

ABSTRACT

Title of Document: IMAGING THE GAP: DISSENSUS AND
BELONGING IN THANDILE ZWELIBANZI'S
STILL EXISTENCE

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In his 2010 series, *Still Existence*, South African photographer Thandile Zwelibanzi images illegal African immigrants as they informally sell sweets and cigarettes on the streets of Johannesburg. In his documentation of the political arguments of these foreigners for their inclusion in the consensus of the nation, Zwelibanzi lends a medium to these individuals through which they can obtain aesthetic (and therefore political) agency. If, in *Still Existence*, the public sphere of Johannesburg's streets serve as the "dissensual stage" upon which foreign traders exert their claims of belonging and contest their right to work, then it is the process of their subjectivization and their argument for their belonging that are ultimately imaged in these portraits.

IMAGING THE GAP: DISSENSUS AND BELONGING IN THANDILE
ZWELIBANZI'S *STILL EXISTENCE*

By

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Introduction

The construction of the racial and racist stereotype is not a simple exercise of the picture as a technique of domination. [Rather], it is the knotting of a double bind that afflicts both the subject and the object of racism in a complex of desire and hatred. The ocular violence of racism splits its subject in two, rending and rendering it simultaneously hypervisible and invisible, an object of, in Fanon's words, "abomination" and "adoration."

- W. J. T. Mitchell, *What Do Pictures Want?: The Lives and Loves of Images*

The Invisibility of the Hypervisible

During Operation Crackdown, a week-long raid in 2001 undertaken by the Johannesburg police to rid Hillbrow and greater Johannesburg of crime and, therefore, the foreigners who were assumed criminals, 885 police and 240 army personnel moved throughout the city looking for South Africa's supposedly hypervisible Other.¹ The set of stereotypical visual cues which have begun to be used by a portion of South Africa's population and its police in order to 'discern' the foreignness of bodies has, in actual fact, led to the arrest of large numbers of South African citizens who have mistakenly been perceived to be non-national.² During this raid, 205,324 individuals living in Johannesburg were accosted by the South African police. Out of those searched, 7,068 were arrested under the suspicion that they were in the country illegally.³ At this same time, one in five detainees at Lindela Holding Facility (located in Krugersdorp, west of Johannesburg) was in fact found to be a

¹ Eric Pelsner, "Operation Crackdown: The New Policing Strategy," *Institute for Security Studies*, Nedbank ISS Crime Index vol. 4, no. 2 (2000), accessed November 10, 2012, <http://www.iss.co.za/pubs/CRIMEINDEX/00Vol4No2/OperatCrackdown.html>.

² Michael Neocosmos, *From 'Foreign Natives' to 'Native Foreigners': Explaining Xenophobia in Post-apartheid South Africa: Citizenship and Nationalism, Identity and Politics* (Dakar, Senegal: CODESRIA, 2010), 103-4. Neocosmos writes, "The usual criterion for arresting a suspected 'illegal immigrant' by the police is regularly stated to be a racial stereotype. Usually this is based on the colour of the skin and darker features, and makes people more likely to be arrested as 'foreigners' or asked for identification. Other methods used are language checks and inoculation marks—all clearly left over from apartheid practices."

³ Pelsner, n.p..

South African citizen who had been unable to present the proper identification papers to the police upon being searched. Having appeared ‘foreign enough’ to be arrested, these individuals had been taken to the Hillbrow police station and from there sent to Lindela where they were to be, ironically, repatriated.⁴

The supposed hypervisibility of the black African foreigner, the *Makwerekwere*, within contemporary South African society is, according to W. J. T. Mitchell, precisely that which also renders the person invisible.⁵ “Individuals are often assumed to be *Makwerekwere* on the basis that they ‘look foreign’ or are ‘too dark’ to be entitled to South Africa,” writes Francis B. Nyamnjoh in, *Insiders and Outsiders: Citizenship and Xenophobia in Contemporary South Africa*.⁶ “The privileging of appearance is carried to ridiculous proportions. People are arrested for being ‘too black,’ having a ‘foreign name’ or, in one case, ‘walking like a Mozambican.’”⁷ “It is assumed,” Nyamnjoh continues, “that illegality is a stock-in-trade of the dark-skinned of the dark continent.”⁸

In her series of photographs from 2001 entitled, *Going Home – Illegality and Repatriation – South Africa/Mozambique*, the well-known South African photographer Jodi Bieber documents Operation Crackdown and the transportation of suspected illegal immigrants from Johannesburg to the repatriation camp at Lindela, accompanying them on the trains which carried them over the South African border

⁴ David M. Matsinhe, “Cleaning the Nation: Anti-African Patriotism and Xenophobia in South Africa” (PhD diss., University of Alberta, 2009), 107.

⁵ W. J. T. Mitchell, *What Do Pictures Want?: The Lives and Loves of Images* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2005), 34.

⁶ Francis B. Nyamnjoh, *Insiders and Outsiders: Citizenship and Xenophobia in Contemporary South Africa* (Dakar, Senegal: Codesria, 2006), 51.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

and into Mozambique.⁹ Writing in 2001 for *Shoe Shop*, an anthology comprised of essays and art projects which take migration and movement through public spaces in Africa as their subject, Bieber stated that her experience on this project left her with a “bitter taste” in her mouth as she witnessed not only blatant corruption by South African police officials, but the aggressive mistreatment of those who were arrested.¹⁰ Describing the initial detention of those suspected of being illegal immigrants, she writes, “With court orders in hand, the police swarmed buildings looking for immigrants without valid papers or with stolen goods.”¹¹ Bieber’s description of the crime prevention unit’s process in Operation Crackdown is significant as it brings to the fore the importance of vision in the construction of stereotypes—South African police officials were not actively *looking* for the absence of identification papers as proof of foreignness; rather, they were searching for visual cues which they believed marked the supposedly hypervisible body of the Other within both the public and private spaces of the city.

Notable in the discussion of the stereotypical construction and use of visual markers of difference in post-apartheid South Africa is Bieber’s choice of the first image in this series, a photograph of an assumed foreigner being frisked by a member of the South African police force (fig.1). Though being in the country illegally is sufficient for arrest, the officer pats the torso of the man whose palms are raised and pressed against the wall in search of further incriminating evidence (such as drugs or a weapon). Both men are immediately juxtaposed with a large advertisement for

⁹ Ibid., 52. For more information regarding Lindela’s history of human rights abuses and police cruelty see: Matsinhe, “Cleaning the Nation,” 109-112 and Neocosmos, *From ‘Foreign Natives,’* 107-111.

¹⁰ Jodie Bieber, “Going Home,” in Marie-Hélène Gutberlet and Cara Snyman, eds. *Shoe Shop: Walking Through Africa, the Arts, and Beyond* (Auckland Park, South Africa: Fanele, 2012), 104-5.

¹¹ Ibid., 96-7.

Carling Black Label beer that is plastered to the wall against which the search takes place. Carling Black Label is a South African beer whose marketing triumphs the masculinity and work ethic of its drinkers. “The Carling Drinker is a man’s man,” the brewery claims, “he does a tough job and at the end of the day takes the reward of his choosing - Carling Black Label.”¹² The questionable nationality of the man being searched is accentuated in this image by the familiar South African identity of the beer with which he is juxtaposed. Through its play with the text on the wall, this photograph marks the beginning of a complicated and multifaceted discourse regarding blackness as a label (or marker) of Otherness within South Africa. Notably, this image by a well-known artist serves as a starting point for my examination of a less well-known photographer from the same nation who similarly challenges notions of both (in)visibility and belonging. In his 2010 series, *Still Existence*, Thandile Zwelibanzi images illegal African immigrants as they informally sell sweets and cigarettes on the streets of Johannesburg. Rather than merely documenting the lives of these people as they seek to make a living in the city, I find that Zwelibanzi's photographs engage with (what has come to be described as) the ‘surprising’ xenophobia of the Rainbow Nation in the post-apartheid period through their presentation of these foreigners’ arguments for belonging.

Like Bieber’s series, *Still Existence* draws attention to the fallacies of visual hierarchies and stereotypes. Rather than simply critiquing South Africa’s allegedly post-racial decades following the end of apartheid or recording the active use of racial profiling by state officials, Zwelibanzi documents the political arguments of

¹² “Carling Black Label: Champion Men Deserve Champion Beer,” South African Breweries (SAB), accessed September 10, 2012, <http://www.sab.co.za/sablimited/content/en/sab-carling-black-label>.

foreigners for their inclusion in the consensus of the nation. The power of photography, Jacques Rancière writes, lies not in the ability of the photographer to structure visual arguments for the belonging of the marginalized; rather, the *coupe de force* of the art of photography lies in its “tendency to break the historical complicity between the art of the photographer and the aesthetic capacity of its subjects.”¹³ In lending the medium of photography to the ostracized Other of the South African nation, Zwelibanzi does not give agency to these individuals so much as create a platform from which they are able to present themselves, not as the romanticized marginalized, but as individuals capable of having, in the words of Rancière, “aesthetic capacity.” What is political and therefore meaningful in Zwelibanzi’s work is not necessarily what his photographs overtly depict (that is, illegal immigrants struggling to survive in a nation that denies them the very right to do so), but rather what they *do*: which is create a space in which these individuals are able to ‘play’ with an aesthetic capacity denied them—to, in other words, disrupt the identity imposed upon them by the police in their assertion of their equality.

Despite the prevalent supposition in the literature on xenophobia in South Africa that the government is capable of remedying its citizens’ anti-foreigner sentiments through educational campaigns and state-run programs, Michael

¹³ Jacques Rancière, “Notes on the Photographic Image,” translated by Darian Meacham, *Radical Philosophy* 156 (July/August 2009): 9. In looking to one of Rineke Dijkstra’s photographs from her *Beaches* series of a Polish adolescent as she stands before the artist’s camera in a pale-green swimsuit, Rancière writes that, “Photography is exemplarily an art of aesthetic ideas because it is exemplarily an art capable of enabling non-art to accomplish art by dispossessing it. But it is also such through its participation in the construction of a sensible environment which extends beyond its own specificity.” Rancière continues by stating that this dispossession and the movement beyond specificity (“which removes all of these characters [such as Dijkstra’s unnamed adolescent] from their social identity”) cannot be thought of as separate operations. It is thus, he writes, that the artistic *coup de force* of photography lies with the despecification of the sensible and its correlate, “the ability acquired by the characters themselves to play with the image of their being and of their condition, to post it to walls or to set it up before the lens” (15).

Neocosmos situates the causes of the Rainbow Nation's xenophobic attitudes within the government itself. "If the aetiology of the problem is connected to the politics of state power," Neocosmos writes, "then it seems unlikely that a state-led education program could hope to provide a cure."¹⁴ Since liberation, artists and others in South Africa's civil society have adamantly addressed the persecution and exclusion of foreigners by nationals. Through public campaigns, festivals, and their own works, artists have looked to the image in the quest to seek the realization of a democratic culture of *ubuntu*, believing, as the preamble to the South African constitution affirms, "that South Africa belongs to all who live in it, united in our diversity."¹⁵ While a number of South African photographers, such as Jodi Bieber, have criticized their government's hypocritical use of the guiding principle *ubuntu* amid mistreatment of black foreigners, artists such as Mimi Ng'ok and Sue Williamson have sought to complicate the image and subsequent perception of post-apartheid South Africa's stereotyped Other, the *Makwerekwere*.¹⁶ Among those artists seeking to carve out a space within the South African national imagination for the presence of the foreigner is Thandile Zwelibanzi whose series, *Still Existence*, addresses not only the symptoms of the nation's xenophobic attitudes, but its political, economic, and subsequently social causes.

Though born in Willowvale, a city of the sleepy Eastern Cape, Thandile Zwelibanzi (b. 1987) was raised in Kagiso, part of the busy province of Gauteng.

¹⁴ *From 'Foreign Natives.'* 3.

¹⁵ Preamble to the South African Constitution, accessed September 12, 2012, <http://www.info.gov.za/documents/constitution/1996/96preamble.htm>.

¹⁶ Though quite the opposite could be said for photographers in the media. For a brief discussion of the role the media has played in constructing images of South Africa's Other see: Anton Harber, "Two Newspapers, Two Nations? The Media and Xenophobic Violence," in *Go Home or Die Here: Violence, Xenophobia and the Reinvention of Difference in South Africa*, ed. Shireen Hassim et al. (Johannesburg: Wits UP, 2008).

Himself a foreigner to the political and social intricacies of inner-city Johannesburg (aka “Jozi”), Zwelibanzi began taking interest in the informal migrant traders he saw lining the streets during his daily trips into the city for his courses at the Market Photo Workshop. “These traders were always in their space of business, from the morning when the taxi dropped me off until late at night when it took me back to my place of belonging,” Zwelibanzi stated in an interview in June of 2012.¹⁷ “I became interested in them and had small conversations with them...I wanted to explore their existence in the constantly changing Jozi landscape, with their temporary structures (plastic crates, card boxes, ironing boards etc.) and seemingly insignificant goods like sweets and cigarettes.”¹⁸ After weeks of meetings and discussions, these illegal entrepreneurs became the subjects of *Still Existence*.

