



Governing enclaves of informality: Unscrambling the logic of the camp in urban Zimbabwe



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ABSTRACT

The warehousing of informals in designated enclaves is a common strategy for the government of urban informality in the global South. In this article, I unscramble state-operated enclaves of informality in Zimbabwe. The article scrutinises two types of enclave: a flea market and a holding camp. I extend Agamben's politico-juridical construction to the social and economic realm. I question claims of inclusion in flea markets by juxtaposing a 'soft' zone of indistinction (flea market) with a 'hard' zone of indistinction (holding camp), arguing that both spaces are dump sites for *homo sacer*. I draw attention to the construction of bare life in both enclaves and emphasise the condition of rightlessness and the delimiting of the value of informals to bare life. Reflecting on the extent to which these spaces manifest the logic of the camp, I argue that both are spaces of exception.

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1. Introduction

A common spatial strategy for managing informals¹ in urban sub-Saharan Africa involves relocating and/or confining them to special enclaves. The enclaves are officially designated spaces where informality is warehoused to achieve several goals: eliminating disorder, making informals contribute to public coffers, and modernising informal enterprises (Hansen, 2004; GoZ, 2005; Centeno and Portes, 2006; Tokman, 2007; see Cresswell, 1996). The establishment of these enclaves is a profoundly spatial strategy aimed at addressing a spatial problem. Ambulant informals on various contested spaces are seen as generating disorder primarily because they flout planning and property laws. They have no legal right to occupy the contested spaces and they use them in ways that violate the dictates of planning (Kamete, 2008).

While the processes leading up to the designation and establishment of the enclaves, as well as the relocation of informals have been scrutinized, not much has been done in terms of clearly conceptualising the enclaves and investigating life in these spaces that the authorities and some commentators flag as proof of inclusive and accommodative policies for informality (see Kayuni and Tambulasi, 2009; Joseph, 2011). Rarely have claims of inclusivity and enablement been subjected to rigorous and critical scrutiny.

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¹ I use the term 'informals' as a shorthand term to refer to people who are directory involved in the informal economy and informal housing (cf. Bayat, 2004).

This paper is an attempt to peer into this relatively under-researched and under-conceptualized dimension of an important phenomenon in sub-Saharan Africa.

Agamben's formulations are useful in this recasting. His notions of bare life, the camp, and the state of exception have been deployed in the study of a wide range of people. These include inmates of Nazi death camps (Agamben, 1998), illegal immigrants (Coleman, 2007; Pope and Garrett, 2013), military detainees (Comaroff, 2007b; Brenkman, 2007), HIV-AIDS sufferers (Comaroff, 2007a), undocumented workers (Ong, 2006), refugees (Downey, 2009; Zannettino, 2012) and asylum seekers (Darling, 2009). To this list this articles adds informals in government-designated markets and informal settlements.

In this article I recast the relocation and confinement of informals and argue that, far from being an exercise in inclusion, the practice is an attempt at disablement and containment. Drawing on research in Zimbabwe, I scrutinize the warehousing of informals in a designated market and a holding centre. I work with Agamben's formulation and extend his politico-juridical construction to the social and economic realm in seemingly benign spaces of informality. Questioning claims of inclusion in flea markets, I juxtapose two sites of abandonment: a 'soft' zone of indistinction (flea market) with a 'hard' zone of indistinction (holding camp), arguing that both spaces embody the logic of the camp. I draw attention to the construction of bare life therein by emphasizing the pervasion of rightlessness and the delimiting of the value of informals to bare life.

In the next section I discuss Agamben's notion of the camp, pointing out that this provides a productive framework for reframing the practice of relocating and warehousing of informals. This is followed by a scrutiny of state-operated enclaves of informality in urban Zimbabwe. Finally, I argue for the recasting of these enclaves as the camp where bare life is produced and abandoned.

2. Biopolitical sovereignty and the logic of the camp

In southern Africa, the creation of enclaves where informals are settled and/or forced to confine their operations has received mixed reactions (Leduka, 2002; Hansen, 2010; Kamete, 2004). On one hand, the enclaves have been hailed as examples of inclusive planning; on the other, they have been dismissed as at best pointless gimmicks, or at worst, insidiously sinister structures of spatialized containment (see UN-Habitat, 2009; Kamete, 2014). The notion of biopolitics offers a productive intervention that could refresh this long-running debate.

First proposed by Foucault, and then radically interpreted by Agamben biopolitics can illuminate critical issues relating to enclaves of informality. Foucault (1998: 136) links the emergence of the modern state with 'the entry of phenomena peculiar to the life of the human species into the order of knowledge and power, into the sphere of political techniques'. This entry of biological life into political calculations marks a new form of power, *biopower*, which explicitly politicizes life, as opposed to sovereign power which 'operated on the principle of the right to commit its subjects to death in order to enhance the strength of the sovereign' (Mills, 2008: 59). For Foucault, there has been a transition from politics to *biopolitics*. He links this transition with attempts to govern populations – the administration of life (Mills, 2008: 59) – that began in the western world in the 17th century (Dean, 1999). It is this version of politics that was exported to southern Africa (Kamete and Lindell, 2010; see Legg, 2007). The handling of informality takes on a new meaning if it is viewed through this lens of biopolitics: the style of government that regulates populations through 'biopower', taken here to mean the application and impact of political power on all aspects of human life.

