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Non-protected Labour in one West African Capital: Characteristics of Jobs and Occupational Mobility in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire

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The microeconomic analysis of labour mobilisation and labour relationships in developing countries, though diverse in its hypotheses, methods and results, still nurtures the idea of dualistically segmented labour markets. This binary rural/urban segmentation leaves in the dark an important stratum of developing countries' labour markets, namely the urban informal sector. How does this huge group of unprotected workers gain access to jobs? Do labour relations comprise a social security dimension? We focus on the contractual forms that unregistered employment relationships take. We successively explore the content of employment relationships and compare it to existing classifications. We also assess the role of friends and families in accessing jobs and the changing social embeddedness over time of labour arrangements to highlight the crucial importance of interpersonal ties for informal work trajectories.

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Introduction

The microeconomic analysis of labour mobilisation and labour relationships in developing countries has generated a series of models which clearly differentiate behaviour presumably prevailing in urban settings from those presumably prevailing in rural ones. Rural economics has focused extensively on land tenancy contracts, bonded labour and risk-sharing arrangements (in which the exchange of “free” labour services can be categorised, see Stiglitz, J.E. (1988), Bhaduri, A. (1973), Bardhan, P. (1989), Coate, S. and M. Ravallion. (1993), Townsend, R.M. (1995)). Urban economics has concentrated on explanations for the existence of non-competing groups - either imposed by law or endogenously induced by firms - in the big private or state-owned industry (Rosenzweig, M.R. (1988), Behrman, J.R. (1999)). Though diverse in its hypotheses, methods and results, this body of rural and urban theoretical literature still nurtures the old idea of dualistically segmented labour markets. Symptomatically, the recent burgeoning literature on risk-mitigation arrangements has, to my knowledge, tended to consider cities as lawless areas, where traditional authority could no longer be exerted and opportunism would be pervasive². This statement seems to be grounded on fuzzy empirical evidence (Morduch, J. (1999)). Surprisingly this binary rural/urban segmentation leaves in the dark an important stratum of developing countries’ labour markets that no development practitioner can afford to ignore, namely the urban informal sector. Whatever the trickiness of methodological and definitional issues the concept raises (Mead, D.C. and C. Morrisson. (1996)), the urban informal sector is a reality that mainstream economics largely neglects³.

This is hard to explain. To take the West African context, the informal sector is by far the most important urban employer (Brilleau, A., F. Roubaud, and C. Torelli. (2005)). How are the processes of access and mobility of this huge group of unprotected workers instituted? At a macro level, social dynamics, social security and social stability cannot be understood without inquiring what is at stake in a developing nation’s informal sector. To illustrate the point, Côte d’Ivoire’s informal sector has, over the past decades, successively absorbed various strata of its population: rural migrants, middle class workers dismissed by their companies during the economic crisis in the 80s and, more recently, educated youths unable to find jobs in the formal sector.

In this paper, we propose to focus on the contractual forms that unregistered employment relationships may take. We will exclude self-employment despite the fact that it constitutes the main pathway to livelihoods in the informal sector. The reason for this is that we want to concentrate our attention on the early stages of informal occupational trajectories. Section 1 discusses the classification used by traditional employment surveys to characterise unregistered labour. Section 2 proposes an

² Some works of urban sociology focusing on the ecological properties of cities favouring criminal behaviours might have nurtured this perception (see Herpin, N. and H. Lagrange. (2005)).

³ In the Handbook of Development Economics, M. Rosenzweig states that “an informed reader will see that most of the features of the low-income-country urban environment described also characterize urban areas of high-income countries. And the issues of the impact of governmental labor market interventions and trade unions and the determinants and consequences of job search strategies, which appear to be particularly pertinent to such settings, form an important part of the core of modern labor economics. Few distinct analytical models specifically targeted in any meaningful way to problems of low-income country urban labor markets have emerged in the literature” (Rosenzweig, M.R. (1988), pp. 713-62., p. 755). Ten years later, in the Handbook of Labor Economics, Behrman maintains this view: “a decade later, this conclusion still holds” (Behrman, J.R. (1999), pp. 2859-939., p. 2916).

alternative typology, rendering the normative content of informal labour relations more visible. Section 3 measures the role of social ties in favouring job access. Section 4 attempts to identify the profiles of occupational trajectories and to articulate them to the availability of agents' social connections. Section 5 concludes.

I. The standard ILO classification of employment relationships and its implicit micro content

Here we try to clarify the implicit micro-rules of employment relationships encapsulated in the standard labour classification in order to enable us, in the following section, to assess its adequacy to our observations of informal arrangements. The categorisation of informal dependent labour in employment surveys carried out in West Africa generally rests on the trinity of "apprentice/family worker/salaried worker" (Lachaud, J.-P. (1994)). This categorisation used by practitioners, though not completely complying with the International Labour Office definitions, derives its popularity from a standard statistical classification of labour, which has been formalised in the Resolution on International Classification on Status in Employment (ICSE in the remainder of this paper) issued by the XVth International Conference of Labour Statisticians in 1993 (ILO. (1993)).

According to the XVth International Conference of Labour Statisticians, national surveys must distribute the labour force into the following mutually exclusive categories: "employees, employers, own-account workers, members of producers' cooperatives, contributing family workers, workers not classifiable by status". The building block of this classification is the differentiation between self-employment and "paid employment" and, secondarily, the social distance between paid protected employment and other forms of dependent labour. The main labour revenues of self-employed workers depend on the firm's activity while employees' earnings remain unaffected by the firm's performance. Profit-sharing schemes can only complement the main stream of fixed pay.