In a nation whose unemployment rate has increased from twenty-three percent in March of 2008, the month in which xenophobic violence erupted en masse, to over twenty-five percent in November of 2012, discussions of citizenship and who is allowed the right to work have become prevalent in South Africa, particularly among its marginalized labor force.¹⁹ Through their engagement with issues such as the spatial politics of the city and the social citizenship of work, Zwelibanzi’s photographs probe the surface of South Africa’s xenophobia, searching the depth of the symptom for its more complicated origins. Considering Zwelibanzi’s series through the discourses of visual and social citizenship as well as through Jacques Rancière’s most recent writings on politics and aesthetics, I find that *Still Existence*

¹⁷ Thandile Zwelibanzi, interview by Andy Davis, *Mahala: Music, Culture, Reality*, June 11, 2012, accessed September 15, 2012, <http://www.mahala.co.za/art/still-existence/>.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ “South African Unemployment Rate,” Trading Economics, accessed January 10, 2013, <http://www.tradingeconomics.com/south-africa/unemployment-rate>.

asserts the belonging of South Africa's Other within the consensus of the *polis* in a number of ways.²⁰ While the remainder of this introduction lays the historical and political groundwork for a discussion of these images, chapter one looks to Rancière's writing on political subjectivity and the dissensual act of disidentification through one's presentation of oneself. Continuing the discussion of the *Makwerekwere* trader and belonging, chapter two discusses Zwelibanzi's subjects and their claiming and reconfiguration of public spaces within the metropolis. Finally, chapter three looks to the social citizenship of work and the restructuring of South Africa's work-citizenship nexus, arguing that citizen and *Makwerekwere* traders co-belong in this series as components of Johannesburg's social and economic networks. It is within these chapters that I examine the layered ways in which Zwelibanzi's images function—that is, as images that show the humanity of individuals denied that humanity; as documents of an other's political argument for belonging (via acts of dissensus); and ultimately as images through which the claiming of an aesthetic capacity is realized.

The Enigma of *Ubuntu* as Rhetoric in the Post-Apartheid Era

In the years immediately following the liberation of African nations from colonialism, Frantz Fanon wrote of the disintegration of Pan-Africanism and the subsequent manifestation of xenophobia as being the primary “pitfall of national consciousness.”²¹ Having placed his confidence in the promises of Africanism, Fanon viewed the rise of xenophobia toward non-national Africans as a “heart-breaking

²⁰ Jacques Rancière, *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*, trans. Steve Corcoran (London: Continuum, 2010), 38.

²¹ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove, 1965), 157.

return to chauvinism in its most bitter and detestable form.”²² “From nationalism we have passed to ultra-nationalism, to chauvinism, and finally to racism,” a disillusioned Fanon wrote as “the working class of the towns, the masses of the unemployed, and the small artisans and craftsman” of the new nations began to clamor for foreigners within their newly liberated borders to leave.²³ Rather than being united in a shared continental identity, African nationals began to view black non-nationals as competitors for scarce resources and positions. “On the Ivory Coast these competitors are the Dahomans; in Ghana they are the Nigerians; in Senegal, they are the Sudanese,” and in South Africa, they have come to be the fictitious composite figure of the black foreigner, the *Makwerekwere*.²⁴ “Their shops are burned, their street stalls are wrecked, and in fact the government... commands them to go, thus giving their nationals satisfaction,” Fanon wrote as xenophobic attacks began to occur with bitter frequency in African cities.²⁵

In his book, *From ‘Foreign Natives’ to ‘Native Foreigners’: Explaining Xenophobia in Post-apartheid South Africa*, Michael Neocosmos notes Fanon’s recognition of the shift in the conception of citizenship from that which was once unifying and all inclusive during the struggle for liberation to that which is now exclusive and “founded on the notion of indigeneity.”²⁶ “In fact,” Neocosmos writes, “if we did not know better, this could easily be a description of changes in South Africa between 1984 and 1990, and especially since 1994 and the establishment of post-colonial liberal democracy when, within the public sphere, the celebration of

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid., 156.

²⁴ Ibid., 157.

²⁵ Ibid., 156.

²⁶ 12.

Africanism and an ‘African Renaissance’ has alternated with xenophobic statements and practices towards other Africans.”²⁷ The schizophrenic nature of South African identity formation in the post-apartheid period is due, largely in part, to the government’s simultaneous use of a rhetoric based in *ubuntu* (a humanist and Africanist philosophy which “connects all of humanity irrespective of ethnicity or racial origins” through the proposition that a person is a person through other people) on the one hand, and its implementation of policies of extreme exclusivity on the other.²⁸ As Rebecca Fasselt writes, this rhetoric “has been marked by a fundamental paradox between what *ubuntu* is assumed to mean (shared and equal humanity) and what is done in terms of everyday political and social practice with its meaning.”²⁹ In the post-apartheid period, the formation of the Rainbow Nation’s Other has occurred within the paradoxical gap between the government’s policies of exclusivity and its *ubuntu* rhetoric, a gap, I argue, that Zwelibanzi documents in *Still Existence*.

On May 8, 1996, then Deputy President Thabo Mbeki addressed the South African parliament in a speech that not only affirmed the African National Congress’s (ANC’s) redemptive promises of inclusivity, but also proclaimed the inauguration of an African Renaissance. In extolling South Africa’s new constitution, Mbeki inspiringly declared that the nation’s new legal framework aimed to, “open the doors so that those who were disadvantaged can assume their place in society as equals with

²⁷ From ‘*Foreign Natives*,’ 12.

²⁸ Thabo Mbeki, “Memorial Lecture for Steven Bantu Biko” (speech made on the occasion of the 30th Anniversary of the Death of Steven Bantu Biko, University of Cape Town, September 12, 2007). Nyamnjoh, 37. “Despite the ANC’s talk of multiculturalism through diversity, inclusivity, and ‘African Renaissance,’” writes Nyamnjoh, “official attitudes have stayed faithful to the logic of containment and exclusion.”

²⁹ Rebecca Fasselt, “Ke Nako (It is Time) To Scrutinize *Ubuntu*: Reading ‘South African Hospitality’ Towards African Immigrants in Patricia Schonstein Pinnock’s *Skyline*” (paper presented at the Multiculturalism, Conflict and Belonging 4th Global Conference, September 23-26, 2010), 3.

their fellow human beings without regard to color, race, gender, age, or geographic dispersal.”³⁰ Paradoxically, Mbeki’s proclamation of his Africanness, in what has come to famously be known as his “I am an African” speech, coincided with the government’s amendment of the Aliens Control Act (1991) and the subsequent intensification of its policy towards the expulsion of illegal immigrants.³¹ In the same year that Mbeki spoke to parliament of his African identity and touted South Africa’s inclusive vision of *ubuntu*, 180,713 immigrants were forcibly expelled from the nation’s borders, a staggering rise from the 44,225 immigrants deported eight years prior.³² Notably, the majority of these immigrants were black Africans from nations such as Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Mali and Tanzania.

Two years after Mbeki’s ‘I am an African’ speech, the South African Human Rights Commission convened a conference in Johannesburg’s Braamfontein in order to address the nation’s prevalent xenophobic attitudes toward black African foreigners. In an addendum to the conference’s hearing, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees wrote that South Africa was “riding a wave of xenophobia” which was “not only a threat to refugees...[but] if left unchecked and unequivocally condemned, is bound to tear asunder South Africa’s social fabric,

³⁰ Thabo Mbeki, “Adoption of RSA Constitution Bill” (statement of Deputy President TM Mbeki, on Behalf of the ANC, on the Occasion of the Adoption by the Constitutional Assembly of The Republic of South Africa Constitution Bill, Cape Town, May 8, 1996), http://www.info.gov.za/aboutgovt/orders/new2002_mbeki.htm.

³¹ Jonathan Crush and Raesibe Mojapelo, introduction to *Beyond Control: Immigration and Human Rights in a Democratic South Africa* (Cape Town: IDASA - Canada, 1998), n.p..

³² Nyamnjoh, *Insiders and Outsiders*, 33. For more on this subject see: Sally Peberdy, “Imagining Immigration: Inclusive Identities and Exclusive Policies in Post-1994 South Africa,” *Africa Today* 48.3 (2001): 15-32.

damage its democracy, and entrench a culture of hate and intolerance.”³³ In his opening address to South Africa’s National Assembly in May of that same year, Mbeki put forth his ambition to establish for the nation a “new patriotism” which would “build a sense of common nationhood and a shared destiny,” an insular fortress which necessitated not only the exclusion of an outsider, but the creation of one.³⁴

Citizenship and South Africa’s Neoliberal Human Rights Discourse

South Africa’s transition to democracy in 1994 and the ANC’s successive embrace of neoliberal policies necessitated a restructuring of the nation state’s consensus, or rather, a recounting of the nation’s parts (and therefore its citizenry) to produce an absence of supplement. With liberation and the renationalizing (and thus counting of) black South Africans in the police’s distribution of the sensible (*partage de sensible*) came a necessary re-drawing of the nation’s citizenry.³⁵ “The partition,” Rancière states in his “Ten Thesis on Politics,” “should be understood in a double sense of the word: on the one hand, that which separates and excludes, and on the other, as that which allows participation.”³⁶ For Rancière, consensus is the unstated and uncontested distribution of society into counted parts—“groups tied to specific modes of doing, to places in which these occupations are exercised, and to modes of being corresponding to these occupations and these places....In this matching of

³³ “The Impact of Xenophobia on Refugees in South Africa,” Statement by United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees for the Conference on Racism and Xenophobia, October 15, 1998, accessed November 1, 2012, <http://www.queensu.ca/samp/Conferences/Agendas/agenda3.htm>.

³⁴ Thabo Mbeki, “Reconciliation and Nation Building” (statement of the Deputy President at the Opening Debate in the National Assembly on National Assembly, May 29, 1998), http://www.info.gov.za/speeches/1998/98602_0x2189810390.htm.

³⁵ Rancière, *Dissensus*, 36. For Rancière, the police “is not a social function but a symbolic constitution of the social.” “The essence of the police,” he writes, “lies neither in repression nor even in control over the living. Its essence lies in a certain way of dividing up the sensible.”

³⁶ *Ibid.*

functions, places and ways of being,” he states, “there is no place for any void.”³⁷ By reducing politics to the police, consensus succeeds in ending politics, not through a mere return to a normal state of things, but rather by establishing a mode of being in which the existence of politics is absent.³⁸ In delimiting the conditions in which ‘political acts’ are able to occur, the state becomes the sole realm in which ‘politics’ may be practiced. “For neoliberalism,” Neocosmos writes, “‘civil society,’ the realm in which rights are meant to be realized, exists solely under conditions of mutual recognition between it and the state, only under liberal democracy. It is this mutual recognition which defines the parameters of the state consensus and is itself a result of struggle.”³⁹ This required “mutual recognition” gave rise to what Rancière and Neocosmos view to be an empty discourse of Human Rights in which one’s rights, though deemed universal, are in actuality only able to be delivered and guaranteed by the state.⁴⁰ It is only through acts of dissensus, or rather, interventions in the consensus of the state (*paratage de sensible*), that the “part without a part” (the uncounted) are able to secure those “rights they have but do not have.”⁴¹ It is precisely these dissensual acts that Zwelibanzi records in *Still Existence*.

In his critique of Hannah Arendt’s discussion of human rights in her seminal

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid., 42-3.

³⁹ *From ‘Foreign Natives,’* 115-6.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 116. Rancière, *Dissensus*, 63, 72.

⁴¹ Rancière, *Dissensus*, 71. In his “Ten Thesis on Politics,” Rancière states that, “when such groups can—and there are always individuals among them who do—make something of these rights to construct a dissensus against the denial of the rights they suffer, they really have these rights.” Ariella Azoulay, in her book, *The Civil Contract of Photography*, makes a similar claim regarding the power of photography in the contemporary period. Looking to the Declaration of the Rights of Man, the writings of Giorgio Agamben etc., Azoulay works to establish a “political theory” of photography through a utilization of the framework of citizenship. Like Rancière in his essay, “Who is the Subject of the Rights of Man?,” Azoulay calls for a reexamination of the concept of the ‘citizen’ and, subsequently, a restructuring of how rights are conferred to subjects (be they recognized by a state or not).

work, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Rancière states:

You are only compelled to claim, as Arendt did, that real rights are in fact those that are given to the citizens of a nation by virtue of their belonging to it and guaranteed by protection of a state, if you presuppose that rights belong to definite or permanent subjects. This presupposition also obliges you to deny the reality of all struggles outside of the frame of the national constitutional state and to claim that national rights are merely ‘abstract,’ an abstractedness revealed in the situation of the ‘merely’ human person deprived of them.⁴²

For Rancière, politics (and subsequently acts of dissensus) reveal the myth of the citizen as the “definite subject” of the Rights of Man. “Not only is there no man of the Rights of Man,” Rancière concludes, but, “there is no need for one [as] the strength of those rights lies in the back-and-forth movement between the initial inscription of the right and the dissensual stage on which it is put to the test.”⁴³ By his understanding, the modern formation of citizenship occurs within the arena of conflict and negotiation, or rather, within the gap created by repeated acts of transgression. Equality, for Rancière, can only be attained through demonstration. A political demonstration which effects dissensus, however, is not that of a demonstration of an individual *for* equal representation or standing within the *polis*, but rather the claiming of those rights which one ‘has but does not have’ through a presentation of a supplement. A claim of this nature is, in other words, dependent on creating or making visible new subjects, spaces, networks, or ways of being via the visualization of a paradoxical world.⁴⁴ The Rights of Man, Rancière states, “can be invoked by the citizens of states ruled by religious law or governmental fiat, the clandestine immigrants held in transit zones in wealthy countries, or the populations in refugee

⁴² *Dissensus*, 71.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 36-7.

camps.”⁴⁵ Indeed, through acts of dissensus, the Rights of Man can even be claimed by illegal foreign traders in South Africa’s city of gold: Igoli, better known as Johannesburg.

