Visual Impersonation — Population Registration, Reference Books and Identification in the Eastern Cape, 1950s–1960s

Lorena Rizzo

Abstract: The paper looks at the population registration and issuing of reference books in the Transkei in the 1950s and 1960s. The *dompas* became the iconic object of apartheid policing within the logic of urban racial segregation and capitalist labour exploitation. The analysis proposed here investigates population registration through the lens of materiality and visuality. It sketches the visual economies that facilitated the scheme in a rural area and explores the role of photography in one of apartheid's most notorious administrative schemes. Along the lines of Walter Benjamin's reflections on technological mediation the paper retraces how the *dompas* as an image/object oscillated between panoptic surveillance and subaltern contestation.

Résumé: Cet article concerne le recensement de population et l'émission de documents d'identité ("reference books") au Transkei dans les années '50 et '60. Le *dompas* devint un objet iconique du contrôle politique de l'apartheid dans une logique de ségrégation raciale urbaine et d'exploitation capitaliste du travail. L'analyse ici proposée s'oriente sur le recensement de la population à travers le filtre de la matérialité et de la visualité. Elle ébauche les économies visuelles qui facilitèrent la mise en place de ce système en milieu rural et explore le rôle de la photographie dans un des systèmes administratifs de l'apartheid les plus connus.

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Lorena Rizzo holds a PhD from the University of Basel, received in 2010. She currently is a postdoctoral researcher and lecturer at the History Department of the University of Bielefeld, Germany, and an Academic Associate at the History Department of the University of Basel, Switzerland. She works on photography and policing in colonial Southern Africa, and is the author of *Gender & Colonialism. A History of Kaoko in North-Western Namibia, 1890s–1950s* (Basel: Basler Afrika Bibliographien, 2012). E-mail: lorena@rizzo-basel.ch

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Dans le sillage des réflexions de Walter Benjamin sur la médiation technologique, cet article montre comment le *dompas* en tant qu'image/objet oscilla entre surveillance panoptique et contestation "par le bas."

Introduction: An Apartheid Scheme[1]

In the early 1950s the apartheid government of South Africa embarked on one of its most ambitious and extensive schemes directed at the registration, identification and control of its subject population. Two pieces of legislation, the Population Registration Act no. 30 of 1950, and the Natives (Abolition of Passes and Co-ordination of Documents) Act no. 67 of 1952 laid the grounds for the administrative re-articulation and implementation of control policies and practices prescribing and curtailing people's rights of residence, mobility and work.[2]

While the population registration scheme made provisions for *every* South African above the age of sixteen years to be issued with an identity number and document, the Natives (Abolition of Passes and Co-ordination of Documents) Act concerned those classified as "native" alone and required them henceforth to permanently carry a so-called reference book.

The reference book or the *dompas,* as it was popularly known among those who had to carry it, was an intricate object.[3] Usually kept in a brown cover, it was made up of two parts. On the one hand, it enclosed a laminated identity card that featured the name of the bearer, his or her ethnic affiliation, the date on which the card was issued, the signature of an official, and a black-and-white portrait photograph. On the other hand, the book included five consecutive documentary sections (A–E) which listed information on permissions to enter urban areas, record of required medical examinations, names and addresses of employers, work status, and receipts for tax payments.[4]

[1] Earlier drafts of this essay were presented during a workshop at the Centre for Humanities Research, University of the Western Cape, in February 2013, and at the *Re-figuring the South African Empire* Conference, University of Basel, in September 2013. I would like to thank Giorgio Miescher for commenting on different versions of the manuscript, and Gary Minkley for supporting my research and sharing his knowledge of photography in the Eastern Cape.

[2] The Population Registration Act was published in the *Extraordinary Union Gazette* on 7 July 1950, 3–19, The Natives (Abolition of Passes and Co-ordination of Documents) Act in the *Government Gazette* on 7 November 1952, 1013–1029.

[3] The example shown here is kept in the Western Cape Archives and Records Service (KAB) and filed under 1/UTA 6/1/79. The book was issued to Xalisile John Tiwani, a man classified as Xhosa, on 25 February 1958. This reference book doesn't contain any information on Tiwani's personal history of residence and work, nor on his tax payments. As all pages are left blank, the book was most probably not collected by his intended owner.

[4] Keith Breckenridge, "Verwoerd's Bureau of Proof: Total Information in the Making of Apartheid," *History Workshop Journal* 59 (2005), 83–108, 85.

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The reference book replaced a plethora of permits, passes, tax receipts and identity certificates, which had been in use since the early twentieth century, and while the government praised its new system as a modern, rational and efficient form of registration, the book first and foremost marked the advent of a panoptic form of policing envisioned by the apartheid regime.[5]

The registration of men classified as "native" and the issuing of reference books to them began in March 1953.[6] Mobile teams of the Native Affairs Department chose the main industrial employers around Pretoria, the Witwatersrand and the Vaal Triangle for a first round of registration that lasted six months and saw more than 400,000 industrial workers being issued with reference books. The main institutional body responsible for the process was the Central Reference Bureau in Pretoria, and it was here where fingerprints taken were henceforth classified, associated with a national identification number and a set of photographs, and filed in a cabinet. Once registration was underway in the main urban and industrial centres, the process was extended to the rural areas of Natal and the Transvaal, and by 1958 the scheme began to target women as well. As Keith Breckenridge has rightfully argued, the reference book system began to crumble at a very early stage in its implementation. Although being registered and issued with a *dompas* required every individual to have an impeccable record of tax payments – a prerequisite that caused problems to many – the overwhelming number of people who applied for reference books, and accordingly submitted fingerprints and photographs to be processed, caused long delays in the work of the Reference Bureau. Additionally, applications for duplicate books due to theft or loss of originals reached an average of 3,000 per month as early as 1954 and added to increasingly chaotic conditions. If nothing else, recurrent confusion of fingerprints, identity numbers and photographs eventually induced the Bureau to introduce mechanical filing cabinets and microfilms in the late 1950s, but by then, massive resistance to the reference books and systematic acts of forgery brought the entire scheme near to a collapse.[7] The state's response to these acts of defiance manifested itself in increased policing and large scale arrests of "offenders" that reached a monthly average of 49,000 in 1962.

[5] On paper regimes in the first three decades after South African Union in 1910 see: Lorena Rizzo, "Visual Aperture. Bureaucratic Systems of Identification, Photography and Personhood in Colonial Southern Africa," *History of Photography* 37–3 (2013), 263–282.

