the two unions, with a permanent office in the FFTUZ headquarters in central Lusaka and several full-time salaried employees. In interviews, Liywalii stressed that all members of the U-FFTUZ executive are former domestic workers and criticised UHDWUZ for failing to ensure the same.⁴⁴ The union keeps extensive records including membership lists and a logbook of disputes between members and their employers. Consulting these records during an interview in 2014, Martha Kasaro, U-FFTUZ deputy general secretary, stated that union membership stood at 2,200 people, with 1,377 female members and 845 male members.⁴⁵ Despite these seeming successes, U-FFTUZ has faced similar financial challenges to UHDWUZ and earlier formal organisations for domestic workers. Liywalii acknowledged that collecting monthly subscriptions from members has been a major problem because of the low wages that most domestic workers receive. UHDWUZ has struggled since the crisis of the mid 2000s and has a smaller membership base and fewer active union officials than U-FFTUZ. UHDWUZ officials suggested that the union had 3,500 registered members and employed ten staff but, given the low financial and organisational capacity of the union and the lack of supporting documentary evidence, these figures are questionable.⁴⁶

As workers' organisations, both UHDWUZ and U-FFTUZ arguably have a responsibility to develop strategies that reflect their members' wants and needs. The extent to which members have shaped the objectives and activities of either union is, however, unclear. Due to lack of funding and low staffing levels, neither union communicates with its members in a systematic or regular way. Interviews with union members suggest they often had to take the initiative in keeping in touch with union officials, for instance by visiting their offices in person or by contacting them by telephone.⁴⁷ Even if this weren't the case, and the unions contacted their members regularly, the memberships of both unions represent only a minority of the large number of domestic workers currently employed in Lusaka, let alone nationally. As discussed above, available data suggests that approximately 97,652 men, women and children were employed in domestic service in late 2013, far more than the unions' combined membership of about 5,700 adult men and women.⁴⁸ The small memberships of both unions, coupled with their financial and administrative limitations, illustrate my argument that formal organisations have consistently struggled to establish a broad following within the labour force. Given this, the extent to which either union is representative of domestic workers in Zambia is doubtful.

⁴³ Interview with Kevin Liywalii, Lusaka, 27 August 2014.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ Interview with Martha Kasaro, Lusaka, 27 August 2014.

⁴⁶ Interview with Joyce Phiri, 11 July 2013.

⁴⁷ I interviewed 6 members of UHDWUZ and 1 member of U-FFTUZ. Contact was made through officials from each organisation and interviews were conducted at their respective offices in Lusaka city centre. Interviews with Irene Kamau, Alice Phiri, Theresa Chanda, Riberia Chambanenge, Rose Chanda and Harriet Mukololo, members of UHDWUZ, Lusaka, 16 June 2014; interview with Fisher Chowa, member of U-FFTUZ, Lusaka, 29 August 2014.

⁴⁸ Chibuye, 'Magnitude of Domestic Workers', p. 2.

The accountability of union officials to members appears more questionable when the issue of external funding is considered. As both unions have struggled to maintain an adequate income through membership subscriptions, they have relied heavily on the support of local and international donors, the ILO in particular. The ILO's recent work on domestic workers' rights in Zambia is part of its broader 'Decent Work for Domestic Workers' campaign. The 'Decent Work' campaign includes improving domestic workers' rights at work, increasing social protections and enhancing opportunities for good employment.⁴⁹ There is also a relationship between the ILO's work on domestic worker rights and its work combatting human trafficking, due to real and perceived links between domestic service and forced and trafficked labour.⁵⁰ UHDWUZ and U-FFTUZ have each engaged with the ILO in its 'Decent Work' campaign and have sought to access the resources available through participation in ILO initiatives. U-FFTUZ has been the more successful in this regard, working with the ILO on several projects, including a 2011 ILO-United Nations anti-trafficking project for which it secured funding reported at K123,019 (US\$12,484).⁵¹ By working with the ILO, U-FFTUZ gained access to resources that were out of reach of both its predecessors and UHDWUZ. Nevertheless, it is significant that such projects appear to have been determined by the aims of the ILO rather than by members of U-FFTUZ, despite the involvement of U-FFTUZ officials as the 'voice' of local domestic workers and the good intentions of local ILO staff. Interviews with domestic workers suggest that poor working conditions and low wages were their key issues of concern, rather than issues of trafficking or forced labour.