In his 2009 dissertation entitled, “Cleaning the Nation: Anti-African Patriotism and Xenophobia in South Africa,” David Mário Matsinhe writes, “The South African establishment battles its anxieties about invisible black intruders who not only look and sound like citizens but are in fact citizens. The outsiders are also insiders. The insiders and the outsiders mirror each other.”⁴⁶ In writing of the high number of mistaken arrests of South African citizens who were perceived to be foreign by the police, Matsinhe offers one plausible reason, that “the *Makwerekwere* is South African and the South African is *Makwerekwere*.”⁴⁷ That Jodi Bieber’s series on illegal immigration could in fact include depictions of South African citizens adds a perhaps unforeseen layer to the weight of her work in the post-apartheid period. Through its deconstruction of the notion of the Other’s hypervisibility, Bieber’s, *Going Home – Illegality and Repatriation – South Africa/Mozambique*, shows both the fallibility of the racialization of the *Makwerekwere* as well as the stereotype’s constructed nature. In *Still Existence*, Thandile Zwelibanzi also examines questions of equality by implicitly including photographs of both South African citizens who have migrated to the city from its peripheral rural areas and illegal non-nationals from other African nations. By positioning these subjects side-by-side in a gallery setting as they sit or stand near their stalls on Johannesburg’s streets, Zwelibanzi disrupts the viewer’s conception of belonging as being tied to the nation and establishes an

⁴⁵ Ibid., 71.

⁴⁶ 146.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

equalizing relationship between citizen and non-citizen alike. Perceived within the national imagination as a “polluting body,” in Zwelibanzi’s series, the *Makwerekwere* defies the expectations of hypervisibility by appearing indistinguishable from the citizen—to recall Matsinhe, “the outsiders are also insiders.”⁴⁸

Before all else, politics, Rancière contends, “is an intervention in the visible and the sayable.”⁴⁹ A political dispute, in turn, “is that which brings politics into being by separating it from the police.”⁵⁰ The emergence of neoliberalism in South Africa since apartheid’s fall and the resulting state of consensus is precisely what Neocosmos suggests gave rise to an empty discourse of Human Rights and, ultimately, to the xenophobia of the nation’s citizens. “The reason for this,” he writes, “is not so much to do with the lack of commitment of Human Rights organizations and activists, but rather with the fact that xenophobia is not primarily a question of individual rights but rather a question of politics.”⁵¹ By staging an act of dissensus, *Makwerekwere* traders in Johannesburg engage a political act, subverting the lack of politics through an insertion of themselves (the uncounted supplement) into the national discourse.⁵² In the chapters that follow I examine how the belonging of the foreigner is affirmed within *Still Existence* through the subjects’ presentation of their own political subjectivization, their restructuring of the city’s public spaces and their reconfiguration of Johannesburg’s networks of trade.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ *Dissensus*, 37.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ *From 'Foreign Natives,'* 120.

⁵² Joseph J. Tanke, *Jacques Rancière: An Introduction* (London: Continuum, 2011), 69. Neocosmos, 118-9.

Chapter 1: Political Subjectivization and the *Makwerekwere* Trader

The new outcomes of racism and xenophobia reveal the very collapse of politics, the reversion of the political handling of a wrong to a primal hate. If my analysis is correct, the question is not only, "How are we to face a political problem?" but "How are we to reinvent politics?" – Jacques Rancière, "Politics, Identification, and Subjectivization"

Constructing the Figure of the *Makwerekwere*: Xenophobic Attitudes and the 'Othering' of the Black African Foreigner in Post-Apartheid South Africa

In his book, *Insiders and Outsiders: Citizenship and Xenophobia in*

Contemporary Southern Africa, Francis B. Nyamnjoh writes,

Although xenophobia and its ills seem to infect just about all societies experiencing rapid social change, not every foreigner, outsider or stranger is a target. Instead, nationals, citizens or locals are very careful in choosing who qualifies to be treated as the inferior and undeserving 'Other,' and such choices depend on the hierarchies of humanity informed by race, nationality, culture, class and gender.⁵³

Led by the example of its government's policies and officials, South African society in the post-apartheid period has turned toward Othering, ostracizing, and criminalizing foreigners from neighboring African nations. All too often, the South African media, referred to by David Matsinhe as, "national gossip channels through which anti-foreigner narratives flow," has aided not only in promulgating, but also in creating the figure of the *Makwerekwere*.⁵⁴ Prejudice toward black African immigrants propagated by both sectors has led to their embodiment, within the South African imagination, of all of the nation's post-apartheid unrests—from the high unemployment rate of its citizens, to the scarcity of housing and space, to the

⁵³ 38.

⁵⁴ "Cleaning the Nation," 122.

sparseness of public services, to the spread of AIDS.⁵⁵ Presented in the context of the media, *Makwerekwere* are not only threatening, diseased, and unmodern, but uncultured and uneducated.⁵⁶ “In terms of skin pigmentation,” Nyamnjoh writes, “the racial hierarchy of humanity under apartheid comes into play, as *Makwerekwere* are usually believed to be the darkest of the dark-skinned.”⁵⁷ Arriving from the ‘darkest’ and most ‘backward’ portions of Africa (as is supposedly evidenced by their darker skin color), *Makwerekwere* have been deemed “too black to be citizen” by members of South Africa’s impoverished and xenophobic population.⁵⁸ Marked with the status of outsider, the bodies of black African foreigners have become the medium upon which the supposed indexical markers of ‘otherness’ are written.

According to the South African Migration Project’s (SAMP) published findings on the attitudes of the South African population towards non-nationals, “the vast majority of South Africans form their attitudes about other Africans in a vacuum, relying mainly on hear-say and media and other representations... Perceptions of, and attitudes towards foreigners,” SAMP concluded, “were a result of second-hand

⁵⁵ Nyamnjoh, *Insiders and Outsiders*, 41. Nyamnjoh references Bronwyn Harris’s, *A Foreign Experience: Violence, Crime and Xenophobia during South Africa's Transition* (Braamfontein, South Africa: CSV, 2001) in stating that the negative perceptions towards black Africans stem from “the fact that they compete with scarce resources and public services such as schools and medical care, infrastructure and land, housing and informal trading opportunities, and with citizens who are already living in poverty and below the breadline. Furthermore, they compete with residents and citizens for insufficient job opportunities, and offer their labor at conditions below those prescribed by law or the applicable bargaining agreements.”

⁵⁶ Sally Peberdy and Christian Rogerson, “Transnationalism and Non-South African Entrepreneurs in South Africa’s Small, Medium and Micro-Enterprise (SMME) Economy,” *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 34.1 (2000): 32. According to the research undertaken by Peberdy and Rogerson, migrant and immigrant entrepreneurs working in Johannesburg were found to be “relatively more educated” than South Africans occupying the same sector. In their survey of Johannesburg’s foreign street traders in particular, Peberdy and Rogerson found that, “ninety percent had some secondary education, nearly thirty-nine percent had formal qualifications (including nine participants with university experience), and over sixty-percent had some form of further education or training” (32).

⁵⁷ *Insiders and Outsiders*, 39.

⁵⁸ Matsinhe, “Cleaning the Nation,” 134, 136.

(mis)information.”⁵⁹ Two years before the violent attacks against African foreigners occurred in Alexandra, a densely populated town northeast of Johannesburg, only seventeen percent of South Africans claimed to have had “a lot” of personal contact with migrants from neighboring countries, twenty-two percent claimed to have had “some” interaction and the remainder of the nation (sixty-one percent) said that they had had little or no contact.⁶⁰ In discussing “The Other Question” in his seminal book, *The Location of Culture*, Homi K. Bhabha states that the stereotype “is a complex, ambivalent, contradictory mode of representation, as anxious as it is assertive.”⁶¹ It is the force of the stereotype’s ambivalence, Bhabha asserts,

that gives...the stereotype its currency: ensures its repeatability in changing historical and discursive conjunctures; informs its strategies of individuation and marginalization; produces that effect of probabilistic truth and predictability which, for the stereotype, must always be in excess of what can be empirically proved or logically construed.⁶²

With the majority of South African citizens having had little or no interaction with foreigners from neighboring countries, it becomes nearly impossible to break with the problematic “truth” portrayed in the discourse in which the stereotype maintains its power—the anxious re-presentation of the stereotype of the *Makwerekwere* within South African society (through the various channels of the media, government addresses and policies, and by word of mouth) ensures that “the effect of probabilistic truth,” will, “always be in excess of what can be empirically proved or logically construed.”⁶³ Though Bhabha’s project is not to formulate a discussion of how one

⁵⁹ Jonathan Crush, ed. *The Perfect Storm: The Realities of Xenophobia in Contemporary South Africa* (Cape Town: 2008.), 31.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 32.

⁶¹ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 2004), 70.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 66.

⁶³ *Ibid.* [emphasis in original]

could break with the stereotype, indeed, his mission is to problematize the assumed simplicity of this break, his assertion that the stereotype retains its power through an anxious re-presentation of a complex web of meanings that can never be “empirically proved” resonates with the stereotype of the black African immigrant in South African society. In his series, *Still Existence*, Thandile Zwelibanzi images illegal foreign traders and their movement toward subjectivization through their disidentification with the stereotypical traits that have been ascribed to the bodies of black foreigners (embodied in the name *Makwerekwere*). In their interruption of the anxious re-presentation of the stereotype, the subjects in Zwelibanzi’s images contest the wronging of their equality by disrupting the state consensus regarding how they are perceived and understood.

Rancière and Political Subjectivization

Unlike Louis Althusser who writes of the subject as the product of ideological construction or Michel Foucault who discusses subjectivization as a process in which individuals constitute and are constituted by the discourses that are foisted upon them, Rancière conceives of subjectivization as an essentially political, and therefore inherently dissensual act which necessitates the assumption of equality.⁶⁴ In his essay entitled, “Politics, Identification and Subjectivization,” Rancière equates emancipation and political subjectivization with the *enactment* of an equality which, for him, exists without conditions. The “construction of such cases of equality [through political acts of demonstration],” he writes, “is not the act of an identity, nor

⁶⁴ While a discussion of Rancière’s precedents would aid in an understanding of his writings on subjectivization, one would not want to read a section entitled “my footnotes on Althusser and Foucault.” See Louis Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses” and Foucault, “The Subject of Power.”

is it the demonstration of the values specific to that group,” rather, “it is a process of subjectivization.”⁶⁵ For Rancière, subjectivization is a political process that creates an outsider or an *in-between*, an individual who is, “between several names, statuses, identities; between humanity and inhumanity, citizenship and its denial; between the status of a man of tools and the status of a speaking and thinking being.”⁶⁶ According to Rancière’s formulation and understanding of political subjectivization, its process consists of two movements—the first being one’s demonstrated denial of an identity which has been imposed by state consensus (e.g. the police) and the second being the assumption of an “impossible identity,” a world-opening misnomer (such as “the proletariat”) which breaks with the inscription of policed identities.⁶⁷ If, in Thandile Zwelibanzi’s *Still Existence*, the public sphere of Johannesburg’s streets serve as the “dissensual stage” upon which foreign traders exert their claims of belonging and contest their right to work, then it is the process of their subjectivization that is ultimately imaged in these portraits.⁶⁸

From its inception, photography has been used to enforce exclusion via the creation of a photographic archive that reified the Other. More recently, however, historians of photography, such as Ariella Azoulay, have added more inclusive theories to the discourse on the medium, contending that photography is capable of

⁶⁵ Jacques Rancière, “Politics, Identification, Subjectivization,” *October* (1992): 60.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 61.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 62. As will be discussed to a greater extent in chapter three, this “impossible identification” in the South African context is that of the “worker,” an identification which, I argue, is shared by both South African citizen and foreigner in Zwelibanzi’s series. As informal trading has become accepted (and subsequently regulated) by the South African government in the post-apartheid period, this sort of work (which was once entirely illegal) is now recognized as a legitimate form of occupation.

⁶⁸ Rancière, *Dissensus*, 71.

manifesting one's belonging or even entrance into a citizenry.⁶⁹ Writing in 2010, Rancière stated that the political nature of artists' interventions,

Always consist in re-qualifying...spaces, in getting them to be seen as places of community; it involves these categories making themselves seen or heard as speaking subjects (if only in the form of litigation)—in short, as participants in *aesthesis*. It consists of making what was unseen visible; in making what was audible as mere noise heard as speech and in demonstrating that what appeared as a mere expression of pleasure and pain is a shared feeling of a good or an evil.⁷⁰

Rather than adding images to the archive which would support the exclusion of foreigners from the South African nation or merely chronicling the lives of these individuals as they sell trifles on the streets of Johannesburg, Zwelibanzi presents these immigrants' existence within a community and pictures their claims of belonging. In presenting not only their shared existence with South African citizens in the public spaces of the city but their shared participation in its economic networks as well, Zwelibanzi reinforces for the viewer seeing his series in its entirety that South Africa's other is truly a necessary part of a whole.

Writing of the image as that which "goes before" the immigrant, W. J. T. Mitchell states in *Seeing Through Race*, that, "before the immigrant arrives, his or her image comes first in the form of stereotypes, search templates, tables of classification, and patterns of recognition."⁷¹ By presenting illegal immigrants as they participate in the social citizenship of work in the very public sphere of Johannesburg's streets, Thandile Zwelibanzi works to disrupt the constructed stereotypes and subsequent xenophobic attitudes held by South Africa's citizenry toward the black African foreigner. It is in this way that Zwelibanzi's photographs propagate a sense of the

⁶⁹ See, for example, Ariella Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography* (New York: Zone, 2008).

⁷⁰ *Dissensus*, 38. [emphasis in original]

⁷¹ W. J. T. Mitchell, *Seeing Through Race* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard UP, 2012), 127.

immigrant's belonging while engendering questions within the viewer regarding not only their status as non-citizen, but their constructed 'otherness.'