The ICSE identifies several sub-groups among the employees. The "salaried workers" of standard employment surveys should be classified as employees. They should be considered as "regular employees" "for whom the employing organization is responsible for payment of relevant taxes and social security contributions and/or where the contractual relationship is subject to national labour legislation" (Paragraph 8.1.). This forms the most protected employment relationship. Importantly here, the only legitimate provider of social security is the State. The Conference doesn't mention any other possible income or consumption smoothing scheme whether private, formal or informal that could be associated with non state-protected employment. Regular employment is the reference around which others categories of "paid employment" are constructed. These are "employees with stable contracts", "casual workers", and "seasonal workers". They differ according to their respective contractual length, as shown in table 1.

How should apprentices be classified? The ICSE answers: "according to national circumstances countries may decide to classify as apprentices or trainees, workers who hold explicit or implicit contracts of "paid employment" which specify that all or part of their remuneration should be in the form of training for a trade or profession. When

identifying apprentice and trainee employees separately, countries may also need and be able to distinguish between those who hold a formal training contract and follow a formal programme combining work experience with practical and theoretical instruction, and those who do not” (Paragraph 14.m). An apprentice is thus an employee, theoretically paid but whose earnings can be retained as a compensation for costs incurred by training. This definition seems to correspond to a Beckerian rationale (Becker, G.S. (1964); see also Velenchik, A.D. (1995)) for an application to developing countries) where the comparison between the productivity of trainees and the costs of their apprenticeship (e.g. foregone earnings, provision of pedagogical material etc.), and the degree of specificity of the human capital transmitted decide what needs to be paid by the employer to the apprentice. But do all “apprenticeship” arrangements follow this formal logic? Empirical evidence in the West African context, as shown below, casts doubt on the legitimacy of equating “apprentices” (in the sense prescribed by the ICSE) to the self-declared “apprentices” of the standard employment surveys, especially when no teaching plan is implemented and no widely recognised diploma is delivered at apprenticeship’s completion.

Finally, in which category should “family workers” appear? Surprisingly, the ICSE considers them as self-employed, just like own-account workers or members of producers’ cooperatives. Indeed, their remuneration depends on the enterprise’s performance. The ICSE states that “contributing family workers are those workers who hold a 'self-employment' job [...] in a market-oriented establishment operated by a related person living in the same household, who cannot be regarded as partners, because their degree of commitment to the operation of the establishment, in terms of working time or other factors to be determined by national circumstances, is not at a level comparable to that of the head of the establishment” (paragraph 12.5). Our field research in Côte d’Ivoire suggests that this definition gives a much sanitised image of family labour: children are granted an identical theoretical decision weight as their parents. The only difference lies in their respective involvement in the business. The ICSE understates the discretionary power that a parent has on the allocation of time of his/her children. The relationship of subordination that prevails within the family is absent from the official classification.

By constructing its typology of employment relationships around the reference to state-guaranteed protection, the ICSE ignores the possibility that labour relations could be built on alternative organisational models. In the mid 80s, Morice, A. (1987), commenting on the applicability of earlier versions of this typology to the informal sector, insisted that “these categories are categories of law precisely where law doesn’t hold [...] and where affiliations are multiple” (p. 56, our translation). What could these alternative affiliations be? Could other organisational models of labour mobilisation be envisaged, i.e. labour regimes carrying their own set of behavioural rules? The family, at least, should be one arena of rules. The complexity of intra-family arrangements is amalgamated by the ICSE into mere business partnership relations. Ignoring the family’s role in a realm of economic interactions from which the formal State is absent is likely to be a mistake.

As part of the discussion on organisational models to which labour relationships could be attached, it is necessary to evoke a particular dimension of employer-employee interactions - totally ignored by the ICSE - that is of great importance in the context of the informal sector. This dimension is the form taken by the remuneration of labour. No

difference is made by the ICSE between monetary and in kind transfers. Rewarding a service in one form or another cannot be commensurate in practice. Intuitively, being paid in the form of a redeployable asset, like money, offers more liberty than being offered a roof, or a meal. There is evidence to suspect that in-kind remuneration – that is difficult to be accurately quantified and valued - is more frequent in a context of an asymmetrical personal relation spread over time (e.g. a paternalistic or patron-client tie) while monetary transfers characterise short term transactions where reciprocal obligations disappear once the job is done. Anthropological and economic literature confirms that in-kind transfers carry a “social control” dimension, for the obvious reason that the use of the object transferred is constrained. The object in the transaction may not be easily alienated or stored. Its recipient is handicapped in using it to mediate exchange or as a reserve of value. For the donor, the rationale behind tied transfers may either be “political” or “altruistic/paternalistic”. The former interpretation, based on an analysis of domestic labour in affluent Indian households, has been put forward by Tellis-Nayak, V. (1983) who reasons that paying in-kind is a way to maintain the chronic illiquidity of dependent labourers and consequently artificially restrict their social mobility. The altruistic/paternalistic interpretation (Pollak, R.A. (1988); Thurow, L.C. (1974)) – although it violates the principle of methodological individualism - qualifies the political interpretation by arguing that a tied transfer is decided in situations where the donor judges that the recipient is not able to appreciate what is good for him/her. According to that series of models, certain persons, particularly children, but also, sometimes, the entire nation or populations, are denied their “consumer sovereignty” due to their lack of competence in specific domains of decision-making. This behaviour is also expected to bias the preferences of the recipients in a collectively desirable direction. Both the political and altruistic/paternalistic versions of tied transfers highlight the key point that tied transfers reflect a particular set-up of relationships between the donor and the recipient which is chronologically anterior to the act of transferring any object. In this set-up, the preferences of the donor systematically dominate the preferences of the recipient. An asymmetrical relation is likely to operate here which the local rules of labour remuneration reveal.

The ICSE fails to consider alternative organisational models of labour relationships at play when the State guarantee doesn’t operate. It disregards, for example, the discretionary labour mobilisation of workers in situations of strong personal dependence. Furthermore, it views apprenticeship through a formal Beckerian lens that is, as the next section will show, not compatible with the practices observed in the informal sector of Côte d’Ivoire.