UHDWUZ has been less successful than U-FFTUZ in securing external funding, including from ILO. The 2014 march to commemorate Convention 189, discussed at the beginning of this article, is a key example. UHDWUZ had initially tried to organise an exhibition at the Lusaka National Museum to commemorate the first anniversary of the passing of Convention 189. After these plans failed to bear fruit, union officials decided to hold a march in central Lusaka.⁵² On the day of the event, a small group of union members met in the centre of the city, where they changed into UHDWUZ-branded T-shirts and collected placards labelled with slogans from ILO's 'Decent Work' campaign. Union officials were clearly keen to portray their organisation as successful and proactive and had organised for the event to be filmed and photographed for publicity purposes. Unfortunately, as officials had not applied for the permit required to hold a march on a public street, members were unable to march down the busy central street, Cairo Road, as they had planned and instead decided to march in the back streets hidden from public view.⁵³ UHDWUZ officials' ambitions and outward-looking self-presentation contrasted markedly with the

⁴⁹ See D'Souza, *Moving Towards Decent Work for Domestic Workers*; ILO, *Convention No. 189. Decent Work for Domestic Workers*; ILO, *Promoting Decent Work for Domestic Workers: ILO in Action*.

⁵⁰ Interview with Evans Lwanga, Lusaka, 12 August 2013. In 2013, Lwanga was National Project Coordinator for Combatting Forced Labour and Human Trafficking and Making Decent Work a Reality for Domestic Workers at the ILO Country Office for Zambia, Malawi and Mozambique. See also C. Fox, *Investigating Forced Labour and Trafficking: Do They Exist in Zambia?* (Geneva, International Labour Office, 2008).

⁵¹ Interview with Kevin Liywalii, 27 August 2014.

⁵² Interview with Joyce Phiri, 13 June 2014.

⁵³ Observation by the author, Lusaka, 16 June 2014.

realities of the situation, as a small number of union members sang to themselves along empty back streets rather than to a public audience.⁵⁴

In comparison with their engagement with the ILO, both U-FFTUZ and UHDWUZ have had more limited contact with the Zambian state. The most sustained form of contact between either union and the state has been through the judicial system. Both unions have helped their members to pursue cases against employers. While the unions settled most disputes with employers through informal negotiation, they also pursued a small number of cases through the Industrial Relations Court (IRC) in Lusaka.⁵⁵ Judge Musona of the IRC stressed that the ability of the unions to use the judicial system was strengthened by the recent passage of secondary legislation on domestic service.⁵⁶ In January 2011, the MMD government passed legislation which stipulated that domestic workers were entitled to receive a minimum monthly wage of K250 (US\$25.37), a monthly travel allowance of K102 (US\$10.35), regulated working hours, overtime and severance pay, sick leave and maternity leave.⁵⁷ In January 2012, the newly-elected Patriotic Front (PF) government revised this legislation to increase the minimum wage to K420 (US\$42.62) per month.⁵⁸ This legislation enabled union officials to make specific references to infractions of conditions of employment, such as unfair dismissal and non-payment of wages. Although Musona had not presided over many cases involving domestic workers, he had on several occasions ordered employers to make payments to domestic workers in line with the new labour laws.⁵⁹

Given both UHDWUZ's and U-FFTUZ's lack of organisational capacity and public presence, it is doubtful that either union's activities had prompted ministers to introduce the recent legislation. Although both unions were invited to meetings with local state and international officials in the run-up to the passing of the 2011 legislation, they played only a minor role in proceedings. Invited to be the 'voice' of domestic workers (a role that we may question considering the discussions above), the unions had little influence over either the timing or content of the legislation. These were instead shaped by a combination of local and international political pressures. Union officials themselves suggested that the MMD had introduced the 2011 legislation in an attempt to garner support from among the poorer members of Zambian society in the run-up to the general election.⁶⁰ Apart from the appeal of the 2011 policy among certain parts of the electorate, at least some members of the MMD government must also have wanted to improve wages and conditions for domestic workers. The extension of the legislation in 2012 under the PF government likely reflected a similar

⁵⁴ The outward-looking approach of both unions can be understood as an example of 'extraversion' as defined and discussed by Jean-Francois Bayart. See J-F Bayart, *The State in Africa: The Politics of the Belly* (London, Longman, 1993).