Imaging the Gap

Inspired by the early photography of Santu Mofokeng and tales of the city from his childhood, Thandile Zwelibanzi took to the streets of Johannesburg in 2009 to learn more about the illegal traders he passed on a daily basis during his trips to the Market Photo Workshop. His series, *Still Existence*, consists of a range of images, from solitary men and women with their small portable stands hawking insignificant goods at night in the heart of the city, to photographs of migrants with their crates of fruits and vegetables as they illegally sell to passers-by in the middle of the day under the direct light of Johannesburg's sun. In one of the most striking photographs in this series, John Isaac, a Malawian informal trader, remains completely still as the city moves hurriedly and blurred around him (fig. 2). Taken at night, at the taxi rank in the heart of Johannesburg, Isaac stands upright and in complete focus. His body is indiscriminately dappled by the blue and yellow lights that emanate from and reflect off of the surrounding office buildings, street posts, and cars, implying that he is just as much a part of the modern cityscape as they. While Isaac's calmness suggests his comfort within the urban space, his stance and unwavering gaze into the camera's lens display a certain entrepreneurial confidence, a trait which interrupts the stereotypically held perception that *Makwerekwere* are 'unmodern' or 'uncivilized.'

In *'Foreign Natives' to 'Native Foreigners,'* Michael Neocosmos returns to South Africa's political economy under apartheid to establish a premise for the nation's prevalent xenophobic attitudes. In essence, he contends that the anti-rural

pro-urban nationalist discourse (which had originally posited blacks as ‘rural’ and whites as ‘urban’ via apartheid policies of divided labor) was not erased after apartheid but rather repositioned, leading South Africans to largely perceive of themselves as modern while deeming the rest of the continent, and those who come from it, as ‘backward.’ South African nationalism, he writes,

Is a notion of the nation which is a fundamentally urban one, centered on the cities. As a result it tends to exclude the rural in the 1980s, and eventually transfers this exclusion to non-South African rural hinterland whence migrants had emanated and where current immigration originates; ‘illegal immigrants’ in South Africa are implicitly or explicitly seen as coming from the ‘backward rural’ areas of the continent, or from ‘failed states,’ they are ultimately the same thing: the impoverished Other.⁷²

The perceived ‘backwardness’ and making of the African foreigner into an irreducible unmodern ‘Other’ by South African citizens has been documented by numerous NGOs and organizations, including the South African Migration Project and the South African Human Rights Commission. In defining the term ‘*Makwerekwere*’ Nyamnjoh writes that the derogatory title refers to, “not only a black person who cannot demonstrate the mastery of local South African languages but also one who hails from a country assumed to be economically and culturally backward in relation to South Africa.”⁷³ Marked by a red glare that hits the top-button of his dark-green coat, John Isaac stands parallel to Hillbrow Tower, the tallest structure in Africa and a now iconic symbol of Johannesburg’s modernity. Lit and motionless, his figure echoes the seemingly permanent form of the soaring structure suggesting that he, ‘despite’ being from Malawi, not only *belongs* in Johannesburg but is also a novel and modern *representative* of it. In linking modernity to a black foreign body,

⁷² Neocosmos, *From ‘Foreign Natives,’* 19.

⁷³ Nyamnjoh, *Insiders and Outsiders,* 39.

Zwelibanzi's image deconstructs the *Makwerekwere* as a figure of rural backwardness, skewing held notions of who constitutes a part in the citizenry by suggesting the foreigner's belonging within not only a particular city, but within the nation's imagination itself.

Constructed within the South African national imagination as unmodern and 'backward,' African foreigners have also been presented and perceived as threats to both the economic and social welfare of South African citizens. In his opening speech to parliament in 1994, Mangosuthu Buthelezi of the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) indicted "illegal aliens" for being "involved in a variety of criminal activities such as drug-trafficking, prostitution and money laundering in what can only be described as typical Mafia-activity."⁷⁴ Buthelezi followed these accusations with the statement that identifying, detaining and deporting these 'aliens' would be "in the interest of all South Africans," calling upon them, "to aid the Department of South African Police Services in the detection, prosecution and removal of illegal aliens from the country."⁷⁵ Two years later, in June of 1996, South Africa's *Mail & Guardian* reported that members from all parties of the South African Parliament had, in some capacity or another, "lashed out at illegal immigrants...branding them potential criminals, drug smugglers, and murderers."⁷⁶ Regrettably, the belief that all African immigrants are dangerous criminals permeates throughout South African society and is encouraged by the nation's political and media streams which often work to fuel each other. As Matsinhe has stated, "In its bid to invent and pin a badge of shame and

⁷⁴ Mangosuthu Buthelezi, "Budgetary Appropriation 1994: Review of Policy" (introductory speech delivered by the minister of home of affairs on August 30, 1994), <http://www.info.gov.za/speeches/1994/251194001.htm>.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ cited in Neocosmos, *From 'Foreign Natives,'* 83.

stigma on non-citizens, the state has a reliable partner in the media.”⁷⁷ In Zwelibanzi’s portraits of these supposed “criminals, drug smugglers and murders,” the viewer is presented with an alternative image, one which shows ‘representatives’ of *Makwerekwere* as hard workers with dignity and difficult stories of their own.

As can be seen in his photograph of John Isaac, or in his image of Mama Mathebula as she sells spinach on the corner of Bree and Blanket streets, Zwelibanzi documents these individuals as they present themselves, that is, as beings with self-possession worthy of respect (fig. 3). Zwelibanzi’s insight as a photographer, however, enables him to frame his images in such a way as to layer their meanings. Notably, in his photograph of Mama Mathebula, the colors of the African National Congress (ANC) flag dominate. Comprised of three solid stripes, gold, green, and black, the colors of the ANC’s flag symbolize the material wealth of the country, the nation’s land, and its native black population. Mama Mathebula’s contribution to completing the necessary colors of the party’s emblem in this image serves to remind the viewer of the struggle black South Africans endured during apartheid for equal recognition by the state. The more poignant remark conjured by this photograph, however, are the ANC’s unfulfilled promises of inclusion. Regardless of whether Mama Mathebula is visually suggested to be necessary for the wholeness of the party or whether she is linked to the history of its struggle, that she is presented in this image as warranting recognition in contemporary South Africa as part of the nation is paramount.

Unlike other prominent contemporary South African photographers who have taken portraiture as their subject, Zwelibanzi provides the names of the individuals he

⁷⁷ “Cleaning the Nation,” 122.

photographs next to each work in the gallery setting, along with their nationality and the time and place in which the portrait was taken. While suggesting the intersubjectivity that exists in this series between photographer and subject, this information, though seemingly unimportant to some, more importantly acknowledges these subjects as individuals with identities outside of those given to them by the police (such as *Makerekwere* or ‘alien’). Within each photograph lies a story and the voice of an individual—people with aspirations to become musicians, to obtain an education, etc. “Some may see these traders selling on the street and think that they have nothing better to do, but no, they’ve put forth a lot to come here. It’s not just a game for them. They really, really are trying hard to make their own living, to push, to sustain themselves with those goods that they are selling,” Zwelibanzi stated when speaking of the people imaged in his series.⁷⁸ Upon seeing these individuals selling on Johannesburg’s streets, Zwelibanzi was plagued by questions regarding why or how they had come to be in the city, remarking that he, “was curious, what are their hopes? Their dreams? Surely they didn’t want to be street traders before, or maybe there were some other things they wanted to do besides, but then, because of maybe their difficulties, they had to start somewhere.”⁷⁹

In Phaswane Mpe’s acclaimed 2008 novel, *Welcome to Our Hillbrow*, the opening narrator, Refentše, explores the xenophobic attitudes of Johannesburg’s inner-city residents. Speaking of South African xenophobia towards black African immigrants and the use of language as a differentiator within the complex social

⁷⁸ Thandile Zwelibanzi, *Movement and Stillness*, presentation given at the Summer Academy at the Salzburg International Summer Academy of Fine Arts, August 19, 2010, accessed September 14, 2012, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iFwKpyM58oU>.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

networks of Johannesburg, Refentše recounts the labeling of the non-citizen by the citizen. Derogatorily named *Makwerekwere* from *kwere kwere*, “a sound that their unintelligible foreign languages were supposed to make, according to the locals,” these people have been denied not only the ability to name themselves but remain unheard because their language is deemed incomprehensible.⁸⁰ As written by Aristotle in Book I of *The Politics*, the possession of logos, or language, is that which endows one with political agency.⁸¹ “If there is someone you do not wish to recognize as a political being,” Rancière writes, “you begin by not seeing him as a bearer of the signs of politics, by not understanding what he says, by not hearing what issues from his mouth as discourse.”⁸² While Zwelibanzi’s documentation of his subjects’ political arguments function as dissensus in the distribution of the visible, it is his *process* that intervenes in the consensus of what is both sayable and understood. During multiple meetings with these traders on the streets of Johannesburg, Zwelibanzi worked with them toward the creation of an image through which they themselves could claim a voice—rather than inscribing these traders with a narrative, the artist and the subject collaborated in the creation of a space in which they were able to write their own. It is in this way that Zwelibanzi and the “part without a part”

⁸⁰ Phaswane Mpe, *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal, 2001), 20. In his discussion of the formation and use of the term *Makwerekere*, Nymnjoh writes, “...black African immigrants are denied a name of their choice in South Africa, especially by South African blacks. This option to deny black African immigrants a name of their choice and dignity permits South African blacks to ensure continuity for the apartheid logic, whose preference was clearly for caricature and affirming a reluctance to share a common humanity and citizenship with strange creatures from beyond the borders of civilization. Thus denied a name, and by extension humanity, it is little surprising that the most violent prejudice is targeted at black African immigrants, despite their relatively small numbers. Labeled as a catalogue of negatives, they provide perfect justification for the state and citizens big and small to flex their muscle of control by keeping the barbarians at the fringes of opportunity, power, and privilege” (14).

⁸¹ Rancière, *Dissensus*, 37.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 38.

worked together in order to alter the outsider's assumed relationship with the *logos*.⁸³

By disidentifying with the stereotypically burdened names given to them by the police and in turn claiming an "impossible identity" as one *in-between*, the individuals imaged by Zwelibanzi interrupt the consensual perception of the black African foreigner through an enactment of equality.

⁸³ Besides serving to negate the political nature of these individuals, language has also been used by some in South Africa as a shibboleth, determining who 'belongs' in society and who is 'foreign.' As was retold by numerous victims of the 2008 assaults in reports elicited by both journalists and the police, those suspected of being foreign were asked by black South Africans to state the Zulu word for elbow, which was referenced with the point of a finger. If the correct answer, *indolowani*, was not given, then the individual being questioned was beaten and, in the case of sixty-two people, killed. The use of language by some as a tool to confirm otherness opposes strategies that contemporary visual artists use today.

Chapter 2: Dissensus: Imaging a Paradoxical World

My aim is to create “real” images. I’m not crazy about particular genres of photography but I like my photographs to give a feeling of looking at a version of the world that we don’t usually see, but know. – Thandile Zwelibanzi

The Politics of Space and of the Stranger: Surveillance and Exclusion

Though relatively dismissed by the African National Congress (ANC), non-governmental organizations and human rights groups have exhaustively examined the causes of South African xenophobic attitudes.⁸⁴ Generally, these findings place the blame for the unraveling of *ubuntu* on South Africa’s colonial past, the ANC’s relative inaction towards its citizens’ xenophobic attitudes (and actual fueling of these mindsets), the media, and the gnawing poverty of the majority of South Africa.⁸⁵ As Francis Nyamnjoh observes,

the option of equality without justice has made the post-apartheid context very tense as ordinary underprivileged South Africans realize that their constitutional rights are slow at delivering the material benefits of citizenship. Claims of wealth and a buoyant economy sound like a cruel joke to them, and increasingly they realize they have to compete with foreigners.... In such contexts of compounding frustrations and uncertainties, it is easy to turn migrants and minorities into scapegoats.... While a small but bustling black elite can today wallow in the conspicuous consumption of prized commodities such as fancy houses and cars, televisions, multimedia Internet connectivity, cellphones, jacuzzis, money-laundering partnerships and sumptuous deals and frequent-flyer privileges, most ordinary South Africans are still trapped in shacks, shanty towns, joblessness, poverty, uncertainty, and the illusion of

⁸⁴ See, for example, the South African Migration Project (SAMP), the South African Human Rights Commission (which, in 2002, set up its Roll Back Xenophobia Campaign), the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNRA), among many others. The number of NGO’s working to monitor and report on xenophobic violence in South Africa is also rather substantive. This list includes, but is certainly not limited to, People Against Suffering, Oppression, and Poverty (PASSOP) (which, for instance, argued against the ANC’s proposal to severely limit or close all township spaza shops owned by foreigners), the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) Monitoring Project and the Consortium for Refugees and Migrants in South Africa (CoRMSA) (both of which work to monitor the South African government’s interventions to address and curtail xenophobic attitudes), etc.

⁸⁵ Crush, *The Perfect Storm*, 12-15.

citizenship and have to struggle even with black African immigrants for consumer crumbs.⁸⁶

Constantly threatened by local hawkers who view *Makwerekwere* as trespassers in the informal sector, Johannesburg's foreign informal traders live lives of near constant harassment and insecurity.⁸⁷

Despite claims by foreign traders that they in fact introduced informal trade to the city, creating a niche for themselves outside of the formal economy though somewhat in competition with it, South African citizens working within the informal sector perceive *Makwerekwere* to be thieves who steal not only their physical space of work on the city's streets, but their customers and, subsequently, their livelihoods.⁸⁸ As a result, *Makwerekwere* traders face both verbal harassment and physical abuse by locals who repeatedly vandalize and loot their stalls, forcing them to move what small pieces may be left of their possessions to another location. The antagonism over physical space within Johannesburg between local and foreign hawkers (and, subsequently, the right to work) has repeatedly led to mass protests and violence in the post-apartheid period.⁸⁹ The aggressive contestations over Johannesburg's public spaces as spheres of livelihood and the prevalent view that these spaces are being 'polluted' by supposedly hypervisible black foreign bodies are

⁸⁶ *Insiders and Outsiders*, 5, 17.