Table 1. Main categories of dependent labour according to the XVth International Conference of Labour Statisticians

Sub-groups of employees	Length of contract	Official affiliation to social security
Regular employees	indifferent	yes
Employees with stable contracts	« long »*	indifferent
Casual workers	« short »*	indifferent
Seasonal workers	« short and cyclical »	indifferent

* the appreciation of « long » and « short » employment relationships depends on “national circumstances”. Source : ILO. (1993)

I. Micro aspects of informal employment relationships in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire

The structure and dynamics of informal employment in Côte d'Ivoire

The recent development trajectory of Côte d'Ivoire is very similar to that experienced by many Sub-Saharan countries. One of its major features is the progressive "informalisation" of its labour market (Vandemoortele, J. (1991)). In the early 80s, the conjunction of the collapse of international prices for primary products (cocoa and coffee) and the exhaustion of a rentier accumulation regime has led Côte d'Ivoire into a deep economic crisis (Schneider, H. (1992)). SAPs have been implemented that have triggered an important downsizing process in the formal public or private sector. Table A.1. in the appendix indicates that protected employment has been hard hit in the past decades in every sector of the economy, excepting the chemical industry sector. Construction and public works have witnessed the most dramatic decline in employment by losing 90 per cent of their jobs. Most of this labour force has, however, been able to re-gain employment in the informal sector. According to Gaufryau, B. and C. Maldonado. (1997), the annual average growth rate of the informal labour force in Côte d'Ivoire was 7 per cent between 1975 and 1980, 4.8 per cent between 1980 and 1985 and 5.7 per cent between 1985 and 1990. Though mostly composed of self-employed people, the informal labour force has a non negligible young dependent component on which the following empirical analysis focuses.

The survey

Here, we use a survey conducted in 1998 in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, designed to detail the contents of unregistered employment relationships. Two branches of activities have been reviewed: the construction and small garment industries. Due to the absence of any sampling base for informal production units, production sites have been selected around the economic centres of Abidjan's ten "communes". Twenty-five construction sites and thirty-one workshops were visited. All the workers present the day of the visit were interviewed. Two hundred and twenty-seven workers answered a questionnaire, roughly equally distributed between the construction and garment industries. No female employee works in the construction sector but genders are roughly equally represented in the garment sector. Our expectation consisted of being able to elaborate a prejudice-free typology of labour relationships by collecting as many details as possible about the nature of material and non-material (human capital) transfers between employees and employers. As our sample cannot be said to be representative, the main interest of our survey does not reside in the number of categories identified but in their content.

A tentative inductive classification of labour relationships

A simple objective measurable criterion, i.e. the monetisation of the employer/employee tie, largely justified by discussion above on the form that labour remuneration takes, has been used to demarcate three types of labour arrangements: some workers are paid a fixed, predetermined and significant rate to execute codified tasks; some workers themselves pay a fixed amount in order to accomplish an "apprenticeship", and, finally, some workers neither pay nor receive any money for working. We call the first arrangement "paid labour", the second "monetised apprenticeship" (or simply

“apprenticeship” in the remainder of this text), and the last “unpaid labour”. Paid workers receive a sum at least superior to FCFA 500⁴ a day and apprentices either pay a bulk sum exceeding FCFA 2000 or regularly transfer a greater than zero payment. By definition, our third class is a residual one. No obvious rule permits us to characterise it yet. This uncertainty will fade with the further analysis proposed. Table 2 indicates the size of each of the classes of workers.

Table 2. Applying the criterion of monetisation of labour relationship

Types of labour arrangement	freq.	Written contracts
Explicitly monetised remuneration	119	3
<i>daily payment</i>	94*	2
<i>monthly payment</i>	16*	1
<i>piecework</i>	11*	0
Monetised apprenticeship	60	5
Non monetised labour	47	2

* Non-exclusive categories

Apprentices and unpaid workers are mainly found in the workshops while paid workers are in the construction sector⁵ (see table A.2. in the appendix). We now turn to a more detail specification of each of the categories. The construction sector is exclusively composed of male workers. Female workers are thus concentrated in the textile sector and, as a result, are either unpaid workers or fee-paying apprentices. Remarkably, the fee-paying arrangement is highly biased toward women. Guichaoua, Y. (2003) explores the reasons why this should be the case.

- Paid labour : unprotected standardised labour transactions

Paid labour contracts have a short lifespan; three months is the maximum length we have observed. Table A.3. in the Appendix measures the average daily or monthly pay of paid workers by the complexity of the tasks they perform. Complex tasks in masonry imply at least piling and aligning bricks. In garment workshops, complex tasks include *a minima* the cutting of clothes. Almost no paid tailor is unqualified. Daily workers’ pay obeys codified rules. At the time of the survey, unqualified workers (i.e. performing simple tasks) were remunerated at FCFA 1500 a day and their qualified colleagues (those performing complex tasks) around FCFA 2500 a day. Clearly, what is being remunerated in the construction industry is the role played in the division of labour, not the person who enacts it.

Do paid workers receive any complementary benefits transferred by their employer? Table A.4. in the Appendix neatly provides a negative answer despite the existence of some cases of daily allowances for lunch. Assistance in the case of disease or accident at work is also reported to be promised by their boss to one paid worker out of five. However, this figure shouldn’t be overestimated: a promise is not an act and, more importantly, this expectation generally emanates from workers whose employer is also a relative. No assistance is thus contractually established. When it exists, it largely derives

⁴ 1000 FCFA=€ 1.5.

⁵ The small textile industry thus extensively relies on « free » or even “remunerating” labour.

from the pre-existing social relationship between the parties. It then cannot be attached to the current labour transaction *per se*. Confirming this argument, the maintenance of safety at work is not claimed as being part of an employer's duties. When assistance is effectively granted, it merely reveals the "generosity" of the employer. Like remunerations, the working conditions of paid labourers are rather uniform (see table A.5. in the Appendix).

