

Trustworthy Trader or Creditworthy Debtor? Competing Moralities and Trader Subjectivities at the Kariakoo Market in Dar es Salaam

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Abstract

Urban Africans in twentieth-century Dar es Salaam made extensive use of credit and debt to create trade networks and respectable identities. Relying on *mali kauli* trade practices (a form of informal credit based on verbal promises), wholesalers at the Kariakoo market established relationally-constituted identities as trustworthy traders, making obvious the morality at the center of discourses and practices of credit and debt. Moral discourses around credit and debt provided a realm where local views of business practices and creditors' visions of desirable business behavior intersected. When formal loans became available in the 1990s, credit providers used morality as a fulcrum to reform urban traders. Although impelled to become creditworthy debtors, Kariakoo traders preferred older systems of trade to cash-based transactions facilitated by formal loans. The persistence of older forms of morality and relations of trust served as a way to critically evaluate and criticize formal loans and attending moral discourses.

In a speech broadcast on the evening news, Dar es Salaam Regional Commissioner Said Meck Sadick addressed the city's female residents at the occasion of International Women's Day 2013. In a patronizing tone, he told them not to be afraid of approaching financial institutions and let cowardice and worries about high interest rates stand in their way of economic development. Instead of listening to stories about people who have failed to repay loans, they should make use of loans and bring about development. "You should dare [to take out a loan] so you can see its fruits, and don't listen to the words of the one who has failed," he pronounced (Rwechungura 2013). According to Said Sadick, stories circulating in the

urban public had generated irrational fears and worries, which prevented women in Dar es Salaam from taking out loans.

Dar es Salaam residents – irrespective of their gender – had good reasons to be skeptical of formal loans. For the past twenty years, banks and microfinance institutions had provided loans to small- and medium-scale businesswomen and businessmen in Dar es Salaam. Yet, many long-standing urban residents remained doubtful. Traders' skepticism did not only refer to the technicalities of these loans such as high interest rates and short repayment periods (see also Kwanama 2012, Mwananchi 2013).

Formal credit was also constitutive of a new business culture, which challenged older ways of doing business and their attendant value systems.¹ In order to demonstrate and interpret this cultural change, I focus on the geographical space of the Kariakoo wholesale market for agricultural products in Dar es Salaam and on how market and credit relations at this market changed with the introduction of micro-credits in the mid-1990s.²

¹ For an anthropological study of how microcredits changed the ways of doing business in an neighborhood in Cairo, see Elyachar (2005).

² More than one hundred oral history interviews with long-standing traders, merchants, bankers, and microcredit lenders form the main body of sources for this article. I conducted interviews during a year-long research stay in Dar es Salaam in 2012-13. Kariakoo market stalls and shops, bank offices, traders' homes, and my apartment situated right next to the wholesale market all served as interview locations. Interviews varied considerably in length, ranging from a quarter of an hour to two and a half hours. Particularly relevant and co-operative traders were interviewed several times. Some interviews took the form of life history interviews, which provide insights into people's personalities, identities, and subjectivities because they allow space for the expression of expectations and desires, dreams and disappointments (see Clark (2010) for an example of using life history interviews with market women in Kumasi, Ghana). In this article, references to and quotations from thirty-four interviews constitute the evidence I draw on to formulate my arguments. I also use data from a survey of forty-eight traders in Kariakoo I conducted during my research stay in Dar es Salaam in 2012-13. Forty-two of them were men, which is representative of the gender distribution among wholesale traders at the Kariakoo market. Likewise representative are racial, ethnic, and religious identities of survey participants. All of them were African from twelve different ethnic groups, and thirty-nine of them were Muslim.

After a short history of urban policies concerning the trade of agricultural products, the first section of the paper describes the *mali kauli* system of trade, an informal credit system as it existed in the Kariakoo wholesale produce market in the twentieth century. Focusing on the use of informal credit, I illustrate how the notion of *uaminifu* (“honesty,” “trustworthiness”) shaped traders’ behavior and the organization of wholesale trade in Dar es Salaam. The second section deals with the period from the mid-1990s onwards when Kariakoo traders started to have access to formal credit. As loan officers impelled urban residents to work on their creditworthiness and become “good debtors,” borrowing traders were expected to see themselves and their relations to other people in a new light. However, the project of inducing borrowers to re-think themselves as independent, rational, and fiscally responsible entrepreneurs did not unfold uncontestedly in the Kariakoo market environment, where communal and trade relations were heavily marked by aspects of credit and debt and shaped by moral discourses on debt.

In the Underbelly of the Market: *Mali Kauli* and *Uaminifu*

The Kariakoo neighborhood in central Dar es Salaam has been the largest market area in Tanzania for the past hundred years. Planned as a residential neighborhood for African workers in the early twentieth century³, Kariakoo has become a busy commercial area with over 3,000 shops, thousands of street peddlers, and hundreds of market stall vendors. The main market – a massive three-floor concrete building constructed at the height of the socialist era in Tanzania – forms the geographical, architectural, and symbolical heart of the neighborhood. It was constructed in the early 1970s and replaced the market hall built in 1914 in the late German colonial period. At its inauguration in 1975 President Nyerere personally praised the

³ For a detailed account of Dar es Salaam in the German colonial period, see Raimbault (2008); also Brennan (2012).

new market building as a modern shopping complex, which enabled Dar es Salaam residents to fulfill all of their everyday needs in a comfortable and modern environment under one roof (Daily News 1975a, 1975b). The Daily News newspaper echoed Nyerere's description of the Kariakoo market as a modern shopping mall. "With all the various items in one place one no longer needs to walk the whole city to fill his shopping list. ... Instead of wandering from street to street, Dar es Salaam residents now can visit Kariakoo Market for all their shopping requirements" (Daily News 1976).