The creation of special enclaves for the warehousing of informality is an exercise of biopower, a biopolitical act. Since these enclaves are fundamentally a spatialized response to informality, a useful intervention is to recast this strategy as one of the state's spatial technologies in the government of informality. Agamben's (1998) notion of the camp is particularly useful in this respect. It is helpful to discuss the camp in the context of the state of exception, a key feature of biopolitics, from which the camp is inseparable. Agamben (2000: 38, 41) observes that the camp was 'born out of the state of exception and martial law', which makes the camp the 'materialization of the state of exception'. For this reason, in this section I will discuss the two concepts together.

Described by Mills (2008: 5) as 'a paradigm of biopolitical sovereignty', the camp is 'the space opened when the exception becomes the rule or the normal situation' (Mills, 2005). To unscramble the camp, therefore, we need to understand the 'state of exception'. The incorporation of a dictatorial element within the constitution allows a government to act decisively, especially when there is need to combat (what it defines as) a crisis and to normalise the situation (Schmitt, 2014: 17; Cailleba and Kumar, 2008). The state of exception is a cornerstone of this element (Schmitt, 1985). It frees the state from any legal restraints to its power that would normally apply. This state is a situation when 'the juridical order is suspended' (Kisner, 2007: 222). This suspension is possible because of the special position of the government's as the sovereign, who, according to Schmitt (1985: 5), is 'he who decides on the state of exception'. Though belonging to the juridi-

cal order, the sovereign 'stands outside the normally valid legal system' (Schmitt, 1985: 7). As Agamben puts it, 'the sovereign, having the legal power to suspend the validity of the law, legally places himself outside the law' (1998: 15).

In the state of exception, questions of citizenship and individual rights can be diminished, superseded and rejected as the sovereign extends its power. Hence, the "citizen" disappears into a "bare life" over whose management the state has taken over and in which the rule of law is suspended' (Kisner, 2007: 223). The bare life into which the 'citizen' disappears is life stripped of form and value (Agamben, 1998; Diken and Laustsen, 2002). It is the form of life that is produced through the colonization or politicization of biological life (*zoē*) 'by an increasingly elaborate skein of institutional structures and relationships which find their axiomatic expression in "law" and various manifestations of "sovereign power"' (Gandy, 2006: 500).

The state of exception is crucial to understanding planning and the handling of informality by the sovereign. This is because of its spatialisation. According to Gandy,

The 'state of exception' takes on the form of a distinctive 'space of exception' whether reflected in the huddled communities beyond the walls of a medieval city or the marginalized belts of deprivation in the contemporary metropolis.

[(2006: 500; emphasis added)]

The same can be said of the enclaves of informality. Interestingly, Roy notes that 'informality is the state of exception determined by the sovereign power of the planning apparatus' (Roy, 2005: 153). This is useful observation, for informality comprises 'unregulated activities in a political economy in which similar activities are regulated' (Roy, 2005: 156). Informality exists because the sovereign, who stands outside the juridical order, allows it to exist.

Described as the 'spatialization of the politics of exception' by Minca (2005: 412), the camp is the space resulting from the declaration of the state of exception: 'the space that appears when the state of exception becomes the rule and gains a permanent spatial form' (Minca, 2011: 41). Gandy (2006) provides useful insights into the rise of the camp. Citing Agamben, he explains that 'sovereign power involves a complex set of spatial relations between "outside and inside, the normal situation and chaos"' (page 501). This sees 'chaos' being incorporated into the juridical order (Gandy, 2006: 501). This incorporation is done 'through the creation of a zone of indistinction between outside and inside' (Agamben, 1998: 5). It is the zone of indistinction that finds a spatial expression in the camp.

Gandy notes that the camp exemplifies this 'absolute space of exception'. In the camp 'citizens are deprived of their rights and reduced to a state of bare life at the whim of a sovereign power' (p. 501). These references to the camp almost always refer to the 'extreme' camps: Nazi concentration camps, modern-day prisoner-of-war camps, refugee camps and detention centres for illegal migrants (see Minca, 2005; Diken and Laustsen, 2006; Rancière, 2004; Comaroff, 2007a). Could we legitimately transpose such dark descriptions from these 'extreme' camps to enclaves of informality? The following cases from Harare suggest that we can. The important thing here is that, just as in the concentration camps, these enclaves are spaces of exception where the suspension of the law becomes localized (Pratt, 2005: 1055), and the exception becomes the norm (Agamben, 2005). It is the extent to which the sovereign is prepared to go in the suspension of the juridical order – and hence the intensity of the deprivation of rights – that marks the major difference between the two. The *logic* is the same; the difference is one of degree.

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