⁵⁵ Interview with Oscar Cheupe, Lusaka, 27 August 2014.

⁵⁶ Interview with Judge Musona, Lusaka, 1 September 2014.

⁵⁷ Government of Zambia, 'Statutory Instrument No. 3 of 2011. The Minimum Wages and Conditions of Employment Act (Laws, Volume 15, Cap. 276). The Minimum Wages and Conditions of Employment (Domestic Workers) Order, 2011' (Lusaka, 2010). At the time of writing, the Kwacha to Dollar conversion rate was K9.85 to US\$1.

⁵⁸ Government of Zambia, 'Statutory Instrument No. 45 of 2012. The Minimum Wages and Conditions of Employment Act (Laws, Volume 15, Cap. 276). The Minimum Wages and Conditions of Employment (Domestic Workers) (Amendment) Order, 2012' (Lusaka, 2012).

⁵⁹ Interview with Judge Musona, Lusaka, 1 September 2014.

⁶⁰ Interviews with Kevin Liywalii and Martha Kasaro, Lusaka, 27 August 2014.

mixture of motives.⁶¹ International political pressures were also significant, particularly from the ILO which had pushed the Zambian government to introduce protections for domestic workers as part of their broader campaigning on domestic workers' rights.⁶² It was surely no coincidence that the 2011 legislation was passed in the same year that Convention 189 was endorsed by ILO members or that the content of the legislation addressed many of the aims of the ILO's 'Decent Work' agenda. To summarise, although UHDWUZ and U-FFTUZ have witnessed the ratification of legislation on domestic workers' rights and minimum wages, their role in bringing this about was limited.

The Limits of Formalisation

Given the provisions of the new legislation and increased state intervention in the domestic service sector, both UHDWUZ and U-FFTUZ will need, in the coming years, to address the challenge of how to remain relevant, both to their members and as workers' organisations. Although both unions have so far managed to use the new legislation to increase their authority in judicial cases and in informal settlements with employers, it is possible that the role of formal organisations for domestic workers will be considered increasingly unimportant by both the state and domestic workers themselves. As Ally has illustrated in the South African context, the extension of full democratic and legal rights to domestic workers can have negative consequences for workers' organisations. In 1996, the South African government recognised the South African Domestic Workers Union (SADWU) after years of repression by the apartheid government and introduced extensive protective legislation for domestic workers. Yet, in this context of increased domestic workers' rights, SADWU unravelled. Ally argues that the post-apartheid state directly and indirectly usurped the role of SADWU and cast itself as the representative voice of domestic workers' interests.⁶³ The decline of SADWU was likely exacerbated by domestic workers' perception that there was less need for a union after the legislative changes. The apparent relationship between increased state intervention and a decline in union support has clear implications for the Zambian context, not least because both UHDWUZ and U-FFTUZ were in a far weaker position than SADWU when the 2011 legislation was introduced.

U-FFTUZ and UHDWUZ will each need to develop strategies not only to maintain their relevance but, ideally, to increase their influence. They can do this in several ways. First, they could step up their efforts to monitor the implementation of the new legislation and to call out those who violate the law. In interviews in Lusaka, many domestic workers criticised the lack of any mechanism to monitor or enforce the new legislation. The Zambian government relies on employers and domestic workers to comply with the law and to report any infractions to the local labour office. But many of my interviewees stated that they would not pursue a dispute through official channels because they feared that labour officers would accept bribes from employers and give out confidential information in exchange for

⁶¹ On the relationship between politics and the law in post-colonial Zambia, see J. Gould, *Postcolonial Legality: Law, Politics, and State Formation in Africa Since the End of the Cold War* (London, Routledge, 2018).

⁶² Interview with Evans Lwanga, 12 August 2013. See also D'Souza, *Moving Towards Decent Work for Domestic Workers*, pp. 39-40, p. 64; ILO, *Promoting Decent Work for Domestic Workers: ILO in Action*.

⁶³ Ally, *From Servants to Workers*, p. 147, pp. 153-60.

payments. Without the trust of domestic workers, the limited mechanisms that exist to enforce the new legislation will not be effective. The unions could, therefore, play the vital role of monitoring the reporting of incidents to local labour offices and following up on complaints.