The new Kariakoo market was not only a symbol of modern consumer culture but also a model for socialist wholesale and retail trade in urban Tanzania. In Nyerere's view, the new market building symbolized socialist modernity and encapsulated an economic system free of exploitation and inequality. The modern socialist marketing system was most visible on the upper floor of the building where shoppers could stroll along shop windows and glance at shoes, clothes, textiles, stationery, pharmaceuticals, and household appliances. The majority of these shops were owned and run by cooperatives and parastatals such as the Urafiki Textile Mill and Ubungo Farming Implements. Private shopkeepers, on the other hand, were largely absent as they were to be replaced by publicly-owned marketing entities, according to the new socialist economic policy. The wholesale market for agricultural produce was located on the underground level of the Kariakoo market building.

The assumed break with the colonial and pre-socialist past, which the new market building was to mark, was much less visible at the underground level with regards to both economic policies and actual trade practices at the market. The policies concerning the production, trade, and consumption of agricultural products were rooted in the German colonial period. The German vision was to make an orderly, centralized, and easily controllable market, in both the concrete sense of actual marketplaces and in the abstract sense of "market" as a conceptual system of trade. The "market hall system" involved a central market hall in every town in the colony where agricultural products were traded in a regulated and orderly manner. The tool to realize the vision of the "market hall system" was the "market hall

act" (*Markthallenverordnung*) passed by the German colonial government in the 1890s. The underlying concept was the *Markthallenzwang*, the "obligation to trade at market halls," which meant that all agricultural products had to be sold and bought for cash in officially recognized market halls.⁴ Commercial transactions on credit and buying and selling outside of the market halls were explicitly prohibited. The *Markthallenzwang* was to prevent African farmers and traders from entering credit relationships with Asian shop owners, which colonial officials considered morally questionable and exploitative.⁵ The colonial government envisioned the trade system based on *Markthallenzwang* to have the effect of turning Africans into better taxpayers and more productive farmers. Africans' presence at the market hall was to help them learn about the laws of the market, i.e. how prices are determined by demand and supply.

By the end of the 1890s, market halls had been set up in most coastal towns including Dar es Salaam. The first official market hall in Dar es Salaam was built by the local representative of the Sultan of Zanzibar because the town did not have enough money in its coffers. A larger market hall was eventually erected in Kariakoo, which was actually planned as a residential neighborhood, but it was first used by the military because of the outbreak of WWI. The presence of the Carrier Corps in the market hall inspired the neighborhood residents to use a Swahili-ized version of the name carrier corps – Kariakoo – for the entire neighborhood (Brennan and Burton 2007). As the British took over the administration in former German East Africa, they left the pillars of urban trade policies planted by the Germans in place. The market hall system remained largely unchanged and the Kariakoo

⁴ Tanzania National Archives (TNA): G4/7: Markthallen der Kommunalverbände. Bd. 1: 1903-1906. Compared to the literature on the role of colonial taxes, very little has been written about the *Markthallenzwang*, but see Koponen (1994: 186).

⁵ German and British colonial discourses demonizing South Asian traders and middlemen as exploiters of helpless African farmers were powerful in East Africa and considerably shaped colonial policies in German East Africa and Tanganyika. In postcolonial Tanzania, the image of the Asian exploiter and petty bourgeois continued to influence policies, e.g. the acquisition of buildings in 1971 and the nationalization of companies (Brennan 2012; Oonk 2013; Shivji 1976).

market hall was used as the only and central wholesale market for agricultural products. Even after Tanzania's independence in 1961, the adoption of socialist policies in 1967, and the opening of a new market hall in 1975, regulations concerning urban marketing of agricultural products displayed striking parallels to the German *Markthallenverordnung*. Not only did they target private Asian shopkeepers, but the wholesale market for agricultural products located at the underground level of the market hall was also the only wholesale market in town for agricultural products and, thus, it served the entire city of Dar es Salaam.

Mali Kauli

Focusing exclusively on policies and regulations, however, would mean to overlook African traders' extensive use of informal credit to create trade networks and personal businesses. Traders' long-standing strategies of organizing wholesale trade were as important as government efforts to control and regulate that trade. The market masters of the old and the new market halls were persons of non-European descent because the market environment was deemed unsuitable for Europeans.⁶ These market masters allowed traders enough leeway to interpret the numerous rules in the market hall act according to their own needs and ideas. As a result, by the 1940s at the latest and probably much earlier, instant cash transactions as prescribed by the market hall act were the exception rather than the rule at the Kariakoo market hall. Instead, *mali kauli* – an informal letter of credit based on verbal promises – was the commonly acknowledged *modus operandi* for trading agricultural products at the Kariakoo market. Traders at the Kariakoo market relied on and invested in *mali kauli* credit relations with their suppliers in order to trade relatively large amounts of produce with little cash at hand. Informal *mali kauli* credit arrangements linked up

⁶ TNA: G4/50: Kommunalangelegenheiten Daressalam. Markthalle. 1898-1915; TNA: G35/67: Bau-Angelegenheiten in der Stadt Daressalaam. 1892-1906; TNA: G4/7: Markthallen der Kommunalverbände. Bd. 1: 1903-1906; TNA: G4/8: Markthallen der Kommunalverbände, 1907-1909.

farmers, rural traders, Kariakoo wholesalers, urban retailers, and end consumers in chains of credit. Even in the modern Kariakoo wholesale market opened in 1975, the *mali kauli* system continued to form the basis on which business transactions were conducted, just as had been the case in the German-built market hall.

Close personal relations between upcountry suppliers and wholesale traders formed the basis of the *mali kauli* system. All the long-standing wholesale traders I interviewed confirmed the existence of *mali kauli* at the time and they were able to describe it with ease and in detail.⁷ The *mali kauli* system allowed them to trade relatively large amounts of produce without having large amounts of cash at their disposal. Kariakoo traders received upcountry goods (in Swahili *mali*) from suppliers, who trusted them, and they verbally (*kauli*) agreed on a price for the goods. No money was exchanged at that point. Once the wholesale traders sold the goods to retailers, which usually took a few days or a couple of weeks, they paid the suppliers according to the agreed-upon price.⁸ Alternatively, an upcountry supplier handed over the produce to the trusted wholesaler, returned home, and collected the money during the next visit to Dar es Salaam. *Mali kauli* was particularly useful in the colonial period when Africans were legally prohibited from taking out formal loans unless they applied for a special permission.⁹ *Mali kauli* was also compatible with Muslim prescriptions with regards to commercial activities loans because interest was not visible in *mali kauli* arrangements.