[6] The following summary of the main features of the registration scheme is based on Breckenridge, "Verwoerd Bureau," who's seminal article remains the main reference on the topic.

[7] The most prominent resistance to the reference books was the nationwide campaign organised by the PAC in 1960.

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Because the *dompas* signified the coercive nature of the apartheid state, it has ever since captured popular and political imaginaries – prominently so e.g. in Athol Fugard's *Sizwe Bansi is Dead*[8] – and has accordingly played an important role in historical writing.[9] Within these imaginaries and debates the focus has been on how the reference book system led to a deterioration of the lives and working conditions of men and women classified as "native," how the book served and perhaps even fuelled the racial politics of a totalitarian regime, and how, accordingly, it provoked immense every-day and unionised resistance by those placed under its rule.[10]

The *Dompas* as an Object and Image

This paper choses a slightly different entrance into the theme by proposing and analysis of the *dompas* as an object and image. Because the reference book was the material result of an alleged simplification process, one aimed at synthesising earlier forms of documentation on an individual's life, his or her provenance, life history, health condition, residence, and labour relations, it is worth unravelling how this sophisticated and complex object was materially constituted, what it was made of and from what kinds of discursive registers it drew. The population registration scheme was the first occasion on which the South African state systematically required every adult citizen and subject to be photographed. We hence encounter a context and moment in time in which photography was applied on a large scale and affected vast sections of the subject population. Because the photographic medium came to occupy such a distinctively important place in the scheme, the population registration and introduction of reference books throughout the 1950s and 1960s constitutes an exceptional case study, which enables us to inquire what kind of photographs it yielded, how these images were used, what they were meant to do, and how the photographs eventually acquired meaning within and beyond the registration context. The discussion draws from historical and anthropological scholarship

[8] Athol Fugard, *Township Plays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000). See also: Lily Saint, "Reading Subjects: Passbooks, Literature and Apartheid," *Social Dynamics* 38–1 (2012), 117–133.

[9] Deborah Posel, *Influx Control and the Construction of Apartheid* (Oxford: University of Oxford Press, 1987); Julia C. Wells, *We Now Demand: The History of Women's Resistance to Pass Laws in South Africa* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 1994); Gary Minkley, "'How, in Heaven's Name, Are These People to Provide Photographs for Themselves?' The Intimate Photographic Event, the Provision of Politics and the Encounter of an 'Empire of Love' in South Africa," (unpublished conference paper, n.d.).

[10] Wells, *We Now Demand*; Pamela E. Brooks, *Boycotts, Buses, and Passes. Black Women's Resistance in the US South and South Africa* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2008), chapter 8.

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concerned with the materiality of images and questions about the material and social practices they constituted, as much as it reconsiders the population registration and the introduction of the *dompas* within recent histories of photography in southern Africa.[11]

The reference book became the new blueprint for the classification and identification of individuals, and it accordingly drew from a combination of indexical registers and an elaborate bureaucratic taxonomy and nomenclature. Yet, to become operational, i.e. a useful means of control and policing, and meaningful in terms of the information it enclosed, the reference book required an adequate institutional and semantic backdrop. It was the function of the Central Reference Bureau to provide this framework of legibility, and most of the work done by its employees indeed consisted of inserting the information gathered in a rapidly expanding system of registers and filing cabinets, and to guarantee for the comparability and verifiability of visual and written data. As we shall see, while the Bureau focused on fingerprints as the modern from of biometric identification, every-day control and surveillance of men and women required to carry the book, by police, magistrates and employers would rest, however, on the material and visual integrity of the book as an image and object. [12]

Notes on an Archive

This essay is based on research conducted in the Western Cape Archives and Record Service in Cape Town throughout 2012 and 2013. My main interest was in tracing photographs produced in the course of the registration scheme and to explore the place of photography in the classification and surveillance of women and men issued with reference books. The documents filed at the Western Cape Archives concern the implementation of the scheme in the Western and Eastern Cape, and occasionally include materials related to a number of towns in the Northern Cape as well. The archival composition and classification mirrors the character and workings of the apartheid administration at the time and the chronologies and geographies of the registration scheme. The archive's centrepiece is made up of files produced in the magistrate's offices throughout these regions, who had been commissioned with executing the registration and

[11] See generally: Deborah Poole, *Vision, Race, Modernity: A Visual Economy of the Andean Image World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997); Elisabeth Edwards, *Raw Histories. Photography, Anthropology, Museums* (Oxford/New York: Berg, 2001); Christopher Pinney, *Photography and Anthropology* (London: Reaktion Books, 2011); Richard Vokes, *Photography in Africa: Ethnographic Perspectives* (Woodbridge/Suffolk/London: James Currey, 2012); Patricia Hayes, "Power, Secrecy, Proximity: A Short History of South African Photography," *Kronos* 33 (2007), 139–162.

[12] Simon A. Cole, *Suspect Identities. A History of Fingerprinting and Criminal Identification* (Cambridge MA/London: Harvard University Press, 2002).

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issuing reference books. While I was going through these archives I came across a file entitled "Itinerant Photographer 1962–63," which caught my attention.[13] It enclosed fragments of correspondence between the magistrate in Kentani, the chief native commissioner/magistrate in Umtata, and the director of the Bureau in Pretoria composed in 1963. My subsequent reading of the archives followed the narrative threads suggested by the documents kept in this particular file, and "Itinerant Photographer" encouraged my decision to focus on the scheme's implementation in the Eastern Cape, and more precisely in the former Transkei, where population registration and the issuing of reference books began around mid–1955.

The paper hence approaches the introduction of the *dompas* with a particular interest in photography, and it looks at the scheme within a regional and local context. The files compiled by the magistrates, some of which also served as native commissioners, comprise correspondence among the officers stationed in the smaller towns and villages throughout the Transkei; letters and minutes between the magistrate and chief native commissioner in Umtata, the administrative centre at the time, and the Central Reference Bureau in Pretoria; the communication with the mobile teams that travelled throughout the region and registered men, and later women during a period of almost ten years; and finally, correspondence between the magistrates and local residents, missionaries, teachers and church elders, photographers and others on issues relating to the population registration and the reference books. Most importantly these files enclose a large number of applications for *dompases*, i.e. an assemblage of written and visual documentation which will be of particular concern for the analysis proposed here.

