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Waged Entrepreneurs, Policed Informality: Work, the Regulation of Space and the Economy of the Zimbabwean-South African Border

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In anthropological research, borders have come to be seen as sites of opportunity in the face of marginality, where state attempts to define spatial boundaries are perpetually confounded by creative enterprises and brokerage. Keen to show how border areas are more fluid, and the state more contested, than often assumed, anthropologists of borders highlight local arrangements and activities that pass beneath the official radar. In doing so, they explore how illegibility from the state perspective offers opportunities to those in the know. This narrow focus risks skewing how borderlands are represented. In this paper I address this by drawing on the case of the Zimbabwean-South African border. While the existing anthropological focus on clandestine activities casts border dwellers as perpetually preoccupied with resisting state regulation, Zimbabwean-South African border dwellers make the most of their location by being *visible* to state officials in a specific way – as waged farm workers. This legitimates their presence, leaving them free to pursue a range of business ventures. The paper in turn questions a wider opposition between the creative entrepreneurship of the informal economy and the drudgery of formal employment. What the case of the Zimbabwean-South African border reveals is people seeking waged agricultural employment as a foothold in building more lucrative businesses. In many cases, these businesses represent not so much cases of moonlighting as the ultimate goal of employment. To understand how this is so, this paper unpacks the spatial and temporal articulations between waged work and other means of making ends meet. In so doing, it suggests fixating less on the border itself as a distinctive feature, replete with smugglers and murky goings-on, and appreciating the various meanings of work in borderland economies.