Trashing Solidarity: The Production of Power and the Challenges to Organizing Informal Reclaimers

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Abstract

This article presents a nuanced social history of how reclaimers at the Marie Louise landfill in Soweto, South Africa, organized against each other on the basis of nationality instead of uniting to combat the effects of the 2008 global economic crisis. Through this narrative of struggles at one particular dump, the article contributes to debates on informal worker organizing by theorizing the importance of the production of identities, power relations, space, and institutions in understanding how and why informal workers create and maintain power-laden divisions between themselves. The article argues that organizing efforts that seek to overcome divisions between informal workers cannot simply exhort them to unite based on abstract principles, but must actively transform the places and institutions forged by these workers through which they create and crystallize divisive identities and power relations.

Introduction—No Reconciliation Today

It was December 16, 2009: South Africa's Reconciliation Day and the unofficial start of summer holidays. Across the country people were putting petrol in their cars, hopping in taxis, and boarding planes to head home to see loved ones or indulge in a few weeks of vacation.

But at the Marie Louise landfill in Soweto the situation was tense. A battle had been raging for months between South African and Zimbabwean reclaimers who collected reusable and recyclable materials at the dump. When the Landfill Operations Manager, who was legally in charge of the dump, went on leave, the South African reclaimers who had de facto control over salvaging at Marie Louise seized the gap. They instructed the security guards to only grant access to reclaimers with identification cards issued by the South African controlled reclaimer committee.

Virtually all those left outside the gate were Zimbabweans. With just days before Christmas and a new year full of school fees and other expenses around the corner, the Zimbabweans were desperate. They stormed the gate. Dozens of South African reclaimers came tearing down the mountain of garbage carrying sticks to ward them off. The tinderbox of nationalist tensions at the dump was starting to ignite.

Fearing the worst, the security guards called the landfill site manager who grudgingly returned from leave. Previously, he had promised the Zimbabweans they could stay until January and cajoled the South Africans into accepting this. A reprieve was obtained, but only fleetingly. Within a few weeks, all those

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without cards were back outside the gates, and the South African reclaimers had once again secured their control over salvaging at the dump.

As I watched these events unfold, the irony that this clash took place on Reconciliation Day hit me with full force. During apartheid, December 16 had been known as the Day of the Vow, an Afrikaner nationalist celebration of the 1838 victory of the Voortrekkers over the Zulus in the battle of Blood River. After 1994, the new democratic government decreed it should become a day to foster reconciliation and national unity. So perhaps what was happening at Marie Louise was not ironic after all, because the Zimbabweans were being kicked out precisely because they were not seen to be a legitimate part of the nation, and most South Africans were adamant they would not reconcile with the presence of Zimbabweans at the dump.

The burning question for me was why, in the context of a global economic crisis that had profoundly negative effects for all reclaimers, they were turning on each other. This article is my attempt to begin to answer that question and to parse out the implications for theorizing organization in the informal economy.

Grappling with Some Dirty Secrets

Collective organizing is predicated on building unity between workers. Movements and organizations attempting to organize informal workers are constantly faced with the challenges of overcoming social divisions and power relations between informal workers and crafting new common identities through which to wage united struggle. However, the burgeoning literature on organizing informal workers[1] provides scant guidance when trying to understand why and how South African reclaimers evicted other informal reclaimers that hot summer day in Soweto. Power struggles *between* informal workers and the ways they organize *against* each other are like dirty secrets that every organizer knows but few academics write about.[2]

Grounded in ethnographic analysis and interviews with reclaimers working at the Marie Louise garbage dump in Soweto during 2009 and 2010, this article contributes to debates on organizing informal workers by analyzing the Reconciliation Day expulsion, as an instance in which informal workers organized against each other. I argue that reclaimers organized largely along nationalist lines at Marie Louise because of the ways South African reclaimers linked their claims to the space of the dump with their claims to a place within the nation. South African reclaimers were able to entrench these claims through the production and crystallization of unequal national identities in the shift system they created to govern working time at the dump.