Yet, before we move to a closer reading of these images and texts, there is a need to point to some material and discursive absences in these archives. With one exception, i.e. the reference book issued to Xalisile John Tiwani in 1958, there are no reference books as such kept in the magistrates' files, although the correspondences provide a tangible sense of how the books were produced and circulated between Pretoria, Umtata and the respective towns and villages in the Transkei until they were eventually delivered to their owners.[14] Generally speaking, this archive conjures and enforces a narrative of undisturbed and untroubled rationality, effectiveness and functionality of a bureaucratic system and scheme, which seemed to have been unconditionally sustained even by those state officials stationed on the most remote internal frontiers. And it is precisely this narrative of modern rationality that stifles any reference to contestation, inquiry and resistance. This essay will hence read the archive *along the grain* and try to explore how a careful inquiry into the visuality and materiality of the photographs produced in the course of the population registration and issuing of reference books

[13] KAB, CMT 3/1435 30/F – "Population Registration and Abolition of Passes. Issue of Reference Books to Bantu. Itinerant Photographer 1962–1963."

[14] See Figure 1.

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in the Transkei might provide directions for unhinging the self-referentiality and self-righteousness of one of the most notorious apartheid schemes.[15]

Itineraries – Images and People on the Move

As mentioned above, the archive suggests that the systematic registration of individuals applying for reference books in the Eastern Cape was up and running in 1955.[16] Here too, the economic rationale behind the scheme was more than obvious, and the authorities left no doubt that the significance of the region for industrial and agricultural labour recruitment made the formal registration of men in the Transkei an urgent priority.[17] Although the Native Affairs Department in Pretoria had provided regional offices throughout the country with *Consolidated Standing Circular Instructions* regarding what was by then administratively called "the population registration of natives" immediately after the Act of 1952 had been passed,[18] it was only in April 1955 that the Chief Magistrate requested the commencement of operations in and around the Transkeian administrative centre.[19] Two months later, the first round of registration materialised: a mobile unit, consisting of twelve men, namely "a team leader, one official photographer, one fingerprint assistant, one embosser, six temporary native clerks, one temporary native recorder and one camera assistant" was said to be visiting Umtata in June, and the local magistrate was required to inform residents accordingly, who would be then asked to report at the designated

[15] See: Ann L. Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain. Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009).

[16] The chronologies of the scheme as it developed in the former Transkei help nuance the temporalities suggested by Breckenridge with regard to an overall national framework based on the analysis of records produced by the central state authorities in Pretoria. See: Breckenridge, "Verwoerd's Bureau." There were earlier applications to the magistrates for reference books in the region, yet they appear to have remained occasional. See e.g.: KAB, 1/MTA 8 N1/23/2, Population Registration Mount Ayliff, 1953–1961, Magistrate Mount Ayliff to the Central Reference Bureau Pretoria, 14 January 1955.

[17] See e.g. KAB, 1/UTA 6/1/79 N1/23/2, Population Registration of Natives, 1955–1958, volume 3, Circular of the Chief Magistrate of the Transkeian Territories, 7 February 1958. The registration scheme in fact enabled the state and the Native Affairs Department in particular, to control and monopolise the practices of labour registration by recruitment agencies that had been in place before. For a discussion of migrant labour in South Africa that keeps an eye on chronological and geographical shifts see e.g.: David Yudelman and Alan Jeeves, "New Labour Frontiers for Old: Black Migrants to the South African Gold Mines, 1920–85," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 13–1 (1986), 101–124.

[18] See e.g. KAB, 1/TSM 7/1/46 N1/23/2, Magistrate Tsomo, n.d.

[19] KAB, CMT 3/1434 30/B, volume 1, Chief Magistrate Transkeian Territories to the Magistrate Umtata, 29 April 1955.

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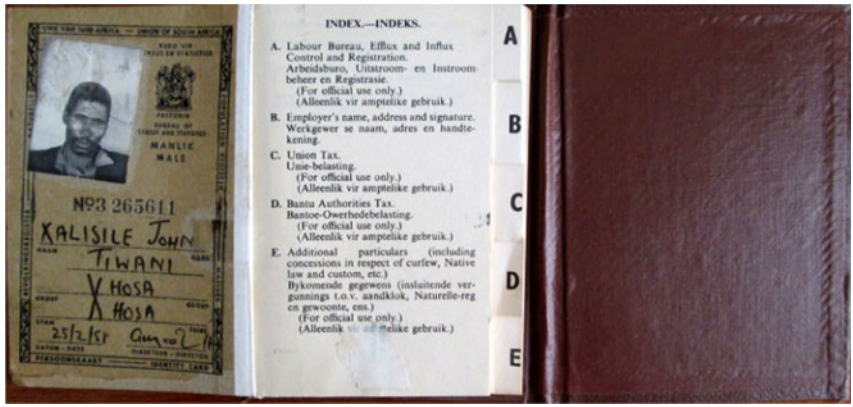
Figure 1. Western Cape Archives and Records Service (KAB), 1/UTA 6/1/79, book issued to Xalisile John Tiwani, on 25 February 1958.



registration centres and bring along their tax identity numbers.[20] In theory, this procedure was meant to be repeated throughout the Transkei by two mobile units, and Pretoria expected all men above the age of sixteen and residing in the region to be issued with reference books by the beginning of February 1958.[21]

Yet, on the grounds this template soon proved to be unsustainable, particularly so, once the registration of women began in 1957 and increased the demands on the mobile teams.[22] The Transkeian authorities had indeed reckoned at an early stage that procedures needed to be tuned to local conditions, and as early as April 1956 the magistrate in Umtata had urged his fellow officers throughout the Transkei to report on the number of people that needed to be registered in their relative districts, assess the availability of photographers on the spot, and make suggestions for the location of registration centres and suitable itineraries.[23] As we shall see, the magistrates" response was quite revealing and the archives provide a

[20] KAB, CMT 3/1434 30/B, Population Registration and Abolition of Passes. Native Registration. Main File, volume 1, The Central Reference Bureau Pretoria to the Chief Magistrate Umtata, 10 June 1955.

[21] KAB, CMT 3/1434 30/B, Population Registration and Abolition of Passes. Native Registration. Main File, volume 1, Chief Magistrate Transkeian Territories to the Secretary for Native Affairs Pretoria, 7 January 1958.

[22] KAB, 1/UTA 6/1/79 N1/23/2, Population Registration of Natives 1955–1958, volume 1, The Central Reference Bureau Pretoria to the Magistrate Umtata, 8 April 1957.

[23] KAB, 1/XAA 172 N1/23/2, volume 1, Identical Minute No. SB 1/16: Issue of Reference Books to Natives by District Offices, sent by the Magistrate in Umtata, 22 April 1956.