To conclude on paid labour, most arrangements conform to the model of spot transactions comprising monetary transfers and few other characteristics. Norms of payments or labour conditions are determined by the particular job to be performed; they do not stem from any individual bargaining. This standardised model of labour transactions is not particularly surprising as most of paid workers in our sample operate in a construction sector which is universally notorious for its cost externalisation practices, notably *via* long chains of subcontracting (Assaad, R. (1993); Evers, H.-D. (1989); Stretton, A. (1979)). What is at stake here however is not the understanding of the labour relationship itself but the long term individual sustainability of such a *modus operandi*. Paid labour ensures sufficient earnings if and only if workers are offered contracts on a continuous basis. What characterises the paid labour force is its chronic vulnerability⁶. As savings are not an immediate solution due to credit market imperfections, we hypothesise that long-lasting subsistence in these conditions is only feasible if dependent paid workers benefit from consumption smoothing arrangements that are exterior to their respective employment arrangement. Who then provides this protection is thus the question which needs to be answered.

- Costly apprenticeship

The second category of labour we have identified comprises workers who declare themselves as apprentices and pay a significant amount to their employer to receive technical training. The promise of the transmission of skills is here explicit, though rarely written. The amount paid by apprentices to their boss at the moment of the survey averages to FCFA 65,000 which immediately suggest that apprentices have to find external financial support. If we consider that a "normal" training lasts roughly three years, then the direct cost of apprenticeship are estimated at FCFA 150,000. To this amount, the basic toolkit of future tailors must be added (scissors, tape measure, pens etc.). This is not only a plausible financial burden for apprentices and those who support them but also a substantial revenue for employers in our sample who sometimes hire up to 12 apprentices, thus rendering the qualification of their main activity ambiguous. Are they indeed "traditional" informal workshops or instead informal vocational training institutes? The ambiguity seems to be sometimes maintained on purpose by the entrepreneurs.

Apprentices enjoy complementary benefits from their employer in a greater proportion than paid labourers (see table A.4. in the Appendix). More than half of them receive at least one complementary transfer, generally consisting of meal or seasonal premium. Some of them are also promised assistance in case of disease or accident occurring at work. Furthermore, more than 50 per cent of apprentices are allowed to use machines at the workplace to work on own account (sometimes even for their own clients) during temporary idle periods. This may explain the long time spent by apprentices in workshops: nine hours a day on average, six days a week.

⁶ A construction site can be stopped overnight if subcontractors are not paid in time.

What is essential to understand about this peculiar arrangement, and notably about the legitimacy of paying such relatively large amounts, is the significance of the transmission of technical human capital, which is hard to objectify. Do workshop supervisors elaborate an explicit training plan for their apprentices? Here we rely on observations of the internal organisation of workshops completed during the survey. Most of them are confirmed by other evidence collected in West Africa on this topic (Inades. (1996); Morice, A. (1987); Grégoire, E. (1987); Marguerat, Y. (1996); Miras, C. (DE). (1980)). Our findings are unambiguous. The apprenticeship doesn't follow any pre-existing explicit plan. It mainly consists of repeating practical operations shown by the employer. Despite the formality induced by the payment of fees, the imperatives of production always supersede training obligations. Among tailors, assembling pieces of fabric (e.g. sleeves to a shirt) or adding finishing touches to clothes (e.g. sewing buttons) are taught in early stages of the apprenticeship but it can take months to be initiated to cutting (the most important part of the production process) or to be allowed to perform the commercial tasks implied in a direct contact with clients. These operations are jealously monopolised by the employer or the most experienced tailors in the workshop. Upgrades in the process of learning seem to happen at a slow random pace. An important opportunity is offered when the apprentice's immediate predecessor in the workshop quits the job or she/he is promoted. The follower then inherits the tasks previously performed by his/her elder. The most recent newcomer only performs tasks despised by others (sweeping, cleaning the machines, ironing etc.). The apprenticeship system, far from obeying a strict teaching calendar, is thus organised as a labour queue. Symptomatically "liberation" is the term used by young workers to qualify the completion of their apprenticeship, an event the timing of which entirely decided by the boss. Objective technical tests rarely support this decision, which then allows its instrumental manipulation by the employer⁷. Finally, the "certificate" delivered is generally not recognised as a valid diploma by formal authorities and consequently, has a value restricted to the area where the employer has gained a certain degree of reputation.

The former arguments require formal treatment to actually test the validity of the Beckerian model of apprenticeship that inspires the category built by labour statisticians. This raises delicate methodological issues that we cannot solve in the present paper: how to quantify the cost of apprenticeship for employers? What is a reasonable length of learning period?⁸ What can at least be suggested here is that employers do not seem to bear obvious large costs in the process of training and that apprentices' productivity, though probably low, may not necessarily be nil, thus justifying net transfers from young workers to their boss (and the application of the ILO categorisation). One could also argue that apprentices actually buy more than just technical competences, for example social capital within a particular business they don't initially know. A rationale for explaining the particular set-up of the apprenticeship

⁷ The end of apprenticeship is a particularly critical moment in the professional career of tailors. Clashes with the employer are frequent when apprentices estimate that they have acquired sufficient skills to directly sell their production.

⁸ Some may also argue that evaluating the degree of generality of the human capital transferred can hardly be done (see Velenchik, A.D. (1995), pp. 451-75.). To us, in the context under review, the solution to this problem is fairly obvious: sewing a button or assembling schoolboy uniforms or male shirts are standardised tasks exclusively containing general human capital. This may hold for the majority of other informal activities producing standard goods or services.

system may require an examination of parental choices of time allocation of their children when school is not anymore a credible track to future income. Apprenticeship may well be a default option for school-leavers unconnected to the informal sector (Guichaoua, Y. (2005)).