Wholesale traders in Kariakoo by and large operated according to the *mali kauli* system. Immediate cash transactions were the exception, credit transactions the rule. Mzee Peni, a wholesale rice traders, started to work at

⁷ Habibu Ramadhani Mganda; Dummah; Faraji Iddi Dibuma; Jabu Ramadhani; Mzee Luanda; Kasoga; Lusunga; Mzee Gogo; Mzee Kagire; Mzee Kobelo; Suleiman Majata; Mohammed Hussen Nyoko; Salum Ramadhani Kusa Elikeni, all interviewed by the author in Swahili.

⁸ Ogawa (2006) described the *mali kauli* system in Tanzania's second-largest city of Mwanza.

⁹ TNA: 10493; 26231; ACC 26/M5/2: Credit to Native Ordinance, 1931.

the Kariakoo market in the early 1960s. He first traded potatoes, tomatoes, okra, and cassava leaves before he got into the rice trade when the new Kariakoo market building opened in 1975. He either waited at his market stall in the Kariakoo market building for upcountry traders, who handed their rice over to him on *mali kauli* basis, or he went to one of the rice-producing areas himself and bought rice from farmers and small-scale traders there when there was not enough rice being supplied to Kariakoo. In Mzee Peni's case, he went to Ifakara in Morogoro region, at about 300 miles south-west of Dar es Salaam on a partially non-tarmac road. From there, he transported the rice to Dar es Salaam on one of the Asian-owned buses or lorries, and sold it at the Kariakoo market. He bought one kilogram of hulled rice in Ifakara for 300 Shillings and sold it in Kariakoo for 500 Shillings. Transportation costs ate up most of the 200 Shilling difference in price. Furthermore, he had to pay a small government tax at the Kariakoo market. Buying the rice in Ifakara on *mali kauli* basis, Mzee Peni's initial costs were negligible. He only had to pay for part of the transportation costs and the tax. Once sold, he paid the rest of the transportation costs as well as the price for the rice in Ifakara.¹⁰ Mzee Peni boasted: "I could go to Ifakara even without any money at all, with nothing but my pants and my shirt and I could still do business. This is different now. Nowadays there are only cash-based transactions [*hela kwa hela*] and you would appear a conman [if you wanted to do business without money]."¹¹ To bring the rice from the field to the urban consumer, six or more people were involved in the trade, all of them relying on the reputation of the others to conduct the trade. Rice farmers in the Kilombero Valley around Ifakara, traders in Ifakara, drivers on the route Ifakara-Dar es Salaam, wholesale traders in the Kariakoo market hall, shop retailers in the neighborhood, and end consumers in Dar es Salaam were all linked up in chains of credit.

¹⁰ Mzee Peni, interviewed by the author in Swahili.

¹¹ Mzee Peni, interviewed by the author in Swahili.

Uaminifu

Constitutive of the *mali kauli* system was a powerful discourse of business ethics. The central notion of this discourse was *uaminifu*, which can best be translated with “honesty” and “trustworthiness.” The discourse set out business rules and it formed a framework of expectations, which shaped traders’ behavior towards each other and towards themselves in significant ways. With the help of this rich and moral vocabulary, Kariakoo traders could assess other traders’ activities and identify them as *waaminifu* (sg. *mwaminifu*, “trustworthy, honest person”), thus belonging to their community, while carefully making sure that other traders would identify them as *waaminifu*.¹² *Uaminifu* was discursively closely related to *mali kauli* and long-standing traders always mentioned *uaminifu* when they talked about the *mali kauli* ways of doing business. It was usually with a sense of nostalgia that traders talked about what trade had been like in the past. But despite the nostalgia, it was striking how both Kariakoo traders and upcountry suppliers placed *mali kauli* and *uaminifu* in a common discursive space. “When a person gives you his goods on *mali kauli* basis, you meet again on the agreed-upon day and you give him his money. He comes and he goes away and already you have built *uaminifu*. When he comes back, he must come see you again,” described Mzee Kobelo, one of the long-standing wholesale traders at the Kariakoo market.¹³ Traders insisted that in order for the *mali kauli* system to work, upcountry suppliers and Kariakoo traders had to be honest and trust each other, which was expressed with the help of the reciprocal verb form *ku-aminiana*, “to trust each other.”¹⁴ The *uaminifu* discourse compelled Kariakoo traders to cultivate their reputation as trustworthy and honest traders in the eyes of upcountry suppliers and the

¹² Cohen and Lovejoy provide examples from West Africa of how Africans organized their trade on the basis of a shared ideology (Cohen 1969; Lovejoy 1980; see also Rockel 2006).

¹³ Mzee Kobelo, interviewed by the author in Swahili.

¹⁴ In Swahili, the verb suffix *-ana* expresses the reciprocal form, e.g. *ku-amini*, “to trust;” *ku-aminiana*, “to trust each other.”

people in the market and in the neighborhood.¹⁵ A good reputation could to a certain extent be inherited from a parent,¹⁶ but all the traders had to constantly work on maintaining and improving their reputation as *waaminifu*.