⁸⁷ Abdoumalik Simone, "People as Infrastructure: Intersecting Fragments in Johannesburg" in *Johannesburg: The Elusive Metropolis*, ed. Sarah Nuttall and J. A. Mbembé (Durham: Duke UP, 2008): 76. Simone discusses the precarious existence of foreigners within Johannesburg throughout his essay. Within the city, he writes, "a 'cat and mouse' game largely prevails. Many foreign Africans cite the need for maintaining hyperawareness of their surroundings. They are constantly on the lookout for police officers, many of whom seem focused on entrapping foreigners in various shakedowns, luring them into what appear to be highly favorable apartment rentals only to then raid them and expropriate money and goods. When interviewing migrants, one notices their constant wariness about whom they can safely talk to and in what contexts."

⁸⁸ Nyamnjoh, *From 'Foreign Natives,'* 42. For more information on this subject, see Matshine's section on Home Affairs (113- 17) in "Cleaning the Nation" or Buthelezi's speech in its entirety.

⁸⁹ Nyamnjoh, *From 'Foreign Natives,'* 41-2.

matters which permeate Thandile Zwelibanzi's series, *Still Existence*. "Bodies are viewed as nation-building blocks subject to an ongoing patriotic process of selection," David Matsinhe writes.⁹⁰ "The bodies caught on the sieve are rejected, labeled coarse and strange, and denied the over-protected belonging," he continues.⁹¹ Documented in Zwelibanzi's photographs of *Makwerekwere* traders is the argument for the belonging of those very bodies that have been deemed undeserving by South Africa's citizenry.

In speaking of the illegal hawkers depicted in this series, Zwelibanzi discussed the daily and sometimes hourly struggles these entrepreneurs face in order to obtain a bit of pavement on Johannesburg's bustling streets on which they can situate and sell their goods.⁹² "Working outdoors in Johannesburg is not simple (for both traders and photographers alike)," Zwelibanzi stated while discussing the challenges posed by the city.⁹³ "This is true more so during the day around the Noord street taxi rank, where people are always in transit," and where a number of these photographs were in fact taken.⁹⁴ "The loud noise from the taxi hooters and sound systems, people shouting, and the hot sun all play their part in adding to this hectic situation," he remarked of his experience photographing in this area.⁹⁵ While Zwelibanzi's photographs are striking for their quiet depictions of what one knows to be the frenetic atmosphere of these traders' surroundings, what is more poignant in

⁹⁰ "Cleaning the Nation," 137.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² *Movement and Stillness*. "There is always a problem with the space," Zwelibanzi stated in regard to this series. "Sometimes traders make land claims, claiming a particular space for themselves and sometimes their claimed space is in front of a shop which causes tension between the shop owner and the trader."

⁹³ Thandile Zwelibanzi, Artist's personal statement, included in e-mail to author, November 27, 2012, n.p..

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

these images is the apparent calmness these individuals display as they work under police and civilian surveillance.

In figure 4, Zwelibanzi images two Zimbabwean women, Margret Muda and Gertrude, as they sit contained behind a row of cardboard boxes that overflow with fruits and vegetables. Plastic plates piled high with bananas and stacked one on top of the other on the far left are doubly echoed by a similar compilation of apples and oranges in the middle of the photograph and small mounds of onions on the far right. In documenting their position under a large yellow CCTV (closed circuit television) sign that reads, “Under Surveillance,” Zwelibanzi comments on these women’s supposed hypervisibility within society—their position as Other means that they are watched and scrutinized not only by cameras (though not for their own security), but by the constituency of xenophobic South Africans who call for African foreigners to *Hambani*, or *Go Home*.

Despite the incessant threats *Makwerekwere* traders face from the South African police, Johannesburgers, and other local traders, the individuals photographed by Zwelibanzi usually display a diffuse sense of calmness when in front of his lens. Meeting multiple times with his subjects before asking if he can take their portrait, Zwelibanzi develops a rapport with those individuals (both South African citizens and foreigners) that appear in this series. In his photograph of Margret Muda and Gertrude, however, one sees a lingering apprehension in the younger woman on the right who appears reticent at being imaged by an apparatus whose history is intimately intertwined with the state and its means of control through documentation. While this younger woman, with her face slightly covered by her white cap, appears

reserved and perhaps shy at having her picture taken, the older and more confident woman on the left presents a serene posture and expression. Sitting with her fingers interlaced in her lap, she leans her back against the wall while waiting for a customer, regarding the viewer nonchalantly. While the position of *Makwerekwere* traders as being directly “under surveillance” is commented on in Zwelibanzi’s photograph of Margret Muda and Gertrude, in other images, such as the artist’s portrait of Monica Thobela, the foreigner’s struggle for inclusion takes prominence in the photograph’s meaning (fig. 5).

Taken in July at the intersection of Twist and Bree streets at 5:20am, Zwelibanzi’s portrait of Monica Thobela, a trader from Moputo, Mozambique, depicts her as she sits in front of closed shops calmly and unobtrusively awaiting customers. Two other figures can be found, slightly blurred, in the background of the image. While the figure on the left wears a long black coat and a red hat, perhaps waiting to cross the street or for a cab, a well-dressed figure on the right of the image can be seen emerging, carrying a metallic silver bag and a matching travel mug, from beneath a shop sign that uses the South African flag as its motif. Situated across from Thobela, and beneath the shop’s sign, are rows of metal bars meant to protect the closed business from thieves. Thobela’s position across from these barred shops suggests, in my mind, two things—first, her literal exclusion from participation in South Africa’s formal economy as an illegal immigrant and, second, a more symbolic exclusion from the South African nation (though she has already entered its borders).

Notable in these photographs, and others within Zwelibanzi’s series, is the stillness of these traders among the movement of the city—a stillness that not only

allows for these individuals to be presented and read as people with identities, rather than merely as types, but which connotes a specific manner of *being* within the city, an existence which is *in-between* (to return to Rancière) and particular to the notion of the stranger as discussed by German sociologist Georg Simmel. In his seminal text, *Soziology*, Simmel states:

If wandering is the liberation from every given point in space, and thus the conceptual opposite to fixation at such a point, the sociological form of the stranger presents the unity, as it were, of these two characteristics. This phenomenon, too, however, reveals that spatial relations are only the condition, on the one hand, and the symbol, on the other, of human relations. The stranger is thus being discussed here, not in the sense often touched upon in the past, as a wanderer who comes today and goes tomorrow, but rather as the person who comes today and stays to morrow.⁹⁶

Later, Simmel links the stranger particularly to the trader, remarking that, “throughout the history of economics, the stranger everywhere appears as the trader, or the trader as stranger.”⁹⁷ The specific character of the trader is, for Simmel, linked to his inherent mobility, which, “embodies the synthesis of nearness and distance,” in that this, “fundamentally mobile” figure “comes in contact, at one time or another, with every individual, but is not organically connected...with any single one.”⁹⁸ In *Still Existence*, Thandile Zwelibanzi images the paradoxical existence of the *Makwerekwere* trader as the wanderer who has ‘come today and stayed to morrow,’ a figure who is ‘liberated from every given point in space’ and yet ‘fixed’ within Johannesburg’s cityscape.⁹⁹ Manifested through an act of dissensus (or rather, an

⁹⁶ Georg Simmel, “The Stranger” in *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*, trans. Kurt H. Wolff (London: Free of Glencoe, 1950: 402-08), 402.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 403.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 404.

⁹⁹ David Bunn, “Art Johannesburg and Its Objects” in *Johannesburg: The Elusive Metropolis*, ed. Sarah Nuttall and J. A. Mbembé (Durham: Duke UP, 2008): 154. In his essay, “Art Johannesburg and Its Objects,” David Bunn writes of Andrew Tshabangu’s 1997 series of photographs entitled *Joburt Park*. Discussing these images, which depict women working among smoldering fires as they prepare

“opening up of worlds”) and depicted here, in *Still Existence*, is the space in which the *Makwerekwere* trader paradoxically exists—“between several names, statuses and identities; between humanity and inhumanity, citizenship and its denial;” between “coming and going,” “nearness and remoteness”; and, ultimately, between insider and outsider.¹⁰⁰ In one of the most visually provocative and affective photographs in this series the viewer is confronted by an image of a *Makwerekwere* trader whose desire to belong has led him to position himself as a formal fixture of Johannesburg’s physical infrastructure (fig. 8).

When speaking of this series and his choice to take a number of his photographs at night, Zwelibanzi stated, “At night, that’s when the city is taking a breather, life is getting settled. Everything becomes different, the environment, atmosphere and city’s feel and mode becomes completely different from the daytime. I wanted to photograph this too.”¹⁰¹ Taken at 10:12pm on the corner of Klein and Plaine Streets in Johannesburg, Zwelibanzi’s photograph of Zimbabwean trader Dumisani Ngwenya captures a seemingly rare moment of calmness in the normally hectic city. With his back to the viewer, Ngwenya sits completely still next to his stand whose plastic sheet covering, much like the static buildings looming before him, is dappled by the reflections of the surrounding street lights. Two flickers of white light appear on the thin plastic sheet which fails to fully cover the crates upon

food in one of Johannesburg’s open public spaces, Bunn writes that although the lives of these women “may look like ephemeral lives...they are regular and intensively lived, part of the complex remaking of locales.” In my reading of Zwelibanzi’s series of foreign traders I put forth a similar claim. The argument for the fixity of these traders within their particular locals can be buttressed by a simple Google map search of the locations named within the titles of Zwelibanzi’s images. For example, as of February 24, 2013, if one were to use Google Earth to search the exact locations where these images were taken, one would find some of the same traders fixed “in their places.” The best example of this is Zwelibanzi’s image of Mama Thobela (fig. 3) taken at the intersection of Bree and Blanket streets.

¹⁰⁰ Rancière, *Identification and Subjectivization*, 61. Simmel, “The Stranger,” 405.

¹⁰¹ Artist’s statement, n.p..

which the flat of the table is propped. A reflection, potentially from one of the red stoplights on either side of Ngwenya, marks the left corner of his stand as it tilts under the weight of the small sweets carefully situated upon it. With the base of a concrete slab as his foundation, Ngwenya appears to be as attached to the concrete upon which Johannesburg was built as the buildings themselves.

Wearing white, cream, black and tan, Ngwenya's physical appearance matches that of the city in this particular moment of dark quiet. As he sits near a halo of white light that radiates from the street lamp directly above him, Ngwenya becomes seemingly camouflaged by the surroundings of the city. Sitting alone and still, two women move past Ngwenya on his left, walking in-step and carrying purses. Noting the angle at which he sits, it appears as if Ngwenya is watching them from his position on the street. In his depiction in this image, Ngwenya is understood to have been "caught on the sieve" and "rejected, labeled coarse and strange, and denied the over-protected belonging."¹⁰² He is also, however, imaged in such a way as to suggest his position as a "building block" of the metropolis itself. Though aesthetically fused with the cityscape and seemingly engulfed by it, however, Ngwenya remains notably isolated from its citizens in a manner that is affectively powerful. Like Zwelibanzi's photograph of Monica Thobela as she sits outside of the barred shops awaiting her own customers, this image of Ngwenya suggests the exclusion foreigners living in Johannesburg struggle against. Better than perhaps any other image in this series, Zwelibanzi's photograph of Ngwenya encapsulates Simmel's writing on the stranger as a figure who "comes in contact, at one time or another, with every individual, but

¹⁰² Matshine, "Cleaning the Nation," 137.

is not organically connected...with any single one,” an isolated figure who desires to be recognized.¹⁰³

Photographing the Re-figuration of Johannesburg’s Public Spaces

In his, “Ten Thesis on Politics,” Rancière states that, “the essence of politics is *dissensus*.”¹⁰⁴ Dissensus, in turn, “is not a confrontation between interests or opinions,” it is rather, “the demonstration (*manifestation*) of a gap in the sensible itself.”¹⁰⁵ For Rancière, dissensus is neither a simple overturning of an institutional order, nor is it a mere restructuring of that which has been deemed seeable and sayable by the police. The significance of dissensus lies, instead, in its opening up of a space in which it becomes possible for subjects to present themselves and their arguments (for inclusion within a society, for certain rights denied them, etc.). Dissensus occurs when an uncounted subject partakes in, or makes claims to, ‘those rights they have but do not have’ through political demonstration.¹⁰⁶ As used by Rancière, “political demonstration” makes visible that which had no reason to be seen by placing one world inside of another, for example, the placement of “the world where workers speak, and speak about the community, in that where their voice are mere cries expressing pain.”¹⁰⁷ “Those who make visible the fact that they belong to a

¹⁰³ “The Stranger,” 404.

¹⁰⁴ *Dissensus*, 38. [emphasis in original]

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.* [emphasis in original]

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 69.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 38. The use of language as a shibboleth in the 2008 xenophobic attacks as well as the ascribed name of *Makwerekwere* to these foreigners by locals make this statement by Rancière’s particularly applicable to both Zwelibanzi’s photographs and his process (in which these individuals are asked to speak rather than being deemed as unintelligible and subsequently silenced).

shared world that others do not see...is the implicit logic of any pragmatics of communication,” he writes.¹⁰⁸

Rancière begins his discussion of dissensus with an empirical given: interventions by the police within public spaces consist not of calling attention to demonstrators, but in dispersing them. “The police is not the law which interpellates individuals (as in Louis Althusser’s, ‘Hey, you there!’),” he writes, instead, “it consists, before all else, in recalling the obviousness of what there is, or rather, what there is not, and its slogan is: ‘Move along, There is nothing to see here!’”¹⁰⁹ In this, “[the police] asserts that the space for circulating is nothing but a space for circulation.”¹¹⁰ Politics, on the other hand, consists of transforming this space from one in which mere circulation occurs into an arena in which the appearance of the uncounted subject is made possible. In other words, politics “consists in *re-figuring space*, that is in what is to be done, to be seen, and to be named in it. It is the instituting of a dispute over the distribution of the sensible.”¹¹¹ In order for the disputes of those who are not represented in the consensus to be recognized, Rancière states that one must present the world in which the argument of the uncounted is viable. Political argumentation, he writes, “is the construction of a paradoxical world that puts together two separate worlds.”¹¹² In this series, Zwelibanzi photographs the political demonstrations (as defined by Rancière) that are made by *Makwerekwere* traders on the streets of Johannesburg. Rather than merely offering proof of the presence of these foreigners within the city, *Still Existence* presents to the viewer

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 37.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid. [emphasis mine]

¹¹² Ibid., 39.

these individuals' belonging within the shared spaces of Johannesburg by emphasizing their re-figuration of its spaces and subsequent introduction of paradoxical worlds.