The unions could also push for improvements to the current legislation, using their links with international organisations such as the ILO to pressure the government to introduce amendments to existing provisions. Maternity protection is a particularly significant issue. According to the existing legislation, female domestic workers are entitled to take 120 days' maternity leave, but only after two years' continuous service and without pay.⁶⁴ While this provision is an important step forward for domestic workers' rights and for women's rights in general, in practice it provides decidedly limited support for new mothers. Few of the women I interviewed could afford to lose four months' income. Furthermore, many women feared that their employers would simply replace them after they went on maternity leave. Although this is technically illegal, many women might possibly lose their jobs, given the lack of monitoring of the new legislation, if they took their full allowance of maternity leave. By pressuring the government to expand social protection measures and by monitoring the implementation of the new legislation, the unions could help their members both to access their legal rights and to extend those rights in key areas.

Finally, the unions have scope to actively engage with the political agenda concerning child labour. To date, both unions have focussed overwhelmingly on representing adult workers, even though children have long been employed in domestic service in significant numbers. As the employment of children under the age of 15 in domestic service became illegal under the 2011 legislation, the recent legislative gains for domestic workers are effectively irrelevant to the large number of working children. Many children need to work, and some want to, but they are unable to ask for the same employment conditions as adults.⁶⁵ The illegality of children's labour renders them unprotected as workers and encourages employers to conceal their young employees. This is particularly the case in kinship-based labour arrangements, with many children exchanging labour for payments of various kinds without any recourse to legal protection or monitoring. The unions could perform an essential task in highlighting the roles that children play as workers in the Zambian economy, workers making a significant contribution to rural and urban household survival strategies and deserving of inclusion and protection under labour laws.

A more enduring challenge facing the unions is that most domestic workers are either unaware of their existence or have found ways to act outside of formal labour-movement channels. In Hansen's research with domestic workers in Lusaka in the 1980s, for instance, none of her interviewees knew that formal organisations like NDHAZ had existed.⁶⁶ In my own research in Lusaka in 2013 and 2014, most of my interviewees were unaware that unions for domestic workers existed in Zambia; only a handful had heard of either UHDWUZ or U-FFTUZ. The only union members that I met were men and women with whom I made contact through a union official. Domestic workers' lack of knowledge of such organisations

⁶⁴ Government of Zambia, 'Statutory Instrument No. 3 of 2011'.

⁶⁵ For children's perspectives on working in domestic service see Hepburn, "Bringing a Girl from the Village", pp. 74-6, 80-2.

⁶⁶ Hansen, *Distant Companions*, pp. 286-7.

probably resulted from the highly sporadic nature of such organisations and their limited capacity to recruit members, both examined above. It also reflects the highly personalised nature of domestic service and the capacity for domestic workers to pursue alternative solutions to workplace challenges. Associations and organised social activities have provided spaces for the development of informal relations of labour solidarity among domestic workers, for instance through domestic workers' membership of ballroom-dancing clubs in the colonial context; similar processes also occurred outside formally organised activities and associations.

Zambian domestic workers developed an awareness of each other's personal problems and workplace grievances in the neighbourhoods in which they worked, as they socialised with each other during breaks, when hanging out the washing or gardening, and when playing with children in their care on the street. Previous scholarship on domestic service in Africa has acknowledged the importance of such neighbourhood interactions. Preston-Whyte's study of domestic service in apartheid South Africa, for instance, examined the significance of informal gatherings and visits as sources of companionship to women domestic workers in the white suburbs.⁶⁷ Her study outlined how domestic workers forged and sustained relationships despite the seemingly atomised nature of their work. However, Preston-Whyte did not examine the ways in which such neighbourhood interactions also fostered forms of labour solidarity. She acknowledges that such relationships were sources of 'mutual aid' but portrays the information that domestic workers exchanged regarding working conditions, wage rates and employers as 'gossip'.⁶⁸ Although such communication was exchanged as part of broader conversations about what was going on in the neighbourhood, it also contained valuable information about labour relations and conditions. With this information, women could compare their rates of pay with others and know who was a good employer and who should be avoided. Through such conversations, women probably also exchanged information about vacancies and how to manage difficult employers, vital sources of information for workers vulnerable to exploitation.