- Unpaid Labour

As mentioned above, unpaid labour has been classified as a residual category. However, it has some remarkable features that allow a more positive depiction. Most unpaid labourers perceive a variety of, often bundled, benefits (see table A.4. in the Appendix). Monetary premia are more frequent than in any other category of labour. Even more striking, a vast majority of unpaid workers are offered in-kind benefits (meals and even housing) or protection against risks. In line with the above discussion, unpaid workers can be said to be maintained in an “illiquid” position but are compensated through tied transfers, ensuring the fulfilment of their basic needs. This is the sign of a paternalistic relationship.

Like apprentices, unpaid workers have access to the machines of the workshop for their own account work. The scope of the tasks they perform is more extensive than that of apprentices. Unpaid workers spend on average more time in the workshop than their fee-paying counterparts (9.6 hours a day). This may again reflect their attachment to the household of their master.

These characteristics of unpaid labour suggest that the labour transaction that has been observed is only one secondary aspect of the pre-existing relation that prevails between the worker and his/her boss. This relation, as the next section will show, is likely to be asymmetrical, based on personal dependence.

Preliminary conclusion: the diversity of employment logics

A careful analysis of employment arrangements prevailing in two sectors of the informal economy of Abidjan has permitted us to distinguish three particular arrangements. Paid labour seems to obey pure market logic as transactions are short-term and standardised. What makes this professional status sustainable in the long term however is probably the access of workers to complementary informal consumption-smoothing mechanisms. We have also identified an intriguing arrangement in the fee-paying apprenticeship whose compatibility with a Beckerian on-the-job learning modelling is far from obvious. Finally, unpaid labour is a status probably embedded in a broader relation of personal dependence. This diversity of occupational situations, each of them being backed on particular - though not necessarily straightforward - logics and expectations (respectively: market transactions, skill acquisition and authoritarian labour mobilisation) contrasts with the ICSE view which orders labour relations around the single reference point of state-protected employment. How these various statuses are accessed is a further issue to which we will now turn our attention.

III. Social ties and employment relationships

From the previous section, it is argued that labour statuses are not randomly attributed to agents: unpaid labour may only be sustainable if consumption-smoothing mechanisms are available; fee-paying apprenticeships require external financial support;

and unpaid labour is likely to stem from pre-existing relations of personal dependence. In the absence of state regulation, social ties are expected to play a major role in the access to jobs. This section tries to define and evaluate this role.

The survey reveals how each occupation has been initiated (see table 3. below). Five circumstances have been observed. Jobs have been obtained either through direct family channels (“employed by a parent”), indirect family channels (“parental intermediation”), friends’ intermediation, a pre-existing non-family tie (“already known employer”) or, finally, the anonymous spontaneous application. The first observation is that whatever the current labour status is, anonymous encounters are of minor importance. This should be stressed as it helps to characterise the sort of labour mobility that prevails within the informal sector: the typical market matching procedure is by no means dominant. On the contrary, socialised access to employment is the rule. Can we nuance the role of social ties in access to job? A practical distinction can be made between “family” and “friends”. The first type of social ties are assigned (inherited) while the second one are constructed (resulting from a progressive accumulation of social connections)⁹. A reasonable complementary hypothesis is that discretionary authority is more likely to be expressed within the family sphere¹⁰ and that, conversely, more equal peer relations should characterise friendship ties.

What dominates among paid workers is a process of job access through constructed ties, i.e. persons living in the same neighbourhood or having the same profession. Reciprocity seems to be the principal rule of behaviour. Table A.8. in the Appendix shows that paid workers not only benefit from others’ recommendation but also contribute to promote the access to jobs of their friends. Paid workers are also the most prone to participate in ROSCAs or become a member of a village association¹¹. It would be misleading however to consider the socialisation of paid workers as being purely symmetrical. Qualitative observations developed during the survey have identified a hybrid relationship, borrowing its logic both from the family regime and from the constructed social realm. This is the patron-client tie, i.e. “an asymmetrical, voluntary, and instrumental friendship in which non-comparable goods and services are exchanged for mutual benefit” (Tellis-Nayak, V. (1983), p. 67).¹²

Whatever the degree of symmetry between the parties to the exchange, the evidence of strong social affiliations on the part of the majority of paid workers may, at least partially, contribute to solve the chronic economic vulnerability they face.

Unsurprisingly, apprentices and unpaid workers are found to be family members (see table 3. and table A.8.). But the way the family affects the occupational spell of these

⁹ This differentiation may overlap Mark Granovetter’s dichotomy between “strong ties” and “weak ties” (Granovetter, M. (1973), pp. 1360-80.). But Granovetter uses this classification to trace flows of information circulating within a network. Here we rather stress the normative content of the social contacts used to gain access to job.

¹⁰ Anthropologists have extensively documented the priority given to elders over juniors in West African societies (Abeles, M. and C. Collard. (1985)).

¹¹ Village associations have are immensely popular in Abidjan. Their initial purpose is to organise funerals but they are also mobilised to mediate conflicts or channel assistance toward one of its member in need. Vidal, C. (1991) and Vidal, C. (1995) forcefully point that this solidarity is pre-conditioned by continuous participation in the association and is not addressed to non-contributing village natives.

¹² For close definitions of the patron-client tie, see also Balandier, G. (1969, pp. 345-49) and Platteau, J.-P. (1995, pp. 767-86).

two categories of workers differs. Parents of apprentices send their children to a workshop they don't run themselves and pay a fee for this, whereas parents of unpaid workers tend to privilege an internal solution: they more frequently directly use their children. The strategies behind these decisions may also differ: apprentices explicitly want to acquire technical (and probably commercial) skills (and the puzzle remains: why do they accept this expensive arrangement?) whereas the labour mobilisation of unpaid workers is likely to conform to the common child-labour economic model where credit constraints force parents to withdraw their children from school (Baland, J.-M. and J.A. Robinson. (2000))¹³. In one case, parents seek to pursue the human capital acquisition of their children, in the other; they have no choice but to compel them to work.