In its conflation of the public and private spheres, Zwelibanzi's portrait of Simphiwe Kakono presents the viewer with a paradoxical world in which a woman from Zimbabwe is able to assert her belonging within the metropolis (fig. 6). Having situated a white crocheted tablecloth on her stand at an angle, allowing for more of it to be seen by passersby than if it had been laid out squarely, Simphiwe Kakono draws attention to her wares as she sits behind her trading stand awaiting customers late into a dark May night. While making her stall aesthetically appealing, the tablecloth's non-utilitarian presence suggests the domestic sphere as well as a sense of the woman's pride in her stand's presentation—separating her goods by type, Kakono has taken great care to neatly set out the small treats she seeks to sell. Small piles of bagged snacks sit on either end of the table and a flat plane of smaller sweets lies before her. The table's base, which also appears to be Kakono's base as her torso is situated directly above it, is emphasized and grounded by the downward pointing corner of the decorative cloth. By disrupting the public/commercial sphere through a presentation of the domestic realm via the delicate white tablecloth, Simphiwe Kakono claims the city as her home, putting forth her argument as a viable one to the viewer who may not, "have the frame of reference enabling them to see it as one."¹¹³ In this portrait, Kakono is imaged as strongly situated in a space to which she legally has no claim.

¹¹³ Ibid., 38.

Though Zwelibanzi's photographs in this series contain a similar subject—images of illegal traders as they make claim to and re-figure particular places within the city—each photograph offers a unique reading of Johannesburg and the foreigner's relation to, and existence in, the metropolis. In the words of Zwelibanzi, "Each image speaks its own language," a statement which dually serves to address both the formal qualities of the photographs themselves and the vast range of their subjects' nationalities.¹¹⁴ The photographs that comprise this series visualize a possible world in which "the argument" of the foreigner for belonging "counts as an argument," a world in which the uncounted subject does not simply exist as a fictitious figure of corruption, criminality, and disease, but rather is *recognized* as an individual. The "*re-figuring* of space" from an arena in which only movement or passage occurs into one in which subjects are able to stop and solidly put forth their claims is doubly suggested by Zwelibanzi in *Still Existence*—firstly through the title of the series which suggests these subjects' stillness within the space of the city and secondly through the juxtaposition of the blurred movement of the metropolis with the solid and unmoving figures portrayed. The very pedestrian nature of Zwelibanzi's images and the particularity of what they capture necessitate a brief turn to the spatial theories of French scholar Michel de Certeau as discussed in, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, and art historian Carol Magee's use of his theories in her recent writing on African cities and photography.

¹¹⁴ *Movement and Stillness*.

The Stillness and Trace of Belonging

In his seminal text, Michel de Certeau examines one's walking of the city and the making of places into "practiced places," or spaces. A place, according to de Certeau, is a defined location. "The law of the 'proper' rules in the place: the elements taken into consideration are beside one another, each situated in its own 'proper' and distinct location, a location it defines," he writes.¹¹⁵ One's practice of, or movement through and about a place enacts, for de Certeau, a variation of that place—what he terms a *space*. Space, in turn,

is composed of intersections of mobile elements. It is in a sense actuated by an ensemble of movements deployed within it. Space occurs as the effect produced by the operations that orient it, situate it, temporalize it, and make it function in a polyvalent unity of conflictual programs or contractual proximities.¹¹⁶

In *Still Existence*, Zwelibanzi images the practicing of place through his intentional capturing of movement within the city. These locations' transformations from places into spaces, however, are disrupted by the stillness of the traders around which this movement occurs. Drawing on Carol Magee's recent work, I argue that the dichotomy of stillness and movement as captured in these images suggests the belonging of *Makwerekwere* traders' within Johannesburg in two ways. On the one hand, these photographs suggest that the traders' *being* within the city is one of fixity—rather than being situated outside of the consensus of the *polis*, Zwelibanzi's photographs suggest, through stillness, that these illegal traders are instead facets of the city's place, proper "elements" of the city which, when recognized, will be integrated into the space of the metropolis.

¹¹⁵ Michel de Certeau, "Spatial Practices" in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, translated by Steven F. Rendall (Berkeley: Univ. of California, 2004: 91-130), 117.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

Photographs “are born of cities,” Magee writes. “Like words,” she states, photographs, “do not merely document.”¹¹⁷

In walking through a city, one practices its places, transforms them into space. Photographing a city transforms the space into a place, a text, a photograph, to be read. The conditions for the city give rise to its visual representation, but this is not the stopping point: arising from the city, the photograph creates it.¹¹⁸

As visual texts, viewers actively transform these photographs into spaces as they ‘walk’ or ‘read’ the place as it is imaged.¹¹⁹ By transforming a place from an arena in which mere circulation occurs into a space in which the appearance of the uncoun­ted subject is made possible, Zwelibanzi allows for the legibility of the *Makwerekwere* trader. Anchored by the stacked plastic crates upon which the flat surface of her stall rests, Simphiwe Kakono’s firm position works against what one knows to be the flimsy nature of her stand. Although her stall is highly portable and can be easily moved, Kakono appears settled as a permanent facet of Johannesburg. By documenting the still existence of these immigrants amid the bustling citizens of the city, Zwelibanzi’s photographs call attention to the fixity of the traders’ presence within the metropolis, disrupting the way in which we think about the public sphere by legibly writing the foreign into Johannesburg’s cityscape. This enables them to be seen, and therefore recognized and “practiced,” by the viewer. It is in these ways that Zwelibanzi’s photographs of *Makwerekwere* traders dually elicit their belonging within the city: firstly as fixed elements in their proper places (rather than as

¹¹⁷ Carol Magee, “Spatial Stories: Photographic Practices and Urban Belonging,” *Africa Today* 54.2 (2007): 113.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

‘pollutants’ or ‘outsiders’) and, secondly, as characters within, as de Certeau and Magee suggest, Johannesburg’s “spatial story.”

Included in Zwelibanzi’s series, however, are also photographs that deny the viewer direct access to the trader’s body, and therefore their recognition—images, for example, such as *Illegal and Legal Tobacco, (18:00 PM) August 2011, Bree Street, Johannesburg* (fig. 9), in which Zwelibanzi has chosen to particularly focus on the goods set out for sale, and *R5 a Pack, (13:55 PM) April 2011, Wanderers Street, Johannesburg* (fig. 10), in which a sole sack of bare potatoes rests on Johannesburg’s patterned sidewalk. In *Personalized space I, (16:00 PM) June 2011 Klein Street, Johannesburg*, Zwelibanzi documents a public space in the city that has been claimed and made “personal,” or private, by an illegal trader. While similar in concept to Simphiwe Kakono’s claiming of a public space as private, this photograph differs in that the trader him/herself is physically absent from the image (fig. 7).

On the left of the photograph a woman moves through an opened red gate and ascends a narrow staircase wearing sandals, a dark blue dress or skirt, and a light-gray suit coat. With a deep-red hand-bag on her shoulder, she appears to be speaking with, or perhaps merely passing, a man whose chest is level with her head. On the lower right of the image one sees, in the same visual plane as the trader’s stand, a slick advertisement for fruits that has been pasted to a white brick wall beneath a window or small loading dock of sorts. In this generic advertisement, bright red bags are shown to be stacked atop piles of grapefruit that are themselves collaged above large ripe watermelons. Above this section of the wall plastered with pictures of fruits rests small containers over-flowing with brown potatoes; these sit in front of a large mound

of the same produce which has yet to be sorted. The abundance of the formal market is juxtaposed with the meager piles of cigarettes and hand-packaged snacks that sit atop the trader's stall. On top of this pile can be seen a large half-empty bag of popcorn which awaits the trader's return for continued sorting into smaller plastic bags for sale. A red shopper bag sits partially hidden behind the black crate upon which the flat surface of the stall is situated and a small pink stool with "Janet" written vertically down one of its four legs in black marker can be found beside the stand to its right. Noticeably, Janet's bright plastic seat is empty.

Though the trader's body is absent from this image, the subject's presence is left as a trace for the viewer of the photograph and is made visible by the means of his or her existence (as is seen in the packages of cigarettes and small bags of snacks set out for sale); to be sure, evidence of the trader's prolonged existence in this space can be found with a careful eye. Tucked into the crevice in the wall on the left of the photograph, for example, we find more of the same type of bag that rests half-empty on the trader's stand. Depending, of course, on the rate of sales, such detritus could suggest that the trader has been in this same location for a significant amount of time. To the right of this crevice is another in the wall that has tucked in it a black sweatshirt; placed beneath this article of clothing is an empty plastic cup that lies on its side. In *Camera Lucida*, Roland Barthes posits that photography is a medium inherently created from an absented presence. "Every photograph is a certificate of presence," he states.¹²⁰ Though Barthes wrote particularly of a temporal sense, that photographs portray "that which has been," his theorizations on "absented presence"

¹²⁰ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), 87.

resonate with this particular image of Zwelibanzi's in which belonging, I argue, is established through little more than one's *belongings*.¹²¹

According to Abdoumalig Simone, the “spatial story” of Johannesburg is woven from a “highly urbanized social infrastructure” whose base unit is the individual.¹²² Their movements, interactions and transactions are what form the city and its networks, molding “an assemblage of increasingly heterogeneous elements into more complicated collectives.”¹²³ Maintaining that the photographs comprising *Still Existence* incite belonging, I posit in the following chapter that Zwelibanzi's images of unmanned stalls and traders' goods capitalize on both the recent restructuring of the state's consensus regarding its recognition of South Africa's “two economies” and its subsequent renegotiation of the nation's work-citizenship nexus. Ultimately, I argue that images such as *Personalized Space I, Illegal and Legal Tobacco*, and *R5 a Pack*, despite the absence of the traders' physical bodies, present the steady presence of Johannesburg's foreign entrepreneurs through their referencing of the trader's trace, and, vitally, the city's social infrastructure and networks of co-belonging.

¹²¹ Ibid., 85. In the catalogue for the 2003 Prague Biennial, curator Lisa Firstenberg writes of those photographs by Zwelethu Mthethwa in which the figure no longer appears as the visible subject, stating that, “space now functions as surrogate for [Mthethwa's] subject. The in-situ signage and décor—a symbol of the economics and cultural politics of the informal settlements he photographs, provide a setting wherein the body remains legible even in its absence.” In her article, *Spatial Stories: Photographic Practices and Urban Belonging*, Carol Magee also writes of the “absented presence” as it is found, both in these particular images of Mthethwa's, and in Malian photographer Alioune Bâ's images of Bamako. “These images, though void of human beings,” Magee writes, “address the urban realities of movement, migration and labor.” This concept of “absented presence” will be addressed further in chapter three through Rancière's writing on photography in his piece, “What Medium Can Mean.”

¹²² “People as Infrastructure,” 68.

¹²³ Ibid., 69.

Chapter 3: Visualizing the Social Citizenship of Work

It's easy to call them, our own people xenophobic when they resort to violence to defend the only space, the only means of survival against competitors for this almost nothing. It's not hatred of foreigners. The name for the violence is xenophobia?....He turns. The poster is presented, with him. A thick marker pen has crossed out XENOPHOBIA the poster reads in giant strides POVERTY. – Nadine Gordimer, No Time Like the Present

Belonging and South Africa's Work-Citizenship Nexus

In his recently published book, *Precarious Liberation: Workers, the State and Contested Social Citizenship in Post-apartheid South Africa*, Franco Barchiesi looks to the struggles of the black working class in South Africa and the African National Congress's (ANC) redemptive promises of work as tied to the discourse of citizenship. At the onset of liberation, Barchiesi argues, the separation between work and equality was narrowed as trade unions and labor movements sought to “redeem wage labor, turning it from a condition of oppression, degradation, and precariousness into a prospect of inclusion and human dignity.”¹²⁴ This, Barchiesi posits, has led to a work-centered conception of citizenship in which wage labor became “an imminent

¹²⁴ Franco Barchiesi, *Precarious Liberation: Workers, the State, and Contested Social Citizenship in Post-apartheid South Africa* (Albany: State University of New York, 2011), 2. Barchiesi writes, “The core principle of apartheid was ‘separate development,’ enshrined in the Promotion of Bantu Self-Government Act of 1959: citizenship for the ‘natives,’ now redefined as ‘Bantu,’ was superseded by belonging to culturally defined and bureaucratically sanctioned tribes. African residential rights in ‘white’ cities were concomitantly restricted. If the UP government had imagined that wage labor would uplift natives to the full status of workers, the apartheid project reversed the process and turned the ‘Bantu’ into migrants—not only Stallard’s ‘temporary sojourners,’ but actual noncitizens and foreign visitors. Native reserves were therefore organized into Bantu ‘homelands,’ run by allegedly traditional African chiefs under supervision of a state apparatus separate from the ordinary bureaucracy. Prime Minister Verwoerd compared white South Africa to a workplace where African workers had no rights to claim. For him the country outside the ‘homelands’ was ‘European-owned property’ where ‘natives’ were allowed to stay ‘just like laborers on a farm.’ The majority of South Africans were destined to experience work and citizenship and disconnected and mutually excluding spatial entities” (41). In his book, Barchiesi provides a thoroughly researched and detailed account of the denationalization of black South Africans during apartheid, particularly through the avenues of wage labor and the severing of work and notions of citizenship. For more of his critical and historical account of this ‘process’ and the redemption of labor in the post-apartheid era, see chapter two (“Redeeming Labor: From the Racial State to National Liberation”) in *Precarious Liberation*.