Neighbourhood interactions between domestic workers in Lusaka certainly fostered the development of social bonds and labour solidarity. Oral testimonies provide important insights into how domestic workers engaged in and perceived such relationships. Clarence Chiteta, for instance, described how she had turned to other domestic workers for help with managing an abusive employer. Chiteta was then employed in a live-out position in the suburb of Kabulonga where she had worked for a Swiss expatriate woman. She had been deeply unhappy in this job because her employer regularly shouted at her and accused her of stealing household items. For her, the one advantage to the job had been that she had built good relationships with other women and men who worked as maids and garden boys on the same housing development. These workers would sit together in a secluded part of the development at quiet points in the working day to share stories and food. Chiteta would join them when she could and regularly sought advice on how to manage her employer's temper. Several women encouraged her to take radical action, by leaving the position without giving

⁶⁷ E. M. Preston-Whyte, 'Between Two Worlds: A Study of the Working Life, Social Ties and Inter-Personal Relationships of African Women Migrants in Domestic Service in Durban. Volume 2' (unpublished paper, Durban, 1969), pp. 307-11.

⁶⁸ *Ibid*, pp. 309-10.

any notice in order to ‘pay back’ her employer for her mistreatment.⁶⁹ Studies of domestic service in Africa have drawn attention to the use of this strategy as a last resort by domestic workers who faced difficult working conditions, but they tend to frame such actions as individual acts of resistance.⁷⁰ As Chiteta’s experience suggests, such seemingly individual strategies of resistance could involve a collective element.

The relationships that developed between domestic workers in the neighbourhoods in which they worked were sources of emotional support. Chiteta, for instance, felt that the relationships that she had developed with other domestic workers had given her the confidence and the support that she had needed to leave her job and find something else. This was no small thing. As a single mother and sole provider for her household, it had serious financial and practical implications. Chiteta described how men and women who worked on the development had told her about vacancies in the area. She followed up on these leads and found a new position.⁷¹ Here parallels might be drawn with Bozzoli’s arguments about the ways in which ‘homegirl’ and ‘homeboy’ networks functioned as sources of support and information for rural-urban migrants in the region.⁷² Although there are clear differences between these examples, each suggests how domestic workers turned to each other for help with finding employment and escaping exploitative situations.

Neighbourhood interactions between domestic workers also fostered the development of collective strategies to overcome economic hardship. Limited access to food was a consistent theme in interviews with domestic workers, a challenge which resulted from a combination of low wages and inadequate in-kind payments. Several interviewees explained how they had helped each other to overcome this challenge. Cecilia Phiri described how she had shared her food provisions with a garden boy while working as a maid in the 1980s. At the time, she was a live-in maid in the suburb of Woodlands, Lusaka, and was paid through a combination of meals, accommodation and a small cash wage. The garden boy who was employed at the same property, commuted to work and was not provided with meals. Phiri shared her provisions with him and, when she could, she also gave him the leftovers from their employers’ meals.⁷³ Augustine Mulanda, Andrew Banda and Teophilous Mufonko, watchmen in the suburb of Kabulonga described how they similarly helped each other to secure adequate supplies of food. Although the group were meant to receive monthly rations of maize flour and vegetables from the management of the housing development on which they worked, such provisions were often not issued or were inadequate to last for the whole month. The group shared what food they had and received supplies from several women who worked as maids on the development.⁷⁴ These oral testimonies provide a window onto the ways in which domestic workers have developed informal collective responses to economic

⁶⁹ Interview with Clarence Chiteta, Lusaka, 5 June 2014.

⁷⁰ On individual strategies of resistance, see J. Cock, *Maids and Madams: A Study in the Politics of Exploitation* (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1980), p. 37, 103, 105-6; James, *Songs of the Women Migrants*, pp. 56-7; R. Ginsburg, *At Home With Apartheid: The Hidden Landscapes of Domestic Service in Johannesburg* (Charlottesville VA, University of Virginia Press, 2011), pp. 61-2, 108-9, 157-63.

⁷¹ Interview with Clarence Chiteta, 5 June 2014.

⁷² Bozzoli, *Women of Phokeng*, pp. 97-8, 123, 132, 157-8.

⁷³ Interview with Cecilia Phiri, Lusaka, 4 February 2014.

⁷⁴ Interviews with Augustine Mulanda, Andrew Banda, and Teophilous Mufonko, Lusaka, 12 August 2014.

hardship, further illustrating how domestic workers have participated in collective organising strategies outside of the formal labour-movement model.