Table 3. Access to current job by labour status (per cent)

Circumstances of access to job	Paid workers(n=115)	Apprentices (n=60)	Unpaid workers (n=47)
Employed by a parent	19	8	43
Parental intermediation	6	52	43
Friends intermediation	25	20	7
Already known employer	17	0	0
Spontaneous application (unknown employer)	33	20	7

These observations are confirmed by table 4 which presents the results of a multinomial logistic regression detailing the chances of being offered the status of paid worker rather than unpaid worker and apprentice rather than unpaid worker. Controlling for age, gender or nationality, being hired via a non-direct family channel systematically significantly increases the chances of not being an unpaid worker. Furthermore, non-family ties are favoured by paid workers who also have smaller chances of being financially backed by their relatives.

Associations between forms of socialisation and labour statuses are clearer now. Paid labour mostly relies on friendship ties entailing reciprocal exchanges. Apprenticeship and unpaid labour are mostly exerted under family auspices, with one difference however: the perspective of human capital acquisition is explicit in the apprenticeship arrangement whereas immediate economic needs are likely to explain unpaid labour. An additional indicator can be mobilised at this stage that measures the length of time required by workers to reach their workplace (assuming that they all use the same mode of transportation): unpaid workers reach their workshop in 20 minutes while it takes respectively 26 and 30 minutes on average to apprentices and paid workers to do the same journey. This spatial measure could proxy the size of the immediate social space to which each category belong and is coherent with our former observations: unpaid workers are probably those whose social spatial sphere is the smallest.

An unintentional result of the socially regulated recruitment in the sectors we have researched is the polarisation by nationality across workplaces. Construction sites hire

¹³ Table A.6. on socio-demographic traits of workers and A.7. on their educational attainment could be compatible with this view: unpaid workers come from poorer more rural background and are less educated than apprentices.

an average of 50 per cent of Ivorian workers. This figure reaches 67 per cent in the small garment industry. But, where the boss is an Ivorian national, this proportion rises up to 70 and 95 per cent in the construction sector and the small textile industry respectively. A symmetrical effect is observed when the employer is a foreigner: the percentage of Ivorian nationals among the workforce drops to 20 and 32 per cent in the construction sector and the small textile industry respectively.

Labour allocation in the informal sector is socially regulated. This finding destroys the widespread view of developing countries metropolitan economies as lawless universes (Morduch, J. (1999)). Furthermore, each social space sustaining particular access to jobs has a normative behavioural content. Relying on friends implies reciprocal commitments within a restricted group of equals, while family labour allocation conveys a relation of authority. A question now remains which relates to the reciprocal permeability of the labour regimes we have identified and their sustainability over time. Can the different statuses be sequenced trajectories? In what order? We now need to direct attention towards the social mobility of informal workers.

Table 4. Labour status and social ties

Labour status by circumstances of access to job (logit estimates)		
	paid labour vs. unpaid labour	apprenticeship vs. unpaid labour
Sex		
Male	3,90 ***	-1,85 ***
Female	Ref.	Ref.
Age		
22 and more	-0,05	-0,78
Less than 22	Ref.	Ref.
Nationality		
Ivoirian	0,43	-0,09
non-Ivoirian	Ref.	Ref.
Circumstances of access to job		
Parental intermediation	-1,29 **	2,17 ***
Friends intermediation or already known employer	2,26 ***	3,60 ***
Spontaneous application	2,71 ***	2,84 ***
Employed by a parent	Ref.	Ref.
Is a member of ROSCAs or village association		
Yes	0,49	-0,38
No	Ref.	Ref.
Receives transfers from family		
Yes	-1,61 ***	1,37 **
No	Ref.	Ref.
Intercept	-3,28 **	-1,53 *
R²		0,52
Observations		220

*** : p-value under 0.01 ; ** : p-value under 0.05; * : p-value under 0.1 Ref.: category of reference

IV. The family to networks transition and its theoretical implications

Profiles of professional spells

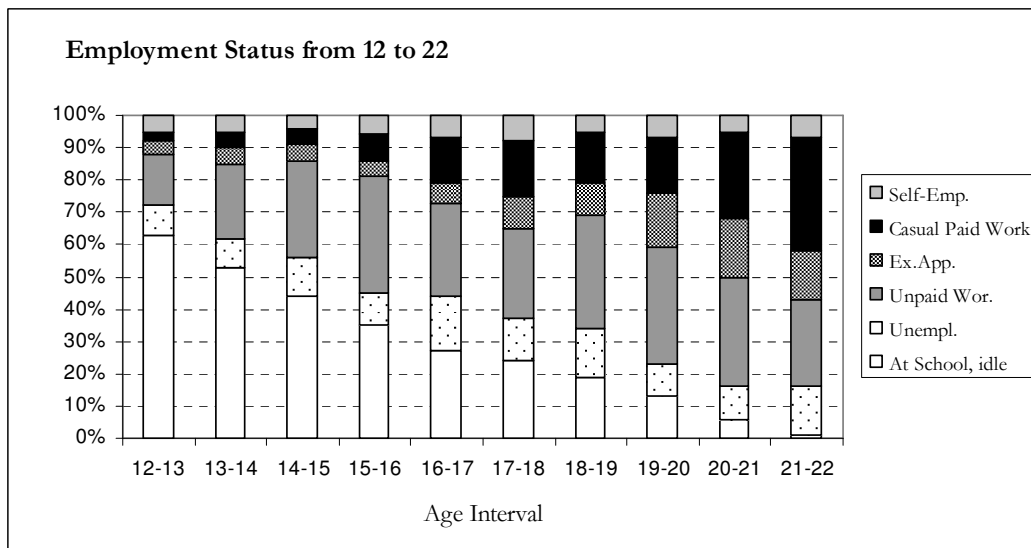
The field survey permits the ex-post reconstruction of the workers' work experience since their entry into the labour force, or alternatively, since their definitive exit from

school. To allow the observation of an individual “workspan”, we restrict our attention to workers aged between 22 and 30, which leaves us with 95 observations (mostly concentrated in the construction sector as workers there tend to be older than in the small textile industry)¹⁴. We then consider their occupations on an annual basis between 12 and 22 years of age. Figures 1. and 2. respectively show, year after year, the circumstances of workers’ access to job and status.

