Diamond Ashiagbor, ed.

Re-Imagining Labour Law for Development: Informal Work in the Global North and South. Oxford: Hart/Bloomsbury, 2019. 275 pp.

The perennial project of rethinking labour law's conceptual and normative narratives gets fresh treatment in Diamond Ashiagbor's edited collection *Re-Imagining Labour Law for Development: Informal Work in the Global North and South.* An outcome of a conference that took place at the University of London's Institute of Advanced Legal Studies in 2016, the book gathers contributions from emerging researchers and leading international scholars in the field of work regulation. As the title suggests, the book centres on informality. Its key contribution lies in approaching informality not simply as an aberration or a new challenge to examine, but rather as a vantage point from which to reassess and rearticulate labour law and its role in development projects, albeit the latter thread is more clearly pulled through some of the book's contributions than others.

Informality is a condition that remains the material reality for a significant and, indeed, a growing share of the world's workers. Introducing the volume, Ashiagbor observes that while it tends to be associated with work relationships in countries of the Global South, informal work is now proliferating everywhere. Processes of vertical disintegration and labour market flexibility policies long promoted by international institutions like the World Bank and the IMF and embraced by national policymakers around the world are also driving informalization in countries of the Global North. Against this backdrop, and in light of the deficits in decent work associated with informality, strategies of formalization, such as those currently promoted by the ILO, seem to be something to embrace. After all, for informal workers, legal protection remains elusive, making labour law "a luxury" of sorts, as expressed by Pamhidzai H. Bamu, one of the book's contributors writing on the situation in Zimbabwe (Chapter 5, p. 122). Yet as this book shows, what informality entails, whether formalization is the best way to address the associated insecurities, and how labour law or work regulation are implicated in both, are questions that need careful unpacking.

The book interrogates these questions through a range of individual and comparative case studies from diverse jurisdictions spanning most continents. It draws upon an eclectic mix of conceptual and methodological tools, embracing contextual, historical, political-economic, and pluralist approaches already popular with labour lawyers, while also drawing on insights from actor network theory, postcolonial theory, regulatory theories, and institutional ethnography. What most of the book's contributors agree on is that informality, while hard to define and capture precisely (see, e.g., Introduction, Chapters 2, 3, 7, and 10), provides a useful vantage point from which to examine the regulation of work relations more generally. Heeding Liam McHugh-Russell's caution, the book eschews binaries that juxtapose economic forms and the "standard" work relations privileged in the Global North against "folk images of informal work and production" in the Global

South (Chapter 2, p. 75), embracing instead a more fluid continuum, or a constitutive relationship, between formality and informality. To that end, the book includes several case studies that examine how workers move between or "straddle" formal and informal work arrangements (see, e.g., Chapter 5) or how informality is produced in part through rendering certain forms of work formal or channelling formal into informal relations (see, e.g., Chapters 1, 3, and 8). As Kerry Rittich points out in her chapter, and as many of the book's contributions illustrate, focusing on informality allows us not only to capture more forms of work in our analysis, but also to grasp a wider array of norms and institutions that actually govern work relations (Chapter 1, p. 25).

Accordingly, while labour law and associated mechanisms remain a key analytical focus in the book, the lens of informality on the one hand reveals this law's problematic imbrication in colonial legacies and development projects (see, e.g., Chapters 2, 3, and 5) and its dissonance from the lived experiences and actual needs of informal workers (see, e.g., Chapters by 4, 5, and 7) and, on the other hand, pushes us to see beyond labour law to recognize other regulatory norms, forms, and mechanisms that may be more effective at protecting working people (see, e.g., Chapters 4, 7, 8, and 9). What the book conveys is that policies of formalization must be assessed in context, and against historic (and enduring) agendas, legacies, and effects to determine whether or not they are indeed likely to deliver improvements in workers' lives, whatever forms of work they engage in. Similarly, the task of re-imagining labour law for development requires grappling with these legacies, and perhaps letting go of our attachment to particular legal forms and mechanisms to develop richer and more expanded conceptions of work and its regulation.

There is much to commend in this rich and challenging book that pushes our boundaries, even if it opens as many questions and quandaries for further research as it answers. The book should be essential reading for those who study and research the regulation of work and labour and those interested in law and development studies or critical approaches to international law and policy. While the book's conceptual register might be too challenging for undergraduates, its contributions would do much to enrich graduate curricula in legal and socio-legal studies of work, labour, and employment.

Ania Zbyszewska
Assistant Professor in Law and Work, Department of Law and Legal Studies, Carleton University
Ania.Zbyszewska@carleton.ca