At a broader theoretical level, I draw on this experience at Marie Louise to make three interventions into debates on organizing informal workers. First, I argue that it is crucial to interrogate and theorize how power relations between informal workers and the identities that underpin them are produced, shape the ways they organize, and circumscribe their terrain for political action.

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Second, because informal workers do not organize in the abstract, but around particular struggles in particular places, interrogations of informal worker organizing must be attentive to how these places are produced and understood, the claims that different informal workers can make to and within them, and how this informs the collective identities they form and the ways in which they organize. Finally, I argue that informal institutions forged by informal workers to govern their labor processes play a critical role in producing and regulating social identities, social divisions, spatial claims, and forms of organizing within particular places. Organizing efforts that seek to overcome divisions between informal workers cannot simply exhort them to unite based on abstract principles. They must actively transform the institutions and spaces that produce and crystallize power-laden identities and social divisions between informal workers.

The article proceeds in four sections. The first section locates the article's intervention within the context of literature on informal worker organizing. The second section focuses on the importance of the interrelated production of Marie Louise, identities, and power relations in understanding how and why reclaimers organized against each other on the basis of nationality. The third section reflects on the role of the production of a shift system in institutionalizing these national divisions. The concluding section draws insights from each section together to make broader theoretical claims.

Organizing Informal Workers

Reflecting the historical preoccupations and political commitments of many labor scholars, a key strand in literature on organizing informal workers is concerned to ensure the continued relevance of traditional trade unions by encouraging them to organize informal and casual workers. This scholarship is predicated on the belief that if transformed, traditional unions could provide an important vehicle for organizing and advancing the struggles of informal and casual workers. Some scholars highlight that in order to recruit nonstandard and informal workers, traditional unions must develop specific approaches to organizing women, ethnic minorities, and foreign migrants. As this would be a fundamental shift in union practice and orientation, these writers offer various perspectives on the possibilities of traditional unions transforming sufficiently to do so.[3]

Other authors note the rising importance of non-traditional forms of organizing. Those writing about the North explore how community worker centers, ethnically based organizing projects, and other creative initiatives are employed to organize immigrant and ethnic minority workers.[4] Many scholars writing about the South focus on how new forms of women's-only or women-centered unions and organizations can successfully recruit and meet the needs of informal women workers. They also explore the limitations and challenges of these initiatives.[5] The literature on organizing migrant domestic workers is particularly attentive to the need for organizing strategies to resonate with the experiences

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and interests of these workers rooted in their mutually constituted and overlapping identities as women, non-nationals, racialized minorities, and workers.[6]

This literature makes important political and theoretical interventions, establishing that scholars and organizers need to reconceptualize the identity of the organizable worker, organizing processes, issues to organize around, and the forms that worker organization takes. Of crucial importance is the recognition that organizing must be shaped in relation to articulations of gender, race, ethnicity, nationality, and other identities pertinent within particular historical and spatial contexts.

However, only a few scholars note organizing strategies to bridge social divides *between* informal workers, such as the use of popular education and cultural activities.[7] None conduct in-depth critical analysis of how these processes forge unity, and there is a general analytical silence with respect to informal workers organizing *against* each other on the basis of power-laden identities.[8]

Finally, the literature on organizing informal workers tends to take these identities as given. Yet, as Bridget Kenny[9] alerts us in her attention to how workers are involved in the production of distinct identities, which mitigate against the forging of solidarity, it is crucial that we explore how these identities are formed and transformed, and interrogate the implications for organizing.

The Dialectical Forging of Space-time and Social Relations at Marie Louise

A key aspect of work characterized as informal is the use of space in ways other than those for which it was intended: street traders turn streets into supermarkets and shopping malls;[10] homeworkers turn homes into factories;[11] and reclaimers transform garbage dumps from commodity cemeteries into resource mines.[12] However, to date, most research on organizing informal workers has been conducted within sociological frameworks that, as Ward[13] observes, frame space as "context" or an "optional extra."