Figure 1. Access to Employment form 12 to 22



Figure 2. Employment Status from 12 to 22



¹⁴ Many of them didn’t enter the construction sector in the first place. Some of them, for example, have accumulated a working experience as farmers.

Logically, rates of idleness or school attendance are higher the younger individuals are and tend to decrease gradually as they get older. The progressive entry of agents into the labour force of agents is largely absorbed by family recruitment of labour whatever the age of the new entrant. A corollary is that unpaid labour is the most common labour status until later ages. But figures 1. and 2. don't exactly coincide. Family-oriented access to jobs remains high whatever the age of agents, but the incidence of unpaid labour tends to decrease as workers grow older, carrying the implication that family arrangements have a certain degree of flexibility and can actually include a monetary transfer. Not surprisingly, and confirming our previous hypothesis on the progressive accumulation of non-family social connections, friendship ties intervene in access to jobs at a rather late stage (around the age of 17) and coincide with the increasing incidence of paid labour. Anonymous encounters on the labour market are systematically marginal.

This evidence suggests the existence of two dynamic processes: i) the transformation of family ties affecting labour relationships through a probable softening of the authority of the parents on their children; ii) the progressive acquisition of non-family ties and their conversion into useful relationships through which to gain access to remunerated jobs. These processes however shouldn't be considered as linear. Trajectories in the informal sector are very unstable and may be temporarily interrupted not only by job losses but also, as reported by our respondents, by accidents, thefts, diseases or unwanted pregnancies. Being "downgraded" is also a possibility: a rural paid worker migrating to town may be compelled to work for his/her host while waiting for a more rewarding job opportunity. However, this delay may also be used to make social connections in a new geographical space.

The Microeconomics of informal labour arrangements

Family and friends are the two main channels through which the workers of our survey gain access to job. How is the discipline of economics equipped to treat such situations?

Since Becker's seminal work, economics has developed a long tradition of analysis of intrafamily consumption choices from which most of the literature on child labour stems (Jacoby, H.G. and E. Skoufias. (1997); Baland, J.-M. and J.A. Robinson. (2000)). This strand of literature may be particularly useful in this context, where workers are still very young. It may certainly provide insights in explaining why some of the households of our survey don't send their children to school. The use of unitary models, though violating the principle of methodological individualism (Chiappori, P.-A. (1988)), doesn't necessarily hinder the accurate modelling of the phenomenon since, as we have shown, non-contestable authority is sometimes used to force children to work. Whereas gender relationships within households are now systematically treated in a game-theoretical framework, the modelling of intergenerational issues, like child labour, still pertinently mobilise an unitary framework where the head of the household "has the last word" (Ben-Porath, Y. (1982)).

How about recommendations between friends? Here we deliberately ignore the literature on referrals on the labour markets of industrial economies (Montgomery, J.D. (1991)) which mainly derives explanations from the employer's point of view: asymmetries of information are minimised when new personnel are recommended by an insider. What we observe in the context of Abidjan is the self-organisation of chains of

recommendation within a group of workers as a way to maximise the chances of individuals avoiding a temporary loss of income. Those who share information on job opportunities are also likely to set up ROSCAs or belong to a common village association. Risk-sharing models are adequate to diagnose these particular practices, which, our case study shows, can be observed in urban settings. Most of these models (Coate, S. and M. Ravallion. (1993); Ligon, E., J.P. Thomas, and T. Worrall. (2002); Dercon, S. (2003)) consider risk-sharing mechanisms as being the result of a self-interested calculus performed by perfectly rational agents, holding symmetrical positions. This framework may fit with decisions taken within networks or groups of equals.

However, this rapid overview of economic models pertinent to our case study is not entirely satisfactory as they concern two static polar forms of individuals' socialisation: pure hierarchical relations in the first series of models, and pure symmetrical exchanges in the second. What happens in between? What our glance at the occupational trajectories of workers has shown is the progressive, though not linear, replacement over time of authoritarian labour mobilisation by forms of access to jobs through friendship ties. How could this change be theoretically accounted for? One possibility is certainly to pay greater attention to the cognitive processes that may transform a child, limited in his/her capacity to take decision into a fully rational *homo oeconomicus*. But the acquisition of agentic capacity may not be theoretically adequate as objective constraints may prevent individuals from exploiting it. A less ambitious possibility consists of empirically identifying intermediate forms of socialisation. In this respect, as we have argued above, patron-client ties may well be a stylised middle point between the authoritarian family realm and the network of friends. These ties are asymmetrical but are also chosen and may simultaneously represent an opportunity to challenge the family's authority and an entry point into business relations permitting access to cash.

V. Concluding remarks

The present paper is mainly an empirical account of labour relationships in the urban informal sector of West Africa. It has firstly attempted to build a typology of employment relationships, not referring to the dominant model of state-protected jobs. Various alternative sets of norms can actually frame employment relationships in a sector where, by definition, official authorities have minor influence. Among these norms are family rules of labour recruitment or principles of reciprocal exchange within socially constructed networks. The high frequency of these behavioural rules confirms that the informal sector can by no means be considered a realm of pure market transactions. Current official classifications, and notably the ICSE, should acknowledge the plurality of norms prevailing in the informal sector. Forms of payment or pre-existing social proximity between the parties could be criteria to identify these norms. This could help to build a positive categorisation of non state-protected labour arrangements, thus filling in the "informal" vacuum. It could also give insights into what the professional prospects of workers could be as current arrangements affect the way a career is pursued: for example, an authoritarian relationship comprising small in-kind transfers might obliterate the chances a worker has to accumulate a start-up capital. On the contrary, frequent access to cash through spot transactions facilitates the possibility of future investment.