If a trader had the reputation of being honest and trustworthy, he could do business even when he did not have any capital at disposal.¹⁷ As long as the suppliers trusted a particular trader, they would supply goods without expecting immediate cash payments. "Here [in Kariakoo], capital is *uaminifu*, and *uaminifu* is capital,"¹⁸ stated Juma Lusunga, a wholesale fish trader at the Kariakoo market, and *uaminifu* allowed traders like him to access goods without having to pay for them right away. A reputation as *mwaminifu* could help a trader back on his feet when he was bankrupt. And a good reputation could bring a trader a lot of business. Salum Elikeni, a longstanding wholesale trader in rice at the Kariakoo market, described how upcountry suppliers he had never met sent him goods, simply because they had heard about his good reputation and entrusted him their produce. He would then pay them their money once he had sold the produce.¹⁹

Neither wholesale traders nor suppliers at the time thought of these arrangements as a form of credit. "The one trusting you doesn't have an idea that he is lending you and you, who are borrowing, don't have any idea that you are borrowing from another person's business; you don't know that and you don't use that kind of language," contended Lusunga.²⁰ Much more important was another kind of language, the language of mutual respect. In fact, it was common for both the supplier and wholesaler to call the other *tajiri*, i.e. "wealthy person," even when one of them did not

¹⁵ Mzee Kalulu used the term *jina kubwa* or "great name," which can be translated as "good reputation" (Mzee Kalulu, interviewed by the author in Swahili).

¹⁶ Habibu Ramadhani Mganda, interviewed by the author in Swahili.

¹⁷ Mohammed Hussen Nyoko, interviewed by the author in Swahili. Habibu Ramadhani Mganda, interviewed by the author in Swahili.

¹⁸ Juma Saidi Lusunga, interviewed by the author in Swahili.

¹⁹ Salum Ramadhani Kusa Elikeni, interviewed by the author in Swahili.

²⁰ Juma Saidi Lusunga, interviewed by the author in Swahili.

have any money.²¹ Although they did not use the Swahili words for “credit” and “debt” when engaging in *mali kauli* practices, Kariakoo traders were very adept at using these arrangements to their advantage. The *mali kauli* arrangement with upcountry suppliers freed up capital traders were able to use productively on the sale side of their business.²² From the perspective of Kariakoo wholesale rice traders, the *mali kauli* system of trade reduced the risk of trade and increased their working capital.

One way for Kariakoo traders to build trust with upcountry suppliers was to show them their house and family in Dar es Salaam. Sometimes, suppliers even stayed at the Kariakoo traders’ houses while waiting for the traders to sell their produce.²³ Wholesale traders would also agree to keep suppliers’ share of profit for as long as the latter decided to stay in Dar es Salaam. Suppliers did not consider the option of putting money into a bank account because banks wanted to have a form of security from their clients or a guarantor who would vouch for a client. Workers and employees were more likely to have bank accounts at that time and small-scale traders from upcountry were not considered potential bank clients.²⁴ By keeping suppliers’ money at their house, Kariakoo traders partially fulfilled the role of the formal financial sector, which suppliers did not have access to.

²¹ Mtunga Mbande, interviewed by the author in Swahili. See also Juma Saidi Lusunga, interviewed by the author in Swahili.

²² An illuminating example provides Habibu Mganda, a banana trader who had been in business since the late 1950s. Even though he had a considerable amount of capital in cash at disposal, he would buy the produce on *mali kauli* basis. “The first thing I learned with regards to bananas is that when you buy cash, you can get a very bad loss” because some bananas do not ripen quickly enough and cannot be sold. The chances for suppliers to reimburse him for unsold bananas were slim. On *mali kauli* basis, on the other hand, Habibu Mganda would only pay for the bananas he actually sold to retailers or end consumers. He would then use the money he had at disposal to sell his produce to large-scale buyers such as the university, the army, the hospital, or the prison on credit. These government institutions would regularly pay him at the end of the month (Habibu Ramadhani Mganda, interviewed by the author in Swahili).

²³ Jabu Ramadhani, interviewed by the author in Swahili.

²⁴ Ramadhani Rashidi Malekela; Habibu Ramadhani Mganda, both interviewed by the author in Swahili.

Traders' conceptions of personhood and self-worth were constituted relationally and they were undergirded by a morality of *uaminifu*. When microcredits and other formal loans became available for traders in Kariakoo in the mid-1990s, loan officers deployed a different kind of morality to distinguish between "good" and "bad" traders and moral discourses around credit and debt became contested.

Competing Moralities: Micro-Credits, Creditworthiness, and *Aibu*

Kariakoo traders had access to formal credit for the first time in the mid-1990s when Tanzania's financial sector was deregulated and small and medium-size loans became available for market hall traders. The Tanzanian government's hotly debated acceptance of an IMF- and World Bank-sponsored structural adjustment program in 1986 was the formal start to deregulate the economy, including the banking sector. The monopoly position of the National Bank of Commerce (NBC) in the commercial banking sector ended in 1991 and the doors were opened for private financial institutions to be set up. By 1999, a total of thirty-one such institutions had been established (Tanzania Ministry of Finance 2000). NBC itself underwent a thorough process of restructuring towards privatization.²⁵ Some of the newly created financial institutions took the form of microfinance institutions. Among the first were FINCA, PRIDE, and the Presidential Trust Fund for Self-Reliance (PTF), all of which were established in the mid-1990s. These early non-bank microfinance institutions in Tanzania made use of ideas and experiences of microfinance institutions in other parts of the world, such as Grameen Bank and BRAC in Bangladesh. Banks in Tanzania drew their inspiration from microfinance institutions in order to reach larger segments of society. The formation of the National Microfinance Bank, an offshoot of NBC, was one example.

²⁵ NBC was split into three different entities in 1997, including NBC (1997) Limited and the National Microfinance Bank.