In order to rectify this lacuna, it is useful to draw on Henri Lefebvre's dialectical understanding of space. Rooted in Marxist ontology, Lefebvre argues that rather than being a static, empty container, space is a social product constituted through contested social relations.[14] Doreen Massey[15] elaborates that rather than being understood as having an intrinsic nature and as juxtaposed to history, space is therefore dynamic and should be thought of as "space-time."

Clarifying what this means for how we understand place, Massey argues that "a 'place' is formed out of the particular set of social relations, which interact at a particular location."[16] Importantly, she highlights that these social relations extend far beyond a place itself to other places and scales. Within her relational understanding of space, places are also necessarily forged through their connections to each other.[17] Finally, the ways that places are produced, the material forms that they assume, the power relations that congeal within them, and how they are understood shape identities, social relations, and future social actions.

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The Reconciliation Day expulsion was fundamentally about access to and control over Marie Louise, as a site for the production of value and generation of income. A Lefebvrian approach clarifies that rather than seeing the place of the conflict as a backdrop, it is vitally important to interrogate how the way in which Marie Louise was produced was central to the political mobilization of the South African reclaimers, as well as the Zimbabweans' response. In particular, it is necessary to unpack how the dump was constituted as a place where reclaimers produced value, why nationality became the primary social identity at the dump, and how South African reclaimers established control over access to the resources at Marie Louise.

Establishing the Resource Mine

Marie Louise did not start its life as a site for the reconstitution of value. When it became operational as a municipal landfill in 1993 no reclaimers were permitted on the site; indeed, in 2018 the landfill permit still does not allow salvaging at the dump. Marie Louise's very identity as a "sanitary landfill" was predicated on it being devoid of any social activity other than the burial of waste by municipal workers. A phalanx of security guards were employed to protect this spatial identity. Nevertheless, in 1993 or 1994, a small number of unemployed South Africans began sneaking into Marie Louise to salvage reusable and recyclable materials. Soon their numbers rose to just under sixty. The reclaimers climbed through holes in the fence and worked early in the morning and/or late at night in an effort to avoid expulsion by landfill security.

This risky game of hide and seek continued until municipal waste management workers realized how much money the reclaimers were making and started reclaiming themselves. Compounding the reclaimers' existing grievances over the brevity of their working day, this new competition catalyzed the reclaimers to start holding informal meetings and mobilizing to establish more secure access to the dump. The leader of this initiative visited other municipal landfills and found that at one of those sites, reclaimers were permitted to work all day. Affirming the importance of a relational understanding of space, this knowledge inspired the Marie Louise reclaimers to struggle to win the right to reclaim during the working day.

The reclaimers' strategy was simple. One morning, in 1998, they simply refused to leave the dump. The reclaimers were attacked by the security guards and then the police. Many were badly injured, and a number ended up in jail. As soon as they were released they returned to the dump, only to be attacked and arrested again. This cycle of struggle continued for two years. Eventually, the municipality and the private company it contracted to manage the landfill conceded that they did not have enough control of the physical space of the dump to prevent reclaimers from working there. Forced to accept that the reclaimers had transformed Marie Louise into a resource mine,[18] they asked the ninety-six reclaimers working at the dump to elect a committee to represent them. On June 15, 2000, they reached a verbal agreement granting

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these reclaimers permission to work at Marie Louise and to control all salvaging activities conducted there.[19]

Establishing Ownership of the Mine

The original reclaimers' right to control reclaiming at the dump did not go unchallenged. Although the reclaimers regulated their own labor process, the municipality still owned the dump. In 2001, as part of the controversial "iGoli 2002" municipal restructuring and privatization plan, the Johannesburg metropolitan council merged its waste management departments and transformed them into a private company called Pikitup, with the municipality as the sole shareholder.[20] As Pikitup was required to shift from being reliant on municipal subsidies to generating a profit, it negotiated a contract that gave a private company sole rights over recyclable materials at the dump in return for an access fee. Reclaimers would only be allowed to continue to work at Marie Louise if they sold their materials to the company. This would remove their freedom to seek out the buyers with the highest prices for different materials, as well as to collect reusable materials. In addition, the company informed the reclaimers that as it had to pay Pikitup, it would pay lower prices than what they were currently receiving.

