

A Fetish about Formality: Recasting the ‘Authoritative’ Handling of Informality in Urban Sub-Saharan African.

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The paper argues that sub-Saharan Africa’s urban planning and management systems have a real fetish about formality. Stressing that the desired city is largely inspired by Western notions of modernity, the paper provides a critique of some forms of governmentality deployed by the authorities in an effort to create or ‘defend’ the modern city against the rising tide of informality and informalisation. Using illustrative cases from Zimbabwe, the discussion argues that the fetish is built upon a desire for formal order in the face of the perceived disorder and spatial unruliness of informality. The paper interrogates the rather inexplicable contention by authorities that informality is intolerable and needs to be eliminated or rehabilitated.