The provision of small loans to formerly “unbankable” people did not simply satisfy an already existing demand as the promoters of microcredits proclaimed. Since providers of small formal loans in Kariakoo were convinced that their potential clientele was “financially illiterate” and first-time customers of formal financial institutions, much effort was invested in shaping urban Tanzanians’ desires for formal loans and persuading traders, who had been excluded from formal financial services, to embrace the idea of borrowing money and making repayments with interest and within clearly defined time units. Much of this work aimed at the cultural ways of doing business in Kariakoo.²⁶ Representatives of credit institutions often referred to the cultural aspect of their work when they used terms such as “credit mentality” or “culture of credit.”²⁷ Salie Mlay, the NMB branch manager in Kariakoo in the early 2000s, went to the Kariakoo market hall every evening to spend time with the traders because he wanted to get to know their way of doing business. “You really need to know how these people work, from the bottom, their culture.”²⁸ Salie Mlay convinced the market manager to organize a meeting in the market building to inform the traders about the formalities of taking out loans.²⁹ An explicit reference to “culture” was also made by Miguel Llenas, the General Director of Dun&Bradstreet Bureau Tanzania Limited, the national representative of the American company Dun&Bradstreet (D&B), when promoting the imminent creation of the first credit bureau in Tanzania in 2013:

²⁶ Elyachar (2005: 214f) shows for the el-Hirafiyen neighborhood in Cairo how prospective managers of local microcredit services were instructed to use culture, such as the headman, the religious leader, community pressure, or the police, as ways to ensure the repayment of loans, and culture was turned into a cost-saving device.

²⁷ Winnie Terry; Shafik Bhatia; Salie Mlay; Reginald Massawe; Tirunagari Srikanth, all interviewed by the author in Swahili or English.

²⁸ Salie Mlay, interviewed by the author in English.

²⁹ Salie Mlay claimed that he had 250 applications after the initial meeting. The applicants included wholesale traders from the underground level as well as shopkeepers from the upper level.

“Now we help the government of Tanzania, the banks, every stakeholders of the country to create a culture of repayment. If you have a loan, you will have to pay. If you have a credit card, you will have to pay. If you have a telephone line in your house, you will have to pay. If you are paying anything in any retail company, for example you go to a retailer store and you buy a fridge or a TV to be paid in one year, you will have to pay it. Because if you don’t do that, eventually nobody will lend you money because everybody will know that you don’t pay in time.”³⁰

Miguel Llenas made clear that the role of the credit bureau was to change borrowers’ mentality and introduce a new culture of doing business. Creditors’ mission was not only to lend money to small traders but to change borrowers’ ways of handling money, conceiving of time, viewing themselves, and relating to other traders.

Uaminifu versus Creditworthiness

Credit providers understood formal loans as a catalyst for the emergence of a new culture of doing business and for the transformation of borrowing traders’ subjectivities towards more individualistic concepts of selfhood. Instead of investing time and money into building personal and trust-based relations with upcountry suppliers, which was crucial in the *mali kauli* system of trade, Kariakoo traders were now expected to be accountable primarily to loan officers and to engage with suppliers in impersonal and cash-based market transactions.

A focus on the notion of *uaminifu* illustrates to what extent creditors’ visions translated to what happened on the ground in Kariakoo, i.e. how power relations and trader subjectivities in the Kariakoo market changed with the

³⁰ Miguel Llenas, General Director of Dun&Bradstreet Bureau Tanzania Limited, in an interview with Tanzanian media at the occasion of a workshop on the establishment of a credit bureau in Tanzania. The workshop took place on May 3, 2013, in Dar es Salaam and representatives of 45 banks operating in Tanzania participated. Interview transcribed by the author and available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6mZTQiOcJeM>.

liberalization of the financial sector in the mid-1990s and the arrival of microcredit loans in the subsequent decade. The widespread availability of formal loans made it easier for Kariakoo traders to pay their suppliers immediately in cash instead of relying on *mali kauli* transactions. Immediate cash transactions had the advantage of shortening upcountry suppliers' stay in Dar es Salaam. A Kariakoo trader with the disposable cash to pay upcountry suppliers immediately was able to lure suppliers away from other Kariakoo traders, who based their trade on the *mali kauli* system. To marginalize and replace *mali kauli* transactions was an explicit goal formulated by Salie Mlay when he started to advertise NMB loans to Kariakoo traders: "I told the [Kariakoo] market manager 'If you want to make more money, we need to cooperate, me and you, and support these people [the wholesalers at the Kariakoo market] so they can have cash and they can sell more, and collect more revenue, and you can renovate the market.' (...) We had a meeting and we agreed that we would give microcredit so they can support cash movements so they can pay on the spot instead of take it on credit."³¹

When Kariakoo traders started to take out formal loans and pay suppliers in cash, the *mali kauli* system and the conceptions of self-worth and personhood described above were challenged. *Uaminifu* as a central term to describe a trader's professional ability and personal identity was undermined while "creditworthiness" as assessed by loan officers became increasingly relevant. The definatory power over who was and who was not a trustworthy trader in the Kariakoo market shifted from upcountry suppliers to loan officers. In the *mali kauli* system, upcountry suppliers ultimately had the power to define which Kariakoo trader was trustworthy. Suppliers expected a trustworthy Kariakoo trader to take care of produce and sell it to the agreed-upon price before it went bad. They relied on a trader's reputation and on their personal relations with the trader to gauge *hi uaminifu*.³² By agreeing to hand over their goods to a particular Kariakoo

³¹ Salie Mlay, interviewed by the author in English.

³² The large majority of traders at the Kariakoo market were men.

trader without insisting on immediate cash payments, they granted the trader a form of short-term credit. As they built personal long-term relations a particular Kariakoo trader, suppliers helped him to establish a reputation as trustworthy traders.