The reclaimers would not accept this deterioration in their conditions. After refusing to sign contracts agreeing to sell their materials to the contractor, they were forcibly removed from the dump and protested outside the gates. They also sought political assistance from local and national representatives of the African National Congress (ANC), whom the reclaimers felt should support them as they had responded to calls from the governing party to create their own jobs, only to have them be taken away. Mocking the reclaimers for "fighting over waste," the ANC ignored their pleas.

With the assistance of a buyer who also would have lost his livelihood if the contract went ahead, the reclaimers secured pro bono legal support from the Legal Resources Center (LRC) and took the municipality and Pikitup to court. In 2003 the reclaimers triumphed; the judge ruled that they had not received sufficient notice of termination of the verbal agreement, and they had been unfairly evicted and could therefore remain on the dump.

The ruling assumed even greater meaning at Marie Louise. Virtually none of the reclaimers or Pikitup management at the dump read the court ruling. The actual ruling meant that if correct processes were followed the reclaimers could be evicted; yet even years later everyone at Marie Louise still believed the court had ruled that the reclaimers could not be removed from the dump as they "owned the dump," a phrase repeatedly used by reclaimers and Pikitup officials in discussions and interviews. This understanding was bolstered when Pikitup and the municipality did not pursue the eviction and continued to cede authority over all reclamation activities to the reclaimers. Returning to Lefebvre and Massey's theorization of the social production of space, it is evident that although the physical space of the dump and its legal status had not changed,

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by 2003, the reclaimers' struggles had transformed Marie Louise into a resource mine and themselves into its owners.

Nationalizing the Mine

The 2009 Reconciliation Day evictions made painfully clear that not all reclaimers were considered owners of the dump. Having only just staved off complete eviction from the landfill, within a six year period following the court case, South African reclaimers managed to nationalize the mine and appoint themselves as border guards regulating whether and how non-South Africans could enter the space. The extent of their power was evidenced by the facts that not only were they able to evict the Zimbabweans, but the Pikitup manager legally in charge of the dump needed to negotiate with them for the Zimbabweans to re-enter.

The large number of non-South Africans working at Marie Louise was directly related to the fact that as it was not a formal workplace and there were no employers, non-South Africans did not require work permits to work there. So, how did South African reclaimers gain the power to limit entry based on nationality? One key component of the answer to this question lies in the particular way that the space of the dump was produced in relation to the forging of the new democratic nation.

The original Marie Louise reclaimers were virtually all South African. After the court case, a small number of people from Lesotho and Mozambique began working at the dump. Starting in 2005 or 2006, as the political and economic crisis in Zimbabwe deepened and migration to South Africa increased,[21] more and more Zimbabweans came to work at Marie Louise. Many were brought to the dump by the *amalayisha* (informal cross border transport operators) they paid to bring them to South Africa and who had promised them work. Although at first they were shocked that the work was reclaiming at a landfill, they soon learned that it was a good way to support themselves. Through family and friend networks the number of Zimbabwean reclaimers rose exponentially. By 2009, forty-one percent of reclaimers at Marie Louise were Zimbabwean.[22]

While the South African reclaimers had always accepted the relatively smaller number of reclaimers from Lesotho and Mozambique, they perceived the significant number of newcomers from Zimbabwe to be a direct threat to their control over and access to the valuable materials at the dump. It was within this context that increasing importance became vested in the fact that the original reclaimers had struggled to secure access to and control over the dump, as well as the period within which this had been done. The reclaimers had fought their way into Marie Louise at the very moment that the first democratic government was established after decades of struggle against apartheid. Many reclaimers explicitly linked their struggle to liberate the dump to the struggle to liberate the country. This association was bolstered when the LRC appointed George Bizos (who had represented Mandela and many other luminaries of the struggle in some of the country's most important political trials) as their advocate in the case against the council and Pikitup.