force of liberation and social empowerment” in strict opposition to informal work such as street trading or vending, subsistence agriculture, etc.¹²⁵

As a number of governmental reports and academics have noted, the division between South Africa’s “two economies” is not necessarily clear-cut. In its report of June 2012 on the informal sector, the South African Local Government Association (SALGA) stated that the

generally accepted definition [of the informal economy] tends to reflect the idea that the formal economy is made up of formally registered businesses and/or people who work for a regular wage, have employment contracts and enjoy the protection of labor legislation, while the informal economy is made up of unregistered businesses and people who operate outside of the formal domain.¹²⁶

SALGA settles on defining informal trading as, “economic activity by individuals and/or groups involving the sale of legal goods and services within public and private spaces, which spaces are generally unconventional for the exercise of such activity.”¹²⁷ “In its most basic,” the report continues, “informal trading takes place on streets and pavements, on private property (used primarily as the entrepreneur’s place of residence) and tends to require little more than actual goods and services to set up.”¹²⁸ Regarding the ANC’s recognition of South Africa’s “two economies,” Barchiesi argues that wage labor is still upheld within the national imagination as the

¹²⁵ Ibid., 21. During the apartheid era, the protection of formal businesses and the desire of the National Party to keep blacks out of designated white areas led to a host of legal restrictions against informal trading. During this period, the South African Local Government Association (SALGA) noted, “the terms *informal*, *black* and *illegal* were often treated almost synonymously with unwanted economic activity, and, as such, most informal selling, especially in urban centers was defined as illegal.” South African Local Government Association (SALGA), *Making the Informal Economy Visible: Guidelines for Municipalities in Respect of Adopting a More Developmental Approach Towards the Informal Economy*, SALGA, *Making the Informal Economy Visible*, 2012.

¹²⁶ SALGA, *Making the Informal Economy Visible*, 4.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 5.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

dominant marker of one's citizenship and subsequent belonging. "The 'two economies' metaphor," Barchiesi writes,

addresses the contrast between normative universalism and practical inequalities by recasting wage labor as the foundation of a legitimate and objective social hierarchy, scientifically observable in the productive status of each citizen....The expressions, "informal, marginalized, and unskilled" opposed to "advanced, sophisticated, and skilled" suggest a diagnostic and therapeutic contrast between social pathology and normality and fold factual measurement and ideal-typical categories into a narrative of labor as virtuous citizenship....Reminiscent of colonial modernity, the "first economy" evokes the old fully stabilized African urban "insiders" as opposed to the troublemaking masses of casual workers and informal squatters. The coloniality of post-apartheid fantasies of work ultimately underscores wage earning as the civilized and efficient lifestyle toward which the unruly "space of Otherness" of backward unwaged multitudes must tend to overcome laziness and aversion to modern production discipline.¹²⁹

Within the past decade, however, the informal economy has been slowly brought into the fold by the South African government. In South Africa, the realm of the spaza shop is no longer viewed to be an "unruly 'space of Otherness'" and those working in this area are not looked upon as "unwaged multitudes" but rather as innovative entrepreneurs. According to *Spaza News*, a newspaper distributed primarily in Gauteng province, in 2010 there were over 100,000 spaza shops in South Africa, 40,000 of which were located in Gauteng. Collectively, these informal entrepreneurs make over seven billion rand a year.¹³⁰ Though spaza shops are more situated than the stands of informal traders (a spaza shop is usually understood to be a small convenience store that is run out of one's home), spaces have been created by Johannesburg's municipal government within the city for South African traders with little more than make-shift stands to set-up and sell their goods. No longer frowned

¹²⁹ *Precarious Liberation*, 92.

¹³⁰ "Spaza News," Noel Ndhlovu and Sylise Petersen. Spaza Media, n.d., accessed March 3, 2013, <http://www.spazanews.co.za/>.

upon, the informal market is now a space which has, through a number of legislative actions, become reserved for South African citizens.

For the ten years that Mangosuthu Buthelezi held the position of South Africa's Minister of Home Affairs, South African citizens were bombarded with rhetoric that pictured a "flood" of immigrants coursing relentlessly through the nation's porous borders. According to Buthelezi, this overwhelming surge of immigrants from South Africa's bordering nations posed a devastating threat to South Africa's economic security. During his address to the Southern African Migration Project's conference in 2007, a year before the violent attacks against black foreign nationals began in Alexandra and the same year President Thabo Mbeki called for the renewal of *ubuntu*, Mangosuthu Buthelezi asserted that, "with an illegal alien population estimated at between 2.5 million and 5 million, it is obvious that the socio-economic resources of the country, which are under severe strain as it is, are further being burdened by the presence of illegal aliens."¹³¹ At the outset of liberation in 1994, Buthelezi attacked foreign informal traders in South Africa's cities, disparaging "aliens" for "starting their own business" through the setting up of stands or spaza shops in spaces that he believed should be strictly reserved for South African

¹³¹ Mangosuthu Buthelezi, *Keynote Address at the Southern African Migration Project's Conference : After Amnesty: The Future of Foreign Immigrants in South Africa*, June 20, 1997, accessed October 11, 2012,

<http://www.queensu.ca/samp/sampresources/migrationdocuments/speeches/mgb/200697.htm>. Nyamnjoh, *Insiders and Outsiders*, 37. The number of "illegal aliens" in South Africa has become a point of contention between human rights groups seeking to quell xenophobic attitudes and the ANC as it looks for ways in which to reflect its citizens' discontent for its failed delivery of basic services. In the post-apartheid era, the unreliability of the supposed number of illegals within the country's borders has led to politicians' exaggeration of the figures, effectively 'bolstering anti-immigration sentiments' among nationals.

citizens.¹³² Seeking to remove foreigners from the informal sector, Buthelezi confronted South Africa's organization of informal businesses, remarking to parliament that he was, "pleased to mention [that he had] had very fruitful discussions with the South African Chamber of Hawkers and Independent Business with regard to aiding the Department in its task of identifying and tracing these people."¹³³ In accordance with Buthelezi's prompting, Johannesburg's municipal government instituted policies that restricted the use of designated informal market spaces to South African citizens.¹³⁴ In 2010, SALGA hosted the first National Informal Trade Economy Summit in which they sought to introduce a regulatory framework ("a draft informal trade policy") that could be adopted by South African municipalities.¹³⁵ Advocating that "the issue of the informal economy be put on the agenda of the National Department of Economic Development," this summit echoed a 2003 presidential report which sought to restructure the consensus of South Africa's work-citizenship nexus by formally recognizing the informal economy, bringing a system of relations and trade that once existed outside of the police into the fold.¹³⁶ South Africa's "second" economy, that which had once only been perceived as "a space of Otherness" (as it was initially created by foreigners, or, in the words of George Simmel, "strangers"), has, since apartheid's end, become recognized and regulated by the state. Subsequently, its citizen participants are seen as "insiders," counted parts

¹³² Keynote Address, n.p. Interestingly, the headline for the August 2010 publication of *Spaza News* is, "Are foreigners killing your spaza shop?" The articles in this edition deal with how a South African spaza owner can become more competitive in the informal market. Included are tips on how to beat out foreigners (who, it is said, are able to sell cheaper goods because they buy in bulk) for business.

¹³³ Keynote Address, n.p..

¹³⁴ Matshine, "Cleaning the Nation," 113. The City of Johannesburg informal trading and street trading by-laws specifically stipulate that an informal trader is "a person who carries on business of trading in designated informal trading areas and includes any employee of such a person."

¹³⁵ *Making the Informal Economy Visible*, 2.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 1-2.

within the consensus of the police rather than simply “troublemaking masses of casual workers and informal squatters.”¹³⁷

“Elementary Forms of Resistance”: Documenting Dissensual Acts

For the viewer of Zwelibanzi’s images, the ‘right’ of *Makwerekwere* traders to occupy these tumultuous urban spaces is inherently unstable as their illegality is linked not only to their status as illegal foreigners, but to their position as unlawful traders who are occupying spaces in the city from which they have been politically excluded. Photographed by Zwelibanzi in 2011 with his hands in his pockets against South Africa’s cold June night, Abdullar Shamte stands behind a folding card table on which he has situated sweets and a variety of packages of cigarettes (fig. 11).

Wearing a pale colored bulky jacket, jeans, and a dark blue winter hat, Shamte has pulled his jacket’s hood over his head, forming a halo around his face that draws our attention to the only section of his body not covered by fabric. Eyes shaded, he regards us more easily than we do he. To the left of his head in the same visual plane is a signpost that explicitly indicates traders are prohibited from selling their goods in this particular location (in this instance, the intersection of Wanderers and Plein streets in Johannesburg). In its scored-through depiction of a figure standing behind a table on which rests a small pile of goods, the sign serves to visually caricature Shamte himself, echoing his form while also unambiguously signaling his actions to be illegal. In his photograph of Malawian trader Mark Mzuza, taken in the middle of the afternoon in August on President Street, one sees an addition to the sign that is missing from the one positioned next to Abdullar Shamte (fig. 12). As Mzuza stands

¹³⁷ Barchiesi, *Precarious Liberation*, 92.

with his hands in his pockets behind an abundance of tropical fruits stacked upon two rows of cardboard boxes, we see he is located “OUTSIDE” of the “Demarcated Stalls Site,” and, symbolically, outside of the state consensus.

In his afterward to Jacques Rancière’s, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, Slavoj Žižek writes that Rancière’s theories, “provide the clearest articulation of the motto which appeared at the demonstrations of the French jobless movement in the mid-90s: *we’re not a surplus, we’re a plus.*”¹³⁸ “Those who, in the eyes of the administrative power, are perceived as ‘a surplus’ (laid off, redundant, reduced to silence in a society that subtracted the jobless from the public accounts, that made them into a kind of residue—invisible, inconceivable except as a statistic under a negative sign)—should impose themselves as the embodiment of society as such,” Žižek writes, echoing Rancière.¹³⁹ “If what Rancière refers to as the police-aspect of the political, the rational administration and control of social processes, focuses on the clear categorization of every individual, of every ‘visible’ social unit,” Žižek continues, “then disturbing such orders of the visible...is the elementary form of resistance.”¹⁴⁰ Although it can be seen most explicitly in Zwelibanzi’s images of Abdullar Shamte and Mark Mzuza (figs. 11 and 12), this “elementary form of resistance,” I argue, is a current that runs throughout the entirety of *Still Existence*.¹⁴¹ By referencing the blatant illegality of his subjects’ occupation of Johannesburg’s public spaces, their illicitness becomes tied to not only to their status as possible illegal immigrants, but to their unlawful participation in an informal economy that is now regulated by the

¹³⁸ Slavoj Žižek, “Afterward: The Lesson of Rancière” in *The Politics of Aesthetics*, by Jacques Rancière, translated by Gabriel Rockhill (London: Continuum, 2006): 76.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 77.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

state. In their defiance against the state consensus, Abdullar Shamte, Mark Mzuza and Zwelibanzi's other subjects visually argue for their inclusion WITHIN, rather than "OUTSIDE," those parts that are counted. Just as the South African government now recognizes what it calls its, "second economy" and those citizens who participate in it not as "surplus" but as "plus," so too, these photographs posit, should foreign traders be recognized and counted as participating members of South African society.

The Great Parataxis: Imaging Networks of Co-Belonging

In *The Future of the Image*, Rancière writes of a "great parataxis" in which there no longer exists any common term of measurement within art. Though this can most readily be seen in the works of Flaubert, in which the great parataxis takes, "the form of the collapse of all system of rationales for emotions and actions in favor of the vagaries of the indifferent intermixture of atoms," as well as in the works of Emile Zola, in which it is represented by, "piles of vegetables, *charcuterie*, fish and cheese in *Le Ventre de Paris*, or the cascades of white cloth set ablaze by the fire of the consummation in *Au Bonheur des dames*," the great parataxis is, fundamentally, the establishment of a "common factor of dis-measure" in which all is set to equal all.¹⁴² For Rancière, this "measureless common factor" is book-ended by two boundaries: schizophrenic chaos and consensus.¹⁴³ Negotiating the boundaries of the great parataxis, Rancière writes, is the sentence-image, the material of visual culture, which "can be expressed in sentences from a novel, but also in forms of theatrical representation or cinematic montage or the relationship between the said and unsaid

¹⁴² Jacques Rancière, *The Future of the Image*, (London: Verso, 2007), 43-44.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 45.

in a photograph.”¹⁴⁴ The sentence-image, Rancière suggests, is capable of linking the heterogeneous in two disparate ways—dialectically and symbolically. While the former creates clashes, what Rancière states are, “developed small measuring tools, conducive to revealing a disruptive power of community, which itself establishes another term of measurement,” the latter creates likenesses which incite co-belonging.¹⁴⁵

According to Rancière, dialectical juxtapositions involve a presentation of, “the strangeness of the familiar in order to reveal a different order of measurement that is only uncovered by the violence of a conflict.”¹⁴⁶ The symbolist “machine of mystery,” however, “is a machine for making something common, not to contrast worlds, but to present, in the most unexpected ways, a co-belonging.”¹⁴⁷ In his photograph, *Mubber Chaton, from Tanzania (20:22 PM) November 2010, Corner Bree and Hoek Street, Johannesburg*, Thandile Zwelibanzi images South Africa’s two economies in a visual parataxis (fig. 13). While the left half of the image comprises Mubber Chaton, his stand, and the darkness of Johannesburg’s streets, the right half of the image depicts the pristine and glowing interior of a food establishment now closed for the night. Here I find that the photograph’s heterogeneous elements can be linked both dialectically and symbolically and that it is precisely by means of the oscillation between these two distinct poles that the image’s meaning is formed. When different elements within the photograph are juxtaposed, a number of various relations and understandings are procured; clashes and the revelation of the

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 46.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 56.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 57.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 58.