For loan officers, *uaminifu* was not a central term to describe a trader's personality and his or her ability as a professional trader.³³ They employed the similar but narrower concept of "creditworthiness" – expressed in Swahili with the verb *ku-kopesheka*, i.e. "to be creditworthy"³⁴ – to separate "good" debtors from "bad" debtors. As bankers expected borrowing traders to be able to pay back loans with interest in regular installments, they required them to prove their creditworthiness by providing evidence that their businesses had been profitable for the duration of several months or years. Hardly any one of these traders had a credit history with formal financial institutions.³⁵ According to Habibu Mganda, a wholesale banana trader at the Kariakoo underground market, "Many of us traders, we don't have business records, which could give us the memory of how last year's business was compared to this year's business. ... That's why the banks are afraid of us and now the banks do lend us money but it's very little money and not a considerable amount."³⁶ Kariakoo traders had to prove that they were capable businessmen even when they had been in business for decades and had a long-standing reputation as *waaminifu*. Signed written documents meant that there was a legal obligation to make agreed-upon repayments, which brought about a new experience of time as well. The *mali kauli* system had depended on flexible time promises. Whenever the produce was sold, Kariakoo traders reimbursed upcountry suppliers for the

³³ A few Kariakoo traders such as Suleiman Majata also referred to *uaminifu* as something that had mattered in the past, but had become less important in the present.

³⁴ From the verb *ku-kopa* ("to borrow") and the derivative verb form *ku-kopesha* ("the make (someone) borrow", i.e. "to lend"). *Ku-kopesheka* is the stative form of *ku-kopesha*, so the literal translation of *ku-kopesheka* is "to be in a state of being made to borrow" or "to be lendable."

³⁵ Creditors and loan officers such as Salie Mlay lamented this to a great extent.

³⁶ Habibu Ramadhani Mganda, interviewed by the author in Swahili.

goods they were entrusted with. Formal credits, on the other hand, entailed fixed time units for repayment, which stripped formal credit off the Maussian gift-like character *mali kauli* loans displayed.

The definatory struggle over the meaning and relevance of *uaminifu* and creditworthiness provides a particularly illuminating insight into processes of subject formation.³⁷ Whether and how people and institutions considered a person trustworthy had an effect on the person's understanding of himself or herself. How trustworthiness was defined and who was defined as trustworthy fundamentally shaped people's identities and subjectivities. Notions of trustworthiness and honesty were particularly relevant in the Kariakoo market environment, where credit and debt were constitutive of social and communal relations.

To a certain extent, formal credit did indeed work as a catalyst for the emergence of a new culture of doing business, just as credit providers had imagined. Formal loans had the effect of prompting borrowers to take stock of themselves and work on their selves in new ways giving rise to new trader subjectivities marked by a sense of individualism and self-reflection took shape.³⁸ An indication for this is the subtle difference between the ways long-standing Kariakoo traders talked about doing business before and after the introduction of formal loans. Traders tended to use reciprocal verb forms expressed with the suffix *-ana* when referring to the past, and they more often used reflexive verb forms expressed with the prefix *ji-* when describing business activities since the mid-1990s. Traders insisted on the importance of *ku-aminiana*, "to trust each other," when doing business on *mali kauli* basis. When describing more recent business activities, traders used reflexive verb forms expressed with the prefix *ji-*, such as in *ku-jikwamua* ("to extricate oneself"), *ku-jipanga* ("to put oneself in order"), or *ku-*

³⁷ With Foucault, I consider subject formation as a continuous process taking place in an environment of power manifested in social relation. In this environment of power, human beings turn themselves into subjects and create certain subjectivities (see especially Foucault 1982).

³⁸ Julia Elyachar (2005) uses the term "entitlement debt" to describe a similar phenomenon in Cairo.

jipimisha (“to evaluate oneself”). Hamis Zowange, a wealthy Kariakoo trader and businessman, was conscious of how taking out formal loans changed the way he did business, even as he struggled to find the right words: “[Loans] helped me get this... you know, when you borrow money, there is a little thing that gives you like a certain obligation to do what? To work, diligently, so you are able to repay and to be in... it contributes to a certain extent to the conduct of business. You evaluate yourself [*unajipimisha mwenyewe*]. Because when you take money or when you take a car [as a loan], then you have to put it to work in a way that you give back the share [of the lender] and you get your share.”³⁹ Mtunga Mbande, a rice trader from Ifakara, who had taken out loans from NMB, also acknowledged that taking out loans had an effect on how he did business. “It animates your mind because, you know, there is this challenge that now, I mustn’t sleep, I need to work. ... You know, when these loans came here, it was true that people thought that we would be able to do what? To extricate ourselves [*Tukajikwamua*].”⁴⁰ The shift towards an increasing occupation with oneself instead of one’s reliance on others also became visible when Kariakoo traders lamented the decreasing importance of *uaminifu* and expressed that the sense of creditworthiness granted by banks and microfinance institutions was not an equivalent substitute for *uaminifu*. Salum Elikeni, for instance, contended that *umimi*, i.e. “selfishness,” had replaced *uaminifu*.⁴¹ Working on their own selves and changing the ways of doing business were often experienced as painful and stressful. Habibu Mganda’s description was representative of other traders’ experiences. “The person, who takes out a bank loan wants to, I mean, he doesn’t sleep. He doesn’t sleep. He does business in a way that does not correspond to his capability and out of fear, so he can repay the money to the bank ... and when there are only three

³⁹ Hamis Mohamed Zowange, interviewed by the author in Swahili.

⁴⁰ Mtunga Mbande, interviewed by the author in Swahili. Mtunga Mbande then went on to say that due to the high interest rates, the extra work one put in only benefitted the banks and not the one taking out the loan. Rather than helping people to free themselves, banks loans actually entrap them.

⁴¹ Salum Ramadhani Kusa Elikeni, interviewed by the author in Swahili.

days left to make the repayments, and he doesn't have the money, well he isn't even able to go to sleep, he only worries."⁴² Instead of working on how they were perceived by fellow traders, suppliers, and customers, who in times of need would serve as sponsors, borrowing traders were now urged to work on themselves and their ways of doing business.