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Once the Zimbabweans arrived at Marie Louise, the original reclaimers deployed their identity as freedom fighters and the liberators of the dump to link their claim to the space of the dump with their claim to a place within the nation. Clarifying why South Africans should have greater rights than Zimbabweans to the dump and the materials within it, one reclaimer explained, "We fought for this garbage … so we are the ones who should be working here, not the people who are coming from outside, because we are the ones who are voting." Here we can clearly see how place, identities, and social relations were forged in relation to one another as part of the process through which rights to access the dump and the materials within it were nationalized.

The South Africans' belief that they had greater rights to the dump than Zimbabweans must be located within a wider political and historical perspective. Far from being anachronistic, it was in keeping with the ANC government's adoption of a chauvinistic nationalism that excluded foreigners from the forging of the new nation.[23] Indeed, the democratic era has been marked by the development of strong policies at both national and local levels seeking to thwart migration from other African countries. Undocumented African migrants are routinely harassed, arrested, and deported.

In addition, the 2009 Reconciliation Day expulsion took place in the wake of the 2008 xenophobic attacks that saw violent and deadly mobilization against non-South Africans (as well as non-Zulu South Africans) in townships and informal settlements around the country.[24] The South African reclaimers at Marie Louise were therefore far from the only South Africans who felt empowered to infuse citizenship with new, locally specific rights and restrict the claims that Africans from elsewhere in the continent could make in these spaces.[25] A relational conception of space is therefore crucial in understanding how Marie Louise became mapped as the nation.

The Production and Role of Institutions

As the Council had discovered when it tried to prevent the original reclaimers from starting to work at the dump in the 1990s, ownership of a physical space does not simply translate into the ability to control who enters it and how they use it. The original reclaimers quickly realized that nationalizing the space of the dump was not sufficient to eliminate competition from the Zimbabweans. They therefore transformed an existing shift system in order to use control over time as a way to enforce the differential citizenship-based rights to the space of the dump and its resources.

Given that the reclaimers do not have employers or managers, the existence of a shift system at Marie Louise was highly surprising. Yet, there have been several different variations of a shift system for reclaimers throughout the history of Marie Louise. As discussed above, in the early years reclaimers worked in two shifts, sandwiching the working day of the majority of the landfill's security guards. Once the verbal agreement allowing the reclaimers to work at the dump was reached in 2000, the time and nature of the shifts changed: The

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recognized reclaimers worked throughout the day in the primary shift, and new reclaimers, who were not covered by the agreement, worked in a second shift that started after four PM. Importantly, the first shift reclaimers considered those in the second shift to be equal members of the reclaimer community.

When the group of reclaimers from Lesotho referred to above began arriving at Marie Louise in the mid-2000s they were placed in a new third shift that started after six PM, so that they did not compete with reclaimers in the first and second shifts. As the Zimbabweans began to expand the numbers in the third shift, most of the reclaimers from Lesotho left the dump to start reclaiming in the street. In early 2008, Pikitup stopped sending trucks to Marie Louise in the evening. Unable to access any fresh material, the third shift reclaimers muscled their way into the second shift. Fearful that they would also try to push into the first shift, the morning shift reclaimers heeded the suggestion made by the Landfill Site Manager and allowed the enlarged second shift to start working at two PM. As the "morning shift" reclaimers actually worked well into the afternoon, they were still able to salvage most of the materials coming to the dump.