We have also attempted to see how the various categories can evolve over time. Logically and historically, intrafamily labour mobilisation is found to be anterior to access to jobs through friendship ties. This has led us to discuss the capacity of existing economic models to capture this very dynamic process. Unitary models of intrafamily decision and risk-sharing models may only be valid to respectively describe the original and final ends of an informal trajectory as a dependent labourer. Greater attention needs to be paid to plausible intermediary situations, the patron-client tie probably being one of them.

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APPENDIX

Table A.1. Evolution of several branches of Cote d'Ivoire secondary sector

	1981		1984		1987		1992	
	freq.	ind.	freq.	ind.	freq.	ind.	freq.	ind.
Food industry	40372	100	37367	92	27824	69	24755	61
Textile	11470	100	5112	45	6134	53	8120	71
Chemical and oil industry	11767	100	13537	115	15204	129	14230	121
Construction and public works	22891	100	8023	34	3016	13	2698	12

Source : Cellule emploi ORSTOM-ENSEA. (1996)

Table A.2. Distribution of workers according to branch (freq.)

	Construction (n=105)	Couture (n=121)
Paid workers	103	16
Apprentices	0	60
Unpaid workers	2	45

Table A.3. Levels of remuneration of paid workers and division of labour (FCFA)

	Mean	Median
Daily workers (n=83)	1750	1500
« simples » tasks (n=62)	1500	1500
« complex » tasks (n=21)	2400	2500
Monthly workers (n=13)	50000	50000
« simple » tasks (n=1)	45000	-
« complex » tasks (n=12)	50400	50000

Table A.4. Complementary transfers from employer according to status (per cent)

	Paid workers (n=119)	Apprentices (n=60)	Unpaid workers (n=47)
Monetary premium	1	13	38
In kind premium	0	5	17
Contribution to lunch expenses	17	35	79
Contribution to transportation costs	6	8	15
Assistance if disease or accident when working	21	23	57
Loans/cash advance	17	12	6
Housing	4	7	23
No complementary transfer	55	46	7
Package of at least two of the above transfers	14	30	73

Notes on Table A.4.

- Monetary premiums are distributed when activity reaches seasonal peaks i.e. at the beginning of a new school year in September, or during religious festivities. They hardly amount to FCFA 1000. In kind premiums are small gifts, often clothes. Monetary and in kind premiums are not part of an explicit policy of incentives; they remain the discretionary initiative of the boss. They just compensate for the additional effort seasonally required from workers.
- Most of the employees and workers of Abidjan work far from home thus necessitating transportation and lunch expenses. Employers sometimes contribute to these expenses, for small amounts (less than FCFA 300) that can hardly be considered as monetary transfers.
- Accommodation is a particular in kind benefit offered by employers. It generally reflects a strong paternalistic

tie. It doesn't necessarily entail living with the boss. Some workshops are set up in a way that enables one employee to live there.

- Assistance in case of disease or accident is by no means an explicit commitment by the boss. It rather stems from his «generosity». Moreover, as the question has been asked here to the employee, the answers reflect more the belief in this generosity than the actual disposition of the boss to enact this assistance.
- Loans or cash advance are a very sensitive issue in the context of Abidjan where the lack of cash chronically hits most of the population. Many formal firms actually pay their employees in two instalments, the first of them being a cash advance dispensed halfway of the month (Bazin, L. and R.Y. Gnabéli. (1996)).

Table A.5. Conditions of work (standard deviation in brackets)

	Paid workers (n=119)	Apprentices (n=60)	Unpaid workers (n=47)
Number of working days (mean)	6 (0,65)	6 (0,3)	6 (0,3)
Number of daily working hours (mean)	8,5 (1,21)	9 (1,33)	9,6 (1,49)

Table A.6. Socio-demographic traits of workers according to employment status

	Paid workers (n=119)	Apprentices (n=60)	Unpaid workers (n=47)
Percentage of women	1	76	36
Mean age (years)	25,6	19,8	19,9
Born in Abidjan (per cent)	28	40	30
Ivorian nationality (per cent)	62	73	62
Father's occupation* (per cent)			
<i>self-employed</i>	34	32	28
<i>farmer</i>	38	10	36
<i>formal employee</i>	25	52	30
Religion (per cent)			
<i>Christian</i>	34	67	38
<i>Muslim</i>	51	23	53

*some values are missing

Table A.7. Educational attainment of workers

	Paid workers (n=119)	Apprentices (n=60)	Unpaid workers (n=47)
Highest educational « cycle » attained			
<i>None</i>	14	14	13
<i>Coranic school/ « franco-arabe »</i>	10	5	19
<i>Primary</i>	51	49	57
<i>Secondary and above</i>	25	32	11
Mean age when leaving school			
	14,1	14,5	13
Main reason for leaving school (per cent)			
<i>Bad results</i>	24	42	46
<i>Lack of money</i>	55	29	29
<i>Accident/disease</i>	17	2	17

Table A.8. Main expenses and alternative sources of income of workers (per cent)

	Paid workers (n=119)	Apprentices (n=60)	Unpaid workers (n=47)
Pays some housing expenses	53	3	4
Runs a secondary inc. generating act.	43	38	43
Receives transfers from family	11	90	62
Is a member of a village ass., ROSCA...	48	30	38
Has helped some friends to get a job through referral	46	0	5