“disruptive power of community” subsequently lead to revealed likenesses, and the apparent incommensurability between the image’s numerous aspects ultimately fashion new measurements that establish a co-belonging of subjects.

Imaged in Zwelibanzi’s photograph of Mubber Chanton are South Africa’s two economies—that of the “informal, marginalized, and unskilled” and that of the “advanced, sophisticated and skilled.”¹⁴⁸ In this photograph, Zwelibanzi suggests the equality of these two economies within the South African imagination by dividing the space they share in the image into equal sections. Part of the irony of this presentation of South Africa’s two economies, however, is that neither the informal trader nor the business portrayed are South African—Chaton, as the title of Zwelibanzi’s photograph states, is from Tanzania, and the storefront is that of a ubiquitous American franchise, Kentucky Fried Chicken. While the “glorious” world of the formal economy is imaged in the luminous and immaculate storefront, the contrast between its wealth and the poverty of the informal trader positioned outside of its pristine interior is poignant. What would appear to be a clash between the differentiation of wealth (the ‘said’ aspect of the photograph) is subverted not only by a co-belonging that is suggested by the image’s equal recognition of the two economic spheres, but by the fact that Mubber Chaton, the “machine of mystery” suggests, faces the same exclusion from economic affluence (represented by the glowing windows of the second largest restaurant chain in the world) as thousands of South African citizens. It is in this imposition of a different measure (a state of co-marginalization) that *Makwerekwere* and citizen trader unexpectedly co-belong.

¹⁴⁸ Barchiesi, *Precarious Liberation*, 92.

“The right image,” Rancière writes in reference to Godard and Reverdy, “establishes the correct relationship between two remote things grasped in their maximum distance.”¹⁴⁹ Through the imposition of a different measure, one only accessible through the interplay between the image’s clashes and layered suggestions of co-belonging, Zwelibanzi’s photograph ultimately suggests Mubber Chanton’s belonging within South Africa’s civil society in two ways: firstly, through his participation in the social citizenship of (what is now recognized by the South African state as) work and secondly, through his shared exclusion with the majority of the South Africans from the redemptive promises made since 1994. The co-belonging of South African citizens and African foreigners within Johannesburg is most symbolically imaged, however, by those photographs in *Still Existence* that lack a figure. Focusing instead on the goods whose sale provide for the continuation of their existence, I posit that photographs such as *Illegal and Legal Tobacco* (fig. 9) and *R5 a Pack* (fig 10) image the shared participation of foreigners and citizens in the networks of South Africa’s informal economy.

In his article entitled, “What Medium Can Mean,” Rancière writes specifically of photography’s particular ability to present absented presences through stringent objectivity. Drawing on Roland Barthes’ understanding of photographs as “certificates of presence,” Rancière analyzes Frank Breuer’s *Containers* series, writing that the, “impact of this series obviously dwells in the tension between [the images’] minimalism and the meaning it conceals.”¹⁵⁰ Looking to Breuer’s untitled photograph of stacks of primary colored containers located in a stockyard in Antwerp,

¹⁴⁹ *Future of the Image*, 58.

¹⁵⁰ Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 87. Jacques Rancière, “What Medium Can Mean,” translated by Steven Corcoran, *Parrhesia* 11 (2011): 6.

Rancière writes of the “faceless workers” who have loaded and unloaded these large containers with merchandise.¹⁵¹ He continues with the statement that the containers themselves, in their reproduction as the subjects of photographs, have been “filled with the absence of these workers.”¹⁵² Important to the discussion of *Illegal and Legal Tobacco* (fig. 9) and *R5 a Pack* (fig. 10) is Rancière’s statement that in his imaging of the absence of the workers, Breuer presents the *presence* of an entire network. In his bare images of cigarettes, potatoes and other goods, Zwelibanzi similarly presents the viewer with the complicated networks of South Africa’s informal economy, an economy in which both *Makwerekwere* and citizen trader co-belong.

In his discussion of Johannesburg, Abdoumalig Simone looks to the “highly urbanized social infrastructure” lying within the “ruins” of the city’s sprawling urbanity, positing that “a specific economy of perception and collaborative practice is constituted [by residents] through the capacity of the individual actors to circulate across and become familiar with a broad range of spatial, residential, economic and transactional positions.”¹⁵³ Discussing the layered economic networks of the city, Simone writes,

While residents of different backgrounds try to keep out of one another’s way, they do form emergent interdependencies ranging from crude patron-client relations to formally constituted pan-African entrepreneurial collaborations. The sheer proximity of Africans from diverse ethnic and national backgrounds leads many residents to explore tentative cooperation based on trust... For example, no matter how much Nigerians and South Africans express their mutual hatred, this does not really stop them

¹⁵¹ Rancière, “What Medium Can Mean,” 6.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ “People as Infrastructure,” 69.

from doing business with each other, sharing residences, or engaging in other interpersonal relations.¹⁵⁴

In *Illegal and Legal Tobacco* (fig. 9) and *R5 a Pack* (fig. 10), Thandile Zwelibanzi documents an important component of Johannesburg's infrastructure, that of informal trade. In these photographs the traders to whom these goods belong are absent, leading the ordered packages of cigarettes and bare potatoes to serve as emblems of Johannesburg's social fabric, woven as it is from the interactions, transactions, and movements of the city's legal and illegal residents.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 78-9.

Conclusion

Equality is not given, neither is it claimed; it is practiced, it is verified.
-Jacques Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*

In a 2005 editorial, Achille Mbembe and Deborah Posel write of the emergence of a new humanism—a critical humanism—that “breaks with essentialized notions of difference and builds on a philosophy of critical cosmopolitanism.”¹⁵⁵ Writing in direct reference to South Africa and the contradictions the nation must meet, the authors state that this new humanism

forces us to confront one of the abiding contradictions of a neoliberal world, which embraces the weakening of national borders from an economic point of view yet reasserts these borders with virulence in order to exclude strangers, migrants and others, whose mobility is driven by the new configurations of global markets.¹⁵⁶

Declaring that “a new humanism is inseparable from a cosmopolitan spirit, premised on a politics of hospitality which recognizes the humanity of the alien,” the author’s reconstruct the responsibilities of citizenship, stating that the project of a new humanism is “also a politics of hope” that is “underpinned...by the insistence that debates about democracy should move beyond simply the idea of rights (as important as they are), to engage the question of obligation.”¹⁵⁷ In calling upon a critical humanism, Mbembe and Posel make demands of the citizen, insisting that the obligations of citizenship include the requirement of “see[ing] the object and hear[ing] the argument that [the citizen] ‘normally’ has no reason to see or to

¹⁵⁵ Achille Mbembe and Deborah Posel, “A Critical Humanism,” *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies* 7:3 (2005), accessed March 1, 2013, doi: 10.1080/13698010500267876, 283-4.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 285.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 284.

hear.”¹⁵⁸ In other words, they propose that the benefits of citizenship should bear with them the requirement of the recognition of “the humanity of the alien.” One would be mistaken, however, to suggest that Zwelibanzi’s series, or any photograph, is capable of demanding such recognition from the viewer—to be sure, the power of photographs is more subtle than Roland Barthes’ has asked us believe in his writing of an image’s *punctum*, or rather, its ability to “pierce.”¹⁵⁹

For Rancière, political art is not that which simply aestheticizes the uncoun­ted in an attempt to rally the viewer to protest on the marginalized’s behalf; rather, art that is political is that which images the marginalized’s exercise of a certain aesthetic sensibility that is denied them by the state. The political power of art, in other words, stems from its ability to re-figure spaces or networks in its bid to present the arguments of the marginalized—not from its supposed ability to move a viewer to pity or force recognition.¹⁶⁰ “Aesthetic experience has a political effect to the extent that the loss of destination it presupposes disrupts the way in which bodies fit their functions and destinations,” Rancière writes.¹⁶¹ “What it produces is not rhetorical persuasion about what must be done. Nor is it the framing of a collective body. It is a

¹⁵⁸ Rancière, *Dissensus*, 38-9.

¹⁵⁹ *Camera Lucida*, 26.

¹⁶⁰ In *Dissensus: Politics and Aesthetics*, Rancière writes of the failure of critical art that seeks to, through a blatant political message, move its viewers to some sort of action. “Art is presumed to be effective politically,” he writes, “because it displays the marks of domination, or parodies mainstream icons, or even because it leaves the spaces reserved for it and becomes a social practice. Despite a century of critique—or so-called—directed at the mimetic tradition, it appears to be still firmly entrenched, including in forms of supposed political and artistic subversion. Underlying these forms is the assumption that art compels us to revolt when it shows us revolting things, that it mobilizes when it itself is taken outside of the workshop or museum and that it incites us to oppose the system of domination by denouncing its own participation in that system. This assumption implies a specific form of relationship between cause and effect, intention and consequence” (134-5). In *The Emancipated Spectator*, Rancière reiterates this position, stating that “there is no straightforward road from the fact of looking at a spectacle to the fact of understanding the state of the world; no direct road from intellectual awareness to political action.” See: Jacques Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, translated by Gregory Elliott (London: Verso, 2009), 75.

¹⁶¹ *The Emancipated Spectator*, 72.

multiplication of connections and disconnections that reframe the relation between bodies, the world they live in, and the way in which they are ‘equipped’ to adapt to it.”¹⁶² In *Still Existence*, the reframing of the relationships between bodies, and the viewer’s relationship with those bodies, is precisely that which constructs a discourse of belonging for these individuals within South Africa’s civil society. The development of this discourse, however, requires us to see the agency Zwelibanzi records—that is, his subjects’ disruption of visual hierarchies through their presentation of themselves before the law. The power of Zwelibanzi’s *Still Existence* resides, therefore, not in its supposed ability to incite the obligations of the citizen for recognition, but rather through its lending of a medium through which uncounted subjects are able to assert their agency, enact an already existing equality, and ultimately affirm belonging.

¹⁶² Ibid.

Figures

Figure 1, Jodi Bieber, *Black Label, Operation Crackdown, Hillbrow, Johannesburg*, from the series *Going Home –Repatriation – South Africa/Mozambique*, 2001. Silver gelatin on fiber-based paper, 42 x 62 cm.

Figure 2, Thandile Zwelibanzi, *John Isaac, from Malawi (04:30 AM) May 2010, Klein Street, Johannesburg*, from the series *Still Existence*. Silver gelatin on fiber-based paper, 84 x 59.5 cm.

Figure 3, Thandile Zwelibanzi, *Mama Mathebula, from Mozambique (21:56 PM)*
September 2009, Corner Bree and Blanket Street, Johannesburg, from the series *Still*
Existence. Silver gelatin on fiber-based paper, 84 x 59.5 cm.

Figure 4, Thandile Zwelibanzi, *Magret Muda and Gertrude, from Zimbabwe (17:54 PM) November 2010, Wolmaras Street, Johannesburg*, from the series *Still Existence*. Silver gelatin on fiber-based paper, 84 x 59.5 cm.

Figure 5, Thandile Zwelibanzi, *Monica Thobela From Maputo (05:20 AM) July 2010, Bree and Twist Street Johannesburg*, from the series *Still Existence*. Silver gelatin on fiber-based paper, 84 x 59.5 cm.

Figure 6, Thandile Zwelibanzi , *Simphiwe Kakono from Zimbabwe (21:15 PM)*
May 2010, King George Street, Johannesburg, from the series *Still Existence*. Silver
gelatin on fiber-based paper, 59.5 x 84 cm.

Figure 7, Thandile Zwelibanzi, *Personalized space I, (16:00 PM) June 2011 Klein Street, Johannesburg*, from the series *Still Existence*. Silver gelatin on fiber-based paper, 84 x 59.5 cm.

Figure 8, Thandile Zwelibanzi, *Dumisani Ngwenya, from Zimbabwe (22:12 PM) February 2011, Corner Klein and Plaine Street, Johannesburg*, from the series *Still Existence*. Silver gelatin on fiber-based paper, 84 x 59.5 cm.

Figure 9, Thandile Zwelibanzi, *Illegal and Legal Tobacco, (18:00 PM) August 2011 Bree Street, Johannesburg*, from the series *Still Existence*. Silver gelatin on fiber-based paper, 84 x 59.5 cm.

Figure 10, Thandile Zwelibanzi, *R5 a pack, (13:55 PM) April 2011, Wanderers Street, Johannesburg*, from the series *Still Existence*. Silver gelatin on fiber-based paper, 84 x 59.5 cm.

Figure 11, Thandile Zwelibanzi, *Abdullar Shamte, from Tanzania (22:45 PM) June 2011 Wanderers and Plein Street Johannesburg*, from the series *Still Existence*.
Silver gelatin on fiber-based paper, 84 x 59.5 cm.

Figure 12, Thandile Zwelibanzi, *Mark Mzuza, from Malawi (14:30 PM) August 2011, President Street, Johannesburg*, from the series *Still Existence*. Silver gelatin on fiber-based paper, 84 x 59.5 cm.

Figure 13, Thandile Zwelibanzi, *Mubber Chaton, from Tanzania (20:22 PM)*
November 2010, Corner Bree and Hoek Street, Johannesburg, from the series *Still*
Existence. Silver gelatin on fiber-based paper, 84 x 59.5 cm.

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