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vivid picture of a complex visual economy and diverse visual practices at hand in the region at the time. But let's first go back to the registration process *per se* and have a closer look at the materiality of work the mobile teams performed once they registered individuals.

The materiality and visuality of the registration

Figure 2 shows the application forms attributed to a sixteen year old youth called Andile Pinkerton Booi, who applied for a reference book in Engcobo in 1961.[24] At the time, this assemblage constituted a characteristic, if not model application insofar as it included the C. 25 form (the yellow card with personal information on the applicant including a space for the photograph), the B.A. 147 form (the dactyloscopy, i.e. the set of fingerprints) and a brown E5 envelope with two black and white photographs enclosed. It is at this point where the files provide a vivid image of the bureaucratic backdrop to the population registration and the growing degree of administrative centralisation. Indeed, once the application process was concluded, all the information produced was sent by the magistrate to the Central Reference Bureau in Pretoria, where, as mentioned before, it would be processed and *archived* and where, eventually, the applicant would be issued a reference book. The book was then sent back to the local magistrate who would finally instruct the person concerned to collect it. All in all, the entire procedure would (ideally) require a period of at least one month.

The course of action summed up here flattens the configuration of the application process in many ways, and it suggests a material and administrative clearness and purposefulness that soon proved much more erratic, unstable, chaotic and – to say the least – contested. Although the scheme was meant to simplify and standardise the documents in use, applying for an identity document continued to mean very different things in terms of its material outcome: brown or green reference book, exemption certificate, temporary identification certificate – or no book at all.[25] Moreover, the fact that Andile Pinkerton Booi's application is kept in the Engcobo magistrate's files up to date points to an important bureaucratic disruption, and the questions of why his application was not forwarded to Pretoria or if he ever received a *dompas* remain unanswered.

[24] Filed under KAB, 1/ECO 6/1/32 N1/23/2.

[25] This is the case at least throughout the early stages of the scheme, i.e. before the *dompas* became compulsory for men in 1958, and for women in 1960. See: Mark Sher, "From Dompas to Disc: the Legal Control of Migrant Labour," in: Dennis Davis and Mana Slabbert (eds.), *Crime and Power in South Africa: Critical Studies in Criminology* (Cape Town: David Philip, 1985), 72–89. Green reference books were issued to those who were exempted from the pass laws, namely teachers, students and church or mission employees.

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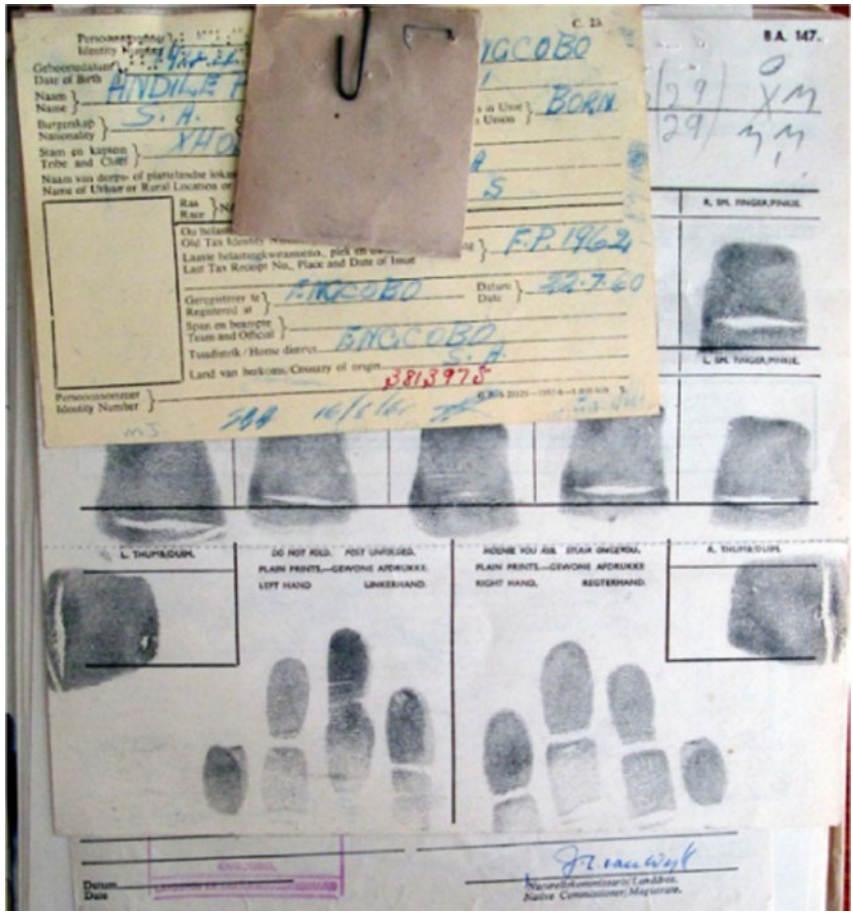
Figure 2. Western Cape Archives and Records Service (KAB), 1/ECO 6/1/32 N1/23/2, application submitted by Andile Pinkerton Booi, Engcobo, 1961.



What, thence, does this conglomerate of cards, forms and photographs, one example of many more of them kept in the files of the various magistrates in the Transkei, tell us about "the population registration of natives?" And what can we say about the role photography played therein?

The application forms provided a particular kind of information on the subjects applying for reference books. In Andile Pinkerton Booi's case the C. 25 card stated that he was born in Engcobo in 1944, hence sixteen years of age and a South African national by birth; he was single, male, Xhosa Zibi, and at the time of registration residing at Tora, a village about 50 km south of Engcobo. The card furthermore listed Pinkerton Booi's old tax identity number, added his new national identity number, and recorded the date of his

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last tax payment. Lastly, it noted when and where precisely the registration had been done. A dactyloscopy featuring the young man's entire fingerprints and a set of two black-and-white portrait photographs, certified by a government official, completed the application.

The process described illustrates what bureaucratic rationality had come to mean by the mid–1950s in apartheid South Africa. For those men and women classified as "native" registration under the population registration scheme entailed a fragmentation of the subject, which required them to represent themselves according to a number of prescribed administrative categories, including age, racial and ethnic classification, and gender.[26] These categories served as the invisible backdrop against which individuals would thereby become manageable entities in a register that allowed to reconstitute bureaucratic subjects furnished with a number (the National Identification Number), recorded statistically (according to the tax records), identified biometrically (based on the fingerprints), and classified (along ethnic and racial lines).[27] And it was this classificatory framework that defined the space in which the photograph would act, responding as it were to the ways in which the bureaucratically recomposed subject eventually came into view.[28]

The Photographs

The photographs kept in the population registration archive are ephemeral. Some of them are attached to the corresponding application and kept in the brown envelope, but many of them are loosely placed between documents, slipping between papers. They are small, hardly larger than a stamp, and hence always at risk of being lost, prone to be swapped, both in the past, when they were produced and included in an application, and the present, within the archive.[29] Their ephemerality is likewise apparent in the dwindling quality, as most of the photographs have begun to fade, whereby some of their subjects appear almost unrecognizable. This material and visual volatility in the archive circumvents unambiguous interpretation and it threatens any attempt at historical recovery. And still, these images evoke a powerful presence.

There is, indeed, an unsettling ability of the photographic image to (seemingly) recreate its subject in the present. Scholars of visuality have

[26] Michel Foucault's work on subject/ivity as well as postcolonial debates on the fragmentation/dislocation/disruption of the (post)colonial subject are echoed here. See for an overview: Leela Gandhi, *Postcolonial Theory. A Critical Introduction* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998).

[27] The notion of invisible backdrop is taken from: Arjun Appadurai, "The Colonial Backdrop," *Afterimage* (March/April 1997), 4–7.

[28] Peter Goodrich, "The Theatre of Emblems: On the Optical Apparatus and the Investiture of Persons," *Law, Culture and The Humanities* 8–1 (2012), 47–67.

[29] Marcus Banks and Richard Vokes, "Introduction: Anthropology, Photography and the Archive," *History and Anthropology* 21–4 (2010), 337–349, 339.

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addressed this effect in different ways, often through an engagement with Walter Benjamin's concept of *aura* in relation to photography. Miriam Bratu-Hansen for example begins her seminal essay on Benjamin with a reflection on a common understanding of aura as "an elusive phenomenal substance (…) that surrounds a person or object of perception, encapsulating their individuality and authenticity."[30] Aura, it seems, participates in and instantiates the logic of the trace or the indexical dimension in photographic signification. Here, Benjamin conceived of aura less in terms of an inherent property of persons or objects, as Bratu-Hansen continues to explain, but as something that pertains to perception, and which becomes visible only on the basis of technological reproduction. In other words: it is not the presence of the photographic subject itself, but the particular condition of exposure and the kind of looking (or gaze) it anticipates and responds to that at once threatens and inscribes the subject's authenticity and individuality.[31]

How do this contestation of the subject's presence in the photograph and the structure of vision resonate in the Eastern Cape magistrate's archives? The photograph shown in Figure 3 takes us back to Andile Pinkerton Booi's application for a reference book in Enqcobo in 1961 and to its particular kind of framing.[32] It relied, as we shall see in a moment, on particular visual conventions, in which the camera focused on an individual's head and face placed against a neutralised backdrop. Arjun Appadurai has called these photographs on official documents *face prints*; images that claim to capture the subject's individuality – his or her aura – not through any documentary technique, but rather by echoing their indexical companions, fingerprints.[33] The terminology is powerful, and the rhetorical move highlights the ways in which these photographs "imprison the subject in visual realism" and semiotic standardization.[34] Yet, the framing nevertheless remains epistemologically ambivalent, as it was precisely the undefined backdrop that marked the uncertainty about what these photographs were meant to represent.[35] The population registration scheme, thence, raises the problem of the subject, and its aura, in particular ways. It requires, if we continue to follow Appadurai's argument, an assessment of wider discursive framings – frames and practices that helped contain photographic meaning and determined the ways in which the photographs would be

[30] Miriam Bratu-Hansen, "Benjamin's Aura," *Critical Inquiry* 34 (2008), 336–375, 340.

[31] Bratu-Hansen, "Benjamin's Aura," 340.

[32] The original image is ca. 4x3 cm in size. Pinkerton Booi submitted two images that were not identical.

[33] Appadurai, "The Colonial Backdrop," 4.

[34] Appadurai, "The Colonial Backdrop," 4.

[35] Appadurai, "The Colonial Backdrop," 4.

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Figure 3. Western Cape Archives and Records Service (KAB), 1/ECO 6/1/32 N1/23/2, photographer unknown, photograph included in the application submitted by Andile Pinkerton Booi, Engcobo, 1961.

perceived. And it is, ultimately, the question of framing and perception that takes us back, once again, to the work of the mobile registration units.[36]

As mentioned earlier on, the registration of men, and later women, in the Transkei was meant to be done by an official mobile team, which included one photographer and a number of auxiliary clerks.[37] Yet, as a result of the rapidly growing numbers of people who needed to be registered, local magistrates decided to make use of quite diversified photographic practices available on the ground. The strategic use of local resources at first disclosed economic interests in the registration project. In fact, a number of labour recruitment agencies, such as the Natal Sugar Planters, the Native Recruiting Corporation Ltd., and the Illovo Sugar Estates Ltd., offered to register and photograph labourers by themselves, as they had actually always done.[38] Obviously, this

[36] Mika Elo, "Walter Benjamin on Photography: Towards Elemental Politics," *Transformations* 15 (2007), n.p.

[37] The official photographers whose names come up in the files are: N.L.J. van Wyk, E.V. Kent, and J. Conn.

[38] KAB, 1/UTA 6/1/79 – N1/23/2, volume 3, Circular by the Chief Magistrate of the Transkeian Territories, Umtata, 7 February 1958; KAB, CMT 3/1434 30/B, volume 1, District Superintendent, Native Recruiting Corporation Ltd., to Chief Magistrate of Transkeian Territories, Umtata, 28 January 1958; KAB, CMT 3/1434 30/B, volume 1, C.R. Bannister, Secretary of Illovo Sugar Estates Ltd., to the Chief Native Commissioner Umtata, 30 January 1958.

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proposal helped maintain some of their freedom of scope in the organisation of labour recruitment, and although the Transkeian administrative authorities resented this on-going market autonomy, the scheme's requirements forced them to give in.[39] But the magistrates' search for a sustainable registration method spotted further protagonists in a quite sophisticated photographic culture. A few commercial photographers, such as F.L. Simpson and Raymond Lee entertained photo studios in and around Umtata and East London, and in some of the smaller towns and villages members of the tiny settler community, who usually indulged in amateur landscape photography and portraiture, likewise agreed to produce appropriate registration photographs.[40] Most importantly though, and to the administration's astonishment, the most noticeable initiative came from local black photographers, who proactively approached the magistrates and offered their services. Between 1958 and 1962 seven independent photographers, namely W.B. Diko and Edward B. Ntsane in Mount Frere, S.M. Mabude in Bizana, Nelson Manxiwa in Willowvale, Isaak Keswa in Umzimkulu, Elliot Sixabayi in Cofimvaba, and James Mpuku in Ngqeleni, applied for permission to participate in the registration scheme, arguing that their knowledge about the area, their experience in servicing their own communities, and the quality of their photographic work made them genuine candidates.[41]

In view of the diversity of photographic practices and the need to use all services available in the Transkei for the registration scheme, the Reference Bureau in Pretoria tried to control the heterogeneous visual economy from the very beginning, and they did so through the prescription of technical equipment to be used and the standardisation of the photographic images themselves. In an annexure regularly attached to the circulars sent by the magistrate in Umtata over a period of several years, the format, style and materiality of the photographs were meticulously determined. According to the guidelines, every photographer had to produce two separate photographs of each individual, 1 9/16 inches in height, 1 1/8 inches in width (corresponds ca. 4x2.85 cm), with no white margins;

[39] See footnote 38.

[40] F.L. Simpson owned Transkei Studio in Umtata, and Raymond Lee Studios was in Queenstown. Amateur photographers were e.g. G.C. Costello in Umtata, R.T.A. Stobart in Bizana, J.J. Kruger in Indwe, V.G. Hart in Tsomo, or N.S. Harrison in Kentani. It seems as if some missionaries, such as Father Kieran McCrann of the Catholic Diocese of Kokstad stationed in Lusikisiki, also owned cameras and took photographs for the registration scheme.

[41] Some of the photographers, such as Edward B. Ntsane, sent sample images to convince the magistrate of their professionalism. See KAB, CMT 3/1434 30B, volume 1, Letter by Edward B. Ntsane to the Chief Magistrate in Umtata, 1 May 1958. Unfortunately, these photographs have not survived in the archive. The archives suggest that most of the men did eventually produce photographs for the population registration scheme. I have unfortunately not been able to trace their personal archives up to date.

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the frame of the image was to include head and shoulders, with "the size of the head not less than 7/8 of an inch and not more than 1 inch."[42] The person was to be photographed without a hat, turban, veil, eye glasses, spectacles, or any other addition to the face that would "alter the natural likeness." No shadow of the person was to be visible, and no part of the face or the shoulders blended to the background. Full face visibility, including the ears, was required, and the photographers had to advise those in front of the camera to refrain from tilting their head. Likewise, photographers were asked to use good quality negative and printing paper, panchromatic emulsion of reputable brand, negatives of normal contrast to be printed on suitable grade of single weight glossy paper, with full tonal range and without loss of detail. Finally, every photographer was invited to adopt a system by which he would be able to trace particulars of the photograph of any person taken by him, if, when necessary, either the photograph or the registration form was handed to him by any state official. Based on these instructions the Central Reference Bureau reserved its right to reject any photograph considered to be insufficient.[43] But the main strategic interference by Pretoria concerned the prescription of technical equipment, and the population registration scheme became the occasion on which the apartheid state facilitated the mass introduction of Polaroid cameras throughout South Africa and into the most remote areas of the country. While in the early phase of the registration scheme photographers in the Transkei used different cameras, by the early 1960s the Polaroid became a prerequisite of any professional involvement.[44] While this technical shift facilitated the work of photographers to some extent, as it reduced delays and made their equipment lighter,[45] it nevertheless transformed their interaction with clients substantially: while portraiture had thitherto taken place in the context of personal encounters between photographers

[42] The photograph of Figure 4 was enclosed as a model image in KAB, 1/TSM 7/1/46 N1/23/2, The Director of the Registration Office Pretoria to the Magistrate Tsomo, 28 April 1960.

[43] See e.g. KAB, 1/XAA 172 N1/23/2, volume 1, Department of Native Affairs Pretoria, Identical Minute No. SB 1/16: Issue of Reference Books to Natives by District Offices, 22 April 1956.

[44] Box cameras of various types seem to have been quite popular among local photographers. See e.g. KAB, CMT 3/1434 30B, volume 1, Magistrate Qumbu to Chief Magistrate Umtata, 11 March 1958. On the prescribed Polaroid cameras see KAB, CMT 3/1435 30B, Secretary for Bantu Administration, Circular No. B.B. 15/6, re: Sale of cameras. W.B. Diko, a photographer in Mount Frere, for example managed to buy himself a Polaroid camera in mid–1963. See KAB, CMT 3/1435 30/F, Letter by W.B. Diko to the Magistrate Mount Frere, 9 August 1963.

[45] See e.g. KAB, 2/KMN 22, volume 2, NC Kuruman to Chief Native Commissioner Potchefstroom, 27 January 1958. The Polaroid cameras produced two identical photographs that developed within a couple of seconds.

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Figure 4. Western Cape Archives and Records Service (KAB), 1/TSM 7/1/46 N1/23/2, photograph included in "The Director of the Registration Office Pretoria to the Magistrate Tsomo, 28 April 1960."

and photographed,[46] producing portraits for registration henceforth became part of a rationalised, accelerated, and palpable technological operation.[47] L.J. Lemmer, chief clerk of the Reference Bureau, had indeed anticipated these operational effects.[48] During an official conference held in Pretoria in 1953 Lemmer had envisioned the required rationality and its purpose:

> When the Native presents himself his photograph is taken by a special camera. Within a minute two photographs of each Native would be ready. It has been tested and found that between 600–700 Natives can be photographed in a working day. After the photographs are taken the Native goes to the section where his fingerprints are taken and his name and particulars obtained. By that time his photograph is ready. From there he is taken to a Native clerk where the identification card is completed. It will then be pasted into a book and sealed by a special stamp. This cannot be removed without damage to the book.[49]

[46] Those photographers who had no studio of their own asked clients into their homes or worked as itinerant photographers who would take images at locations selected by those who commissioned portraits. See e.g. KAB, CMT 3/1434 30 B, volume 1, Magistrate Elliotdale to Chief Magistrate Umtata, 14 March 1960.

[47] Polaroid likewise changed the material form of the photographs produced and the process of reproduction. No negative image is available here, only positive ones. Accordingly, the instant cameras changed the materiality of photographic archives.

[48] On Lemmer, see: Breckenridge, "Verwoerd's Bureau," 88.

[49] KAB, CMT 3/1434 30 B, volume 1, Chief Magistrate Transkeian Territories to the Secretary for Native Affairs Pretoria, Umtata, 29 June 1953. The magistrate enclosed notes he had taken of Lemmer's speech.

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The implementation of the population registration scheme in the Transkei in the late 1950s and early 1960s, with its focus on two powerful indexical registers – photography and fingerprinting – and a prescribed administrative structure that gravitated around the Central Reference Bureau in Pretoria, came to distinguish the mediation between those classified as "native" and the apartheid state as an increasingly technological matter. Critical and at times resolute responses from residents in the region are consistently marginalised in the archive, and if they received attention at all, the defiance was blended into a narrative of harmless negotiation that concerned questions of organisation and rationality of registration. This was the case e.g. when the magistrate in Umtata received a letter of complaint by a group of women in Mputi, a village 35 km east of Engcobo, in 1957, who asked the official to "appoint the date and come and explain to us all about this photographing,"[50] or when individuals wrote letters and complained about mismanagement and corruption among headmen and clerks who used the registration scheme as a means of political tutelage or personal gain.[51] But what these interventions likewise indicate is a growing concern of men and women in the light of a panoptic regime imposed by technocrats, and the production of standardised photographs, which fed a classificatory, bureaucratic nomenclature. As we shall see, it was precisely the photographic standardisation that came to occupy a pivotal place within the politico-ideological project of the apartheid state.

Aesthetics of Registration

Why did the apartheid state invest so significantly, both in economic and administrative terms, in the photographic recording of the entire population? What was photography meant to do within the population registration scheme? As would seem natural, photographs served the need to identify an individual, and sure enough the scheme remained a context in which the question of photographic *likeness* or *semblance* surfaced many a time.[52] Yet, by the late 1950s, the question and, more importantly, bureaucratic practice of identification was unambiguously linked to fingerprinting and a complex system of multiple numerical registration

[50] KAB, 1/UTA 6/1/79 – N1/23/2, volume 2, Letter by Mputi women to the magistrate D.O.G. Sparg, 12 June 1957.

[51] KAB, 1/ECO 6/1/32 – N1/23/2, volume 2, Letter of complaint by Malingonke Jijingubo to the Magistrate Engcobo, 26 January 1961.

[52] What emerges recurrently in the archive are cases in which e.g. local headmen are asked to identify persons on photographs. See e.g. KAB, 1/XAA 172 N1/23/2, volume 2, Statement by Ngonyama Gecelo, headman, in front of magistrate, Cala (Xalanga), 6 June 1958; KAB, 1/ALC, Minister B.A.B. Gasa, Bantu Presbitarian Church of South Africa, Lovedale, to the Magistrate in Alice, 24 March 1958.

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and archival order.[53] Fingerprinting, as Christopher Pinney has argued for colonial India, provided the complementary means by which the instability and uncertainty of photographic meaning could be contained.[54] Yet, I would argue, the two indexical registers were, while they shared discursive grounds, deployed within different representational and perception practices, and it seems, hence, as if we are invited to think about these photographs beyond the problem of identification. The magistrates' archives are, as we shall see, quite suggestive at this point.

I would like to propose a way of thinking with and about the photographs produced for the population registration in the Eastern Cape within the framework of a distinction between *semblance* and *resemblance*, or play, proposed by Walter Benjamin in his seminal essay *The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility*.[55] Benjamin's dialectical reflections on technology are based on a distinction between a first technology, which constitutes a counterpart to nature, and serves man to shape and master natural forces (and magic). What marks the mechanical age, in contrast, is the emergence of a second technology, which differs in orientation and aims at the interplay between nature and humanity, thereby operating by means of experiments and varied test procedures:

> The origin of the second technology lies at the point where, by an unconscious ruse, human beings first began to distance themselves from nature. It lies, in other words, in play.[56]

Further on in his essay, it is the notion of play that serves as an entrance into the discussion of technological mediation and perception. In an extended footnote, Benjamin retraces the origins of artistic activity in mimesis, where he locates two polar aspects of art: *semblance* and *play*, semblance being key to auratic perception (in its Hegelian articulation). Yet, what makes the polarity between semblance and play significant in

[53] Union of South Africa, Department of Bantu Administration and Development, Pretoria, General Circular no. 20 of 1959 (File No. SB 9/1), Reference Book System: Finger-prints, 1 September 1959. The circular stated on page 3: "The finger-print system offers a complete solution of the problem which always existed of positively identifying a Bantu." See also: Breckenridge, "Verwoerd's Bureau."

[54] Christopher Pinney, *The Coming of Photography in India* (London: The British Library, 2008), 61.

[55] I am using the second version of the essay and will quote from a reproduction of the text, which is accessible online. See: Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility," www.lcst2120.files.wordpress.com/2011/07/work-of-art.pdf, accessed on 10 August 2013. The distinction between semblance and play is also discussed in Elo, "Walter Benjamin on Photography," though the argument developed here takes a different direction.

[56] Benjamin, "Work of Art," 26.

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dialectical terms is that it is determined by the first and second technology, and while the former continues to be motivated by the logics of semblance, the latter accrues from an inexhaustible reservoir of experimenting procedures, from play, imitation or re-semblance.[57]

In his essay, Benjamin's concern was with film in particular, a medium in which he believed the element of semblance had entirely been displaced by the element of play. And it was precisely at this point where he located the technology's revolutionary potential.[58] Photography, in contrast, continued to be haunted by an unresolved tension between semblance and play. And as we shall see, this undetermined position of photography as a form of technological mediation pervaded its role and place in the population registration scheme. While it might be unjustified to read the polarities between semblance and play in this archive as an expression of a revolutionary potential, retrieving the ways in which the Eastern Cape materials reference different forms of technological adaptation[59] might, perhaps, disclose some of the contestations that otherwise remain submerged in and marginalised by the colonial archive's hegemonic gesture.

The Bureaucratic Desire for Semblance

I have argued above that the photographs produced for the reference books functioned within a specific classificatory and archival framework, which on the one hand helped constitute the "native subject" in terms of race, ethnicity, gender and age. On the other hand the classification and nomenclature determined a specific kind of reception, which helped contain the instability of the image in terms of meaning.[60] But the effects of the photographs within the logics of the registration scheme remained complex and the desire for semblance, i.e. the wish to use photography as a technology to mediate the relationship between a subject marked by race and its sovereign, the apartheid state, caused one of these complications.

The population registration scheme provided indeed a space in which the apartheid state re-constituted its subjects and determined their sociopolitical appearance. The *dompas* became the iconic object that marked this re-articulation of the state's hold on its subjects, and it constituted the material and visual instantiation of every man and woman, outside of which there would be no acceptable, legitimate or perceivable form of existence. And it is at this point where the photograph became a reminder – of the permanent exposure to a state apparatus that monopolised the possibility and right to determine a person's identity, home, work, health and mobility.

[57] Benjamin, "Work of Art," 48, footnote 23.
[58] Benjamin, "Work of Art," 45, footnote 11.
[59] On adaptation, see: Benjamin, "Work of Art," 27.
[60] Benjamin elaborates this point with regard to the importance of captions. See: Benjamin, "Work of Art," 27.

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In its entirety, its material multiplication and narrative repetitiveness, the population registration served the ideological project of racial mapping, the constitution of a political space fragmented into tribal areas and marked by racial frontiers. One of these frontiers concerned the differentiation of an eminently problematic category of persons – coloureds[61] – and, again, required a particular kind of photographic mediation.

The "question" of coloureds in the Eastern Cape had seemingly taken the magistrates and registration teams somehow by surprise.[62] The presence of people in an area classified as "native," and Xhosa in particular, who claimed mixed descent and hybrid cultural heritage complicated notions of ethnic and racial homogeneity that, by the late 1950s, was increasingly meant to translate into stable and "racially integrated" spatial configurations. The issue was uncomfortably dragged along for a while until in June 1960 the administration decided to send two official photographers, H.L.G. Botes and J. Verhoeven, to the Ciskei and the Transkei, who would exclusively photograph "Coloureds" and facilitate applications for identity cards.[63] A month later the Reference Bureau in Pretoria additionally commissioned N.S. Harrison to travel through the region and photograph "all Whites, Coloureds and Asiatics."[64] Within the Transkei the administration chose a pragmatic and rational approach to the problem of classification, also because the magistrates sketched a situation in which there were "white" and "coloured" pockets in but a few villages.[65] Eventually, it was decided that residence and the particulars of tax payment would inform racial classification and hence determine if a person was to be declared "coloured" or "native."[66]

[61] There's a vast literature on the category of "coloured" within racial classification in twentieth century South Africa. For an overview see: Sean Jacobs, "Coloured Categories. Review of Mohamed Adhikari, *Not White Enough, Not Black Enough: Racial Identity in the South African Coloured Community*," H-South Africa, H-Net Review, May 2007.

[62] There is no reference whatsoever in this archive to the settlement of "coloureds" on the frontier around the Kei River in the first half of nineteenth century by the Cape colonial government. See: Martin Legassick, *The Struggle for the Eastern Cape 1800–1854. Subjugation and the Roots of South African Democracy* (Johannesburg: KMM Review Publishing, 2010).

[63] KAB, CMT 3/1443, The Secretary for Bantu Administration and Development to the Chief Native Commissioner Umtata, Pretoria, 26 June 1960. "Coloureds" were issued so called "persoonskarte" and were not required to carry reference books.

[64] KAB, CMT 3/1443, Native Commissioner Kentani to the Chief Native Commissioner Umtata, 25 July 1960.

[65] See footnotes 63 and 64.

[66] KAB, 1/KTN 127 N1/23/2, volume 1, Bantu Affairs Commissioner Kentani to Chief Bantu Affairs Commissioner Umtata, 13 March 1963.

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But the archive draws further attention to the problem of racial mapping through a small group of files that seems, at first glance, misplaced, as it includes a particular set of documents and photographs produced during population registration to the north, in the Northern Cape.[67]

The photograph in Figure 5 was taken in 1956 and attributed to Martha Swarts van Wyk, who applied for an identity card (*persoonskarte*) in March of that year, and used the registration form N.V.R. 7 prescribed for "Cape Malays, Cape Coloureds and other coloured persons" over the age of sixteen.[68] As in this image, some of the Kuruman photographs featured a number plate held by the person portrayed, though it remains unclear if the numbers referenced bureaucratic systems such as taxation, or if they were part of an indexical register used by the photographer in order to retrieve copies of images.[69]

Van Wyk's application and those of her fellow applicants kept in these files had given cause for concern. They were all accompanied by a formal request issued in the office of the Population Registrar in Pretoria, which invited the magistrate or native commissioner on the ground to re-evaluate the person's racial classification. The form phrased the registrar's doubts as follows:

> As there exists a measure of doubt as to the racial group to which he/she belongs, I shall be glad if you will kindly complete the attached questionnaire in respect of him/her and return it to me.[70]

The invitation from Pretoria usually led to the magistrates or native commissioners inviting the respective person into their office, where he or she would

[67] These Northern Cape files are an integral part of the population registration files kept in the Western Cape archives. While in terms of administration and political geography they concern a different area, which was far beyond the former Transkei, I argue that they nevertheless occupy and important discursive position within the Eastern Cape material.

[68] The photograph was part of a set of two identical images kept in a brown envelope and filed under KAB, 2/KMN 22, N 1/23/2, volume 1. The envelope was stitched to the N.V.R. 7 form of Martha Swarts van Wyk, certified on 17 March 1956.

[69] In early 1958 the native commissioner in Kuruman had confirmed that there was a commercial photographer in the town, who took studio photographs of people, yet didn't use Polaroid cameras (KAB, 2/KMN 22, N 1/23/2, volume 1). The Native Commissioner Kuruman to the Chief Native Commissioner Potchefstroom, 27 January 1958. Martha Swarts van Wyk and others, who registered before Polaroid cameras were introduced by the registration teams to the region, probably had to find the closest photographer themselves. It's not clear where van Swarts van Wyk's photograph was taken. Obviously the numbers in the image reference conventions of prison- and police photography. See: Minkley, "How, in Heaven's Name," 9.

[70] The text was part of standard form B.V.R. 30/3.

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Figure 5. Western Cape Archives and Records Service (KAB), 2/KMN 22, N 1/23/2, Vol. 1. The photograph is kept in an envelope stitched to the N.V.R. 7 form of Martha Swarts van Wyk, certified in Kuruman, 17 March 1956.

be required to provide specification for the completion of the said questionnaire. The interrogations were narratively framed as a mere bureaucratic inspection and verification of information related to familial status and history of residence. But what they actually served was a re-evaluation of the photographs and a reassessment of semblance, i.e. the photographic mediation of a bureaucratically contained subject. This is why the registrar in Pretoria always included photographs in his requests, which implicitly invited the respective officers on the ground to reconsider if the image at hand conveyed the applicant's racial affiliation in an appropriate way.[71] The