Competing Moralities and Aibu Stories

Despite the multi-pronged attempts to create new borrowing and fiscally responsible subjects, former conceptions of self and personhood were not entirely undermined. The project of impelling borrowers to re-think themselves as independent, rational, and fiscally responsible entrepreneurs accountable only to loan officers did not unfold uncontestedly. Competing moralities allowed urban residents to critically evaluate new forms of credit and debt and their attending moral discourses. The persistence of older forms of morality and relations of trust served as a way to evaluate and criticize formal loans. Kariakoo traders were skeptical of formal loans and the new business culture formal loans were supposed to bring about as well as the new morality undergirding loan officers' assessments of potential debtors. While users of formal loans were supposed to work on their creditworthiness by producing paper trails and making repayments on their loans in regular intervals, Kariakoo traders continued to build their reputation as *waaminifu* traders by creating relations of trust with other traders and suppliers. Newly entitled receivers of formal loans drew on these older forms of morality to critically engage with the emerging morality of creditworthiness, which constituted a competing morality of borrowing and lending and challenged older forms of morality and relations of trust between traders and upcountry suppliers.

A large majority of traders did not uncritically embrace the new financial instruments.⁴³ People framed their critique mainly in three different ways.

⁴² Habibu Ramadhani Mganda, interviewed by the author in Swahili.

⁴³ 44 out of the 48 Kariakoo traders I talked to in my survey were critical of formal loans.

One was to criticize the technicalities of loans available in urban Tanzania. A common assessment was that interest rates were excessively high and the time for repayment too short and not up for re-negotiation. Kariakoo traders often brought up the issue of time when describing how lenders seized borrowers' possessions such as houses and land due to non-repayment of loans. According to them, the fixed time units on which formal loans relied were the reason so many people lost their possessions.⁴⁴ Moreover, the conditions to even qualify for a loan were numerous and difficult to fulfill. For instance, ownership of a house was often not sufficient as a collateral, unless one also had the title deed, which was not easy to get in urban Tanzania. Various application fees further lowered the appeal of loans. Several people also articulated their annoyance with loan officers, who would not give out loans unless the clients allowed them to keep five to ten per cent of the loans for themselves as a bribe. Finally, lenders disliked the long application process and the wealth of papers and documents one had to submit and sign to get a loan.⁴⁵ Since small traders knew that the unpredictability of their business would make it difficult for them to effect regular repayments, they had good reasons not to take out loans.⁴⁶

Religious beliefs provided the grounds for some Kariakoo traders not to use formal loans. Taking out an interest-bearing loan was problematic for Muslims traders, who accounted for the large majority of traders in Kariakoo.⁴⁷ According to the Qur'an, loans bearing interest or *riba* were forbidden or *haramu*. As long as no interest was charged, however, loans were not considered problematic⁴⁸ and Muslim traders often accepted

⁴⁴ Mzee Abdallah, interviewed by the author in Swahili.

⁴⁵ Jabu Ramahani; Ramadhani Rashidi Malekela; Mzee Urio; Fabiola Lagali; Juma Saidi Lusunga, all interviewed by the author in Swahili. While criticizing the technicalities of loans was common for most Kariakoo traders, traders of a younger generation tended to be the ones restricting themselves to this kind of critique.

⁴⁶ Hamis Kassim Ulele, interviewed by the author in Swahili.

⁴⁷ 39 out of the 48 Kariakoo traders surveyed were Muslim.

⁴⁸ A small minority of Muslim traders such as Alif Ndige, a shopkeeper in Kariakoo, even considered financial services offered in the form of Islamic banking problematic. Islamic

informal interest-free loans from fellow traders or from wealthy Kariakoo patrons. Advancing goods on credit was not *haramu*, either, which was a distinct advantage of *mali kauli* arrangements. Many shopkeepers were only able to establish themselves because they received goods on credit.⁴⁹ For most Muslim traders, however, religious identity did not prevent them from taking out interest-bearing loans and many were quite willing to talk about their experiences with credit. Even more orthodox Muslims acknowledged that when a person was in trouble and needed money, it was acceptable to take out interest-bearing loans.⁵⁰

A third way of conveying dislike for formal loans took a different tone, one that belonged to the realm of affect. Anxiety was the most common feeling long-standing businesspeople, who had relied on *mali kauli* transaction for decades, expressed when evaluating formal loans. They articulated their fear of being put in jail⁵¹ or being dispossessed of their belongings when failing to repay loans according to the rigid time frame set by the lender. Traders used the verb *ku-taifisha*, “to nationalize,” to describe how banks seized the houses of borrowers, who had failed to make repayments in time.⁵² The use of the terminology of *ku-taifisha* illustrates how past events and experiences shaped Kariakoo residents’ perception of the newly-introduced formal ways of lending and borrowing. The banks in post-1991 Tanzania were private companies and the word “to nationalize” may not have been entirely accurate to describe a private company’s seizing debtors’ property. But *ku-taifisha* conjured up the memories and the ghosts of the socialist past, most strikingly the so-called “acquisition of buildings” in 1971

banking had only been available in Dar es Salaam for a few years when I conducted interviews in 2013.

⁴⁹ Mzee Abdallah, interviewed by the author in Swahili.

⁵⁰ Mzee Abdallah, interviewed by the author in Swahili.

⁵¹ Nuru Uwesohogwa Muki, interviewed by the author in Swahili.

⁵² Mohammed Hussen Nyoko, interviewed by the author in Swahili: “mimi ni mwoga sana naogopa kutaifishwa;” Mzee Mgaya, interviewed by the author in Swahili: “Wao [benki] wanaangalia nyumba kama halali basi wanakupa. Ukikosa kurudisha wanataifisha nyumba.”

when privately-owned multi-story buildings were nationalized.⁵³ Most of the nationalized houses were located in Dar es Salaam.