These examples of informal collective action and mutual aid provide insights into the ways in which domestic workers have attempted to manage inequality and adversity in the urban context. The division of food provisions, for example, had a significant impact on the wellbeing of those involved, while the sharing of advice and information helped domestic workers to deal with exploitative working conditions and find alternative employment. Informal collective organising among domestic workers also had a political element. While observing conversations between domestic workers and during group interviews, I became aware of the extent to which men and women took the opportunity to debate and discuss politics and socio-economic inequality. Interviewees were highly aware of the grievances they shared with other poor urban residents and many criticised the unequal structures of class, gender and status that shaped both their working conditions and the broader urban social structure. Domestic workers also discussed and debated the attitude of the government and political parties towards the urban poor, with many interviewees criticising the lack of interest shown by politicians towards them at any time other than the run-up to elections. These critiques reflected the frustrations that domestic workers felt as members of the urban working poor and merged with more specific arguments about the Zambian state's neglect of domestic workers.

Conclusion

This article has examined the history of collective organising among domestic workers in Zambia. Zambian domestic workers have engaged with the formal labour movement since the 1930s and have attempted to establish formal organisations since the early 1950s. During the 1960s and 1970s formal trade unions were established, though each of these organisations was short-lived and achieved only limited success. Domestic workers had more success with formal organising from the 1990s, with the establishment of a workers' association and, later, a trade union that continues to operate in Lusaka at the time of writing. The impetus for domestic workers to pursue formal organising methods must be understood in relation to the history of the broader labour movement in Zambia, which enjoyed significant support among large numbers of the workforce from the late colonial period onwards. Although the post-colonial state did much to dismantle the power of the labour movement, particularly during the 1990s, labour solidarity continued to exert a significant influence on the ways in which many Zambian citizens conceptualised the relationship between employers and workers, and workers and the state.

I have argued that, despite the efforts of workers and activists, formal workers' organisations have failed to deliver lasting, meaningful gains for Zambia's domestic workers. Each of the organisations discussed in this article struggled to establish a significant base of support, with membership rates that only ever represented a fraction of the tens of thousands of men, women and children who were engaged in domestic service at a given time. Trade unions and associations for domestic workers have played only a limited role in improving domestic workers' rights at an official level. This was the result of both their limited financial and organisational capacity and the consistent marginalisation of domestic service as an area

of concern by colonial and post-colonial governments. It also reflects a more fundamental problem: the failure of workers' organisations to tailor their interventions to the broad, complex realities of domestic service in the Zambian context, particularly regarding the large numbers of people employed in 'informal' working arrangements, including labour provided by children and relatives.

Domestic workers were more likely to pursue informal strategies of resistance, both individual and collective, than to join a formal organisation. As I've discussed, this was the result of a lack of awareness that such formal organisations existed and reflected the ability of domestic workers to act outside of formal channels. Domestic workers developed an awareness of each other's personal problems and workplace grievances through participation in urban associational life and while socialising with each other in the neighbourhoods in which they worked. Through such channels, domestic workers developed informal collective solutions to exploitative working conditions, abusive employers and economic hardship. These informal relations of solidarity were significant to those involved and provided sources of much-needed material and emotional support. By looking at examples of informal relations of solidarity alongside the history of formal worker organisations, a more complex picture of domestic workers' lives emerges. This approach provides insights into the ways in which domestic workers, who are among Africa's urban working poor, have used alternatives to the formal labour-movement model to address exploitation at work, socio-economic inequality and political grievances.

Contemporary interventions into domestic service in Zambia promote an agenda of formalisation despite the realities of informality which shape labour relations and collective organising in the sector. Since 2011, the Zambian government has focussed on the regulation of domestic service through legislation, while the ILO has similarly promoted legal initiatives and the establishment and strengthening of formal workers' organisations. But without a more nuanced and sensitive approach, interventions aimed at improving domestic workers' rights will continue to exclude large numbers of domestic workers. Specifically, the current formalisation agenda risks creating a bifurcated labour market in which adults in formal employment can gain access to rights and protection while children and adults engaged in 'informal' arrangements remain invisible to the state and excluded from protection. With efforts at formalisation currently being promoted across the region, this is more than a Zambian story: lessons can be learned by workers' organisations, governments and international organisations working across Africa to improve the rights and working conditions of domestic workers.

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Sacha Hepburn

*Department of History, University of Warwick, Humanities Building, University Road,
Coventry, CV4 7AL. E-mail: s.hepburn@warwick.ac.uk*