The afternoon shift quickly became known as "the Zimbabwean shift." Given that in 2009 thirty-six percent of reclaimers in the Zimbabwean shift were South African, the name seemed incongruous at first. However, when spaces opened up in the morning shift, these South Africans (as well as Mozambicans and Basotho) were able to move into it from the Zimbabwean shift. This did not apply to Zimbabweans. The afternoon shift was therefore Zimbabwean because virtually no Zimbabweans could move out of it. The shift system therefore enforced a national temporal border that contained competition from the Zimbabweans.

In order to understand the political work performed by the shift system, it is useful to theorize it as an institution. Initially, it was assumed that the informal sector (as it was then called) was completely unregulated. In an important intervention, Meagher[26] observes that institutions play an important role in governing the informal economy. Drawing on insights from feminist studies of institutions to enrich Greg Albo's Marxist theory of institutions,[27] I argue that institutions should be understood as crystallizations of power-laden identities and social relations in particular spatio-historical conjunctures that people subsequently act through, are constrained by, and potentially transform in the course of future struggles. Analyzing the shift system in this light reveals that it did more than simply lock in pre-existing identities and power relations. Access to the recyclable materials at Marie Louise was so effectively limited by the shift system that a central part of being Zimbabwean at the dump meant being both temporally, as well as spatially, confined. The extent of control over one's time therefore became a key component of citizenship at Marie Louise.

The particular way the shift system combined space and time made it much easier for the South African morning shift reclaimers to police the national borders at Marie Louise. The garbage trucks always dumped their contents on the apex of the growing mountain of buried trash that dominated the

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dump's geography. If Zimbabweans tried to climb to the top before their time they would be met with a barrage of insults and stones.

But this was not the only reason that they did not actively contest the ways they were defined and regulated. In what I refer to as "the social uses of the law," the original reclaimers asserted that the court had ruled that they owned the dump,[28] and the Zimbabweans accepted this claim. As one Zimbabwean reclaimer explained, "They say the dump belongs to them, that is why they are fighting for it. We do not have any say because we only came here as we are poor, we need work. So when you are in a person's house you have to beg him, because you came needing help." This belief was exacerbated by the strong anti-foreigner sentiments they experienced outside the dump, particularly in the wake of the 2008 violence.

Another reason Zimbabweans accepted the time limitations placed on them related to their recognition that as *mafikizolo* (latecomers) they could not tell those who came to the dump before them what to do. As they only planned to stay in South Africa until the political and economic conditions at home improved, struggling for full equality at Marie Louise was not their primary concern. Perhaps most importantly, over ninety percent of the Zimbabweans that came to South Africa did so for economic reasons and did not have a history of struggle in Zimbabwe. It is not, therefore, surprising that they did not become militants at the dump. As this shift system became firmly entrenched at Marie Louise, the citizenship based rights and power relations between reclaimers were institutionalized.

Global Crisis, National Solution

Having explored the social history of salvaging at Marie Louise, it is now possible to return to the Reconciliation Day eviction. As elaborated more fully elsewhere,[29] when the global economic crisis first manifested at Marie Louise in October 2008 prices for many recyclables plummeted overnight. The prices for other materials soon followed. This fall in the market value of recyclables was compounded by a significant decrease in the quantity of materials coming to the dump as residents reduced their consumption in response to the crisis.

Literature on the global crisis and the informal economy generally assumes that the crisis was an independent, external force that descended from above and impacted passive workers.[30] However, a relational understanding of the production of space requires us to analyze the global recycling economy as a constitutive part of Marie Louise as a resource mine. Reclaimers had only struggled to access Marie Louise and continued to labor there because they had developed mechanisms to sell materials into the global value chain, and global prices were sufficiently high for them to earn a living from salvaging. Rather than introducing the global recycling economy to Marie Louise in the form of an external shock, the global crisis transformed the role that it was already playing at the dump.

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In addition, the particular form that the crisis assumed at Marie Louise and the ways in which it was contested were shaped by how the crisis articulated with existing power relations, identities, and institutions at the dump. Rather than having uniform effects for all reclaimers, as the crisis was refracted through the shift system it had nationally differentiated implications. Zimbabweans experienced a larger decrease in income than South Africans as they faced greater competition for the smaller quantity of materials entering the landfill during their relatively shorter shift. The deeply ingrained divisions between South African and Zimbabwean reclaimers precluded any possibility of joint action against buyers to try to secure even marginally higher prices. However, the long history of South African reclaimers organizing against Zimbabweans, the establishment of clear citizenship-based rights to recyclables, and the institutionalization of these rights through the shift system opened another way for the South Africans to increase their incomes—this was by completely expelling the Zimbabwean shift from Marie Louise so that the morning shift would not face any competition at all.

Conclusion

Conducting a social history of Marie Louise reveals that the 2008 Reconciliation Day expulsion of reclaimers on largely nationalist lines was neither the natural result of simple xenophobic hatred, nor a spontaneous mobilization that could have been grounded in any other set of identities. Instead, it emerged out of the particular ways Marie Louise, reclaimers' identities, the power relations between them, and their understandings of their political possibilities at the dump were forged in relation to one another.

This analysis of organizing at Marie Louise is necessarily highly specific and contextual. However, it is through this specificity that the social history of Marie Louise offers more general insights into studying organizing in the informal economy.

At the most basic level, this article establishes that studies of informal worker organizing must stop shying away from acknowledging and exploring divisions between informal workers. It is only once we understand how power relations between informal workers and the identities that underpin them are produced, shape how they organize, and circumscribe their terrain for political action that academics, organizers, and workers can understand the ways in which informal workers are already organized and think through whether and how these might be transformed to build meaningful solidarity.

In his influential analysis of the politics of "informal people," Bayat[31] argues that people, such as reclaimers, act as isolated individuals driven by necessity, and only engage in collective action when their "quiet encroachments" are under threat. Bayat also implicitly assumes that individuals engaged in similar work share a common, pre-existing identity that eventually unites them in defensive struggles. However, this article has established that informal workers exist in relation to one another (as well as other actors).

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Their ability to earn an income is predicated on their labor to create their places of work and develop institutions to govern their labor, both of which are bound up with the production of new identities and power relations. Rather than presuming that informal workers function as individuals, it is crucially important to investigate the implicit and explicit ways they relate to one another.

Analyzing these social processes and their relevance for organizing requires us to combine insights from sociological, geographical, and institutional theory. Adopting spatial analysis means interrogating how the identities through which informal workers organize, their political imaginaries, and their political praxis are forged in particular places, bound up in the meanings they give to those places, and informed by the types of claims they believe different workers can make there. It also means analyzing these processes in relation to the spatio-historical conjuncture within which they occur, and being keenly aware of how processes and relations in other places and scales are internal to developments within the place being studied.

A feminist Marxist analysis emphasizes that the institutions forged by informal workers to govern their labor processes play a crucial role in shaping whether and how they organize by crystallizing power-laden social identities and relations. As with the production of space, the production of these institutions should not be analyzed in isolation, but must be located within the context of inter-related socially constructed spaces and scales. Because within this approach, institutions are seen to be socially produced and are not granted ontological primacy, they can be contested and transformed. Rather than taking their stability for granted, it is necessary to explore why informal workers who are disadvantaged by institutions participate in their social reproduction. Conducting such analysis will unlock important grounded insights into why informal workers organize in the ways they do, the very real challenges confronted in developing broader forms of solidarity, and the ways in which it might be possible to do so.

NOTES

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8. An important exception is Claire Bénit-Gbaffou's nuanced analysis of organizational divisions between street traders in Johannesburg. Claire Bénit-Gbaffou, "Do Street Traders

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15. Doreen Massey, *Space, Place and Gender* (Minneapolis, 1994), 154.

16. Doreen Massey, *Space, Place and Gender*, 168.

17. Doreen Massey, *Space, Place and Gender*, 121.

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