Long-standing Kariakoo traders articulated their anxiety of being dispossessed of their belongings by telling stories. These stories were about people whose possessions – household items, furniture, cars, or even houses – were taken away because of an outstanding loan. What tellers of these stories conveyed went beyond the material loss debtors incurred. More important were the shame and embarrassment people experienced when they were being dispossessed. A failing debtor's greatest worry was to avoid being seen by neighbors and passers-by when creditors showed up to collect the possessions. Tellers of these stories used the Swahili word *aibu*, i.e. "embarrassment," "humiliation," or "shame," to describe these situations.⁵⁴ Zena Shanti provided a typical example of an *aibu* story: "I am scared [of taking out loans] because I don't have anything and then you end up having to sell the place you expected to build a house on and then you'll be distressed. The other day, a woman had all of her possessions taken away, all her things were taken to Magomeni [a neighborhood in Dar es Salaam] where they were sold. This is *aibu* for me when I think of it in my heart, you take another person's thing and you fail to give it back."⁵⁵ People told each other and me similar *aibu* stories about unnamed neighbors and acquaintances all the time and unsolicitedly. The debtors were never explicitly identified as tellers did not consider it appropriate to publicly mention debtors' names.⁵⁶

⁵³ The Acquisition of Buildings Act, 1971.

⁵⁴ Moral neighborhood communities played a crucial role in ensuring the repayment of loans in colonial Kariakoo.

⁵⁵ Zena Omari Shanti, interviewed by the author in Swahili.

⁵⁶ Faraji Iddi Dibuma, interviewed by the author in Swahili. Failing to pay debts was often described as *aibu*, not only in oral accounts but also in newspaper reports and other written texts. In 2011 the newspaper *Mwananchi*, the most widely-read Swahili newspaper in Tanzania at the time, ran a story on Tanzania's public debt in which it contended that it was *aibu* for Tanzania to continue to have debts the coming generation would have to repay (Mwananchi 2011).

The frequency with which Kariakoo traders and residents told others and me *aibu* stories and the similarity of these stories indicate how effectively they shaped people's opinions on formal loans.⁵⁷ Wholesale rice trader Temeck Sanga remembered that in the early days of microfinance in Dar es Salaam it was huge news when there was a case of a bank selling a debtor's assets.⁵⁸ Several microcredit officers complained that stories about failing debtors whose possessions were taken away were often blown out of proportion, a theme Dar es Salaam Regional Commissioner Said Sadick alluded to in his speech recounted at the beginning of this article (Mwananchi 2013.). These statements attest to the power of *aibu* stories in shaping potential borrowers' opinions and "structures of feeling"⁵⁹ about formal loans. Similar to vampire stories in colonial East Africa (White 2000), *aibu* stories reflected people's anxieties, in this case anxieties with regards to the introduction of formal loans and new kinds of power relations they entailed.

Conclusion

The cultural and moral underpinnings of financial and trade relations at the Kariakoo market have stood at the center of this article. Broadly conceptualizing market relations as cultural rather than merely economic formations⁶⁰ puts a new complexion on the advent of neoliberal capitalism in Tanzania. Changes in the political economy such as the end of state

⁵⁷ I have been inspired here by Ellen Moodie's use of people's narratives and how telling stories has the effect of shaping identities (Moodie 2010).

⁵⁸ Temeck Lenard Sanga, interviewed by the author in Swahili.

⁵⁹ "Structures of feeling" is a term coined by Williams (1973).

⁶⁰ Max Weber (1998) formulated an early conceptualization of capitalism as a cultural formation in 1905. Weber asserted that the "Protestant ethic" was an important force behind the development of capitalism in Europe and the United States. For how "the economy" came to be conceptualized as a sphere separate from cultural, social, and political life and following its rules, see Mitchell (2002).

socialism in Tanzania and the start of multiparty democracy were accompanied by new discourses and changing subjectivities. The “liberalization” or “deregulation” of the Tanzanian economy as spelled out in structural adjustment programs went beyond introducing the rationale of the market in both economic and non-economic spheres of the Tanzanian society. It also involved the emergence of a discourse of the responsible debtor and the re-making of traders as debtor-citizens accountable to financial institutions. Ultimately, the advent of neoliberal capitalism envisioned the re-making of Tanzanian citizens as market subjects. Formal credit and the discourse of the responsible debtor provided the grounds on which borrowing traders were impelled to re-think and re-make themselves as independent, rational, and fiscally responsible entrepreneurs.

The Kariakoo wholesale produce market in Dar es Salaam has served as a lens through which processes of subject formation become visible. At the Kariakoo market, the past two decades were marked by the emergence of immediate cash payments financed by formal loans as an alternative for transactions on *mali kauli* basis. Credit providers considered formal loans as central to a new business culture, which compromised older ways of doing business and their attendant value systems. The shift towards cash payments and formal loans constituted a qualitative change in traders’ relations amongst each other and in their understandings of themselves. Discursively, the concept of *uaminifu* was challenged by the more narrowly defined concept of “creditworthiness.” The provision of small loans to people, who had previously not been considered creditworthy, did not simply satisfy an already existing demand as the promoters of microcredits proclaimed. Rather, much cultural work was required to shape urban Tanzanians’ desires for formal loans.

As urban traders started to make use of bank loans, formal credit served as a catalyst to transform borrowing traders’ subjectivities. The power to define a person’s ability to be a good and successful trader shifted from upcountry suppliers to loan officers. As loan officers measured and quantified “creditworthiness” with specific methods, borrowing traders

came to see themselves and their relations to other people in a new light. Traders of the younger generation defined themselves as businessmen or businesswomen responsible for and in charge of their own lives even when their business careers were marked by hardship and failure. The use of formal credit induced borrowers to take stock of themselves and work on their selves. New trader subjectivities marked by a sense of individualism took shape.

In spite of the attempts to create new borrowing and fiscally responsible subjects, former conceptions of self and personhood were not entirely undermined. Long-standing Kariakoo traders, who had relied on the *mali kauli* system, perceived small and microcredits against the backdrop of a multi-layered history of borrowing and lending, histories of dispossession and wealth-creation, and systems of trade. Competing moralities continued to exist in Kariakoo and the persistence of older forms of morality and relations of trust allowed traders to critically evaluate new forms of credit and debt and their attending moral discourses. Rather than shifting the burden of blame onto themselves, they continued to build and maintain their reputation as *waaminifu* traders by creating relations of trust with producers, consumers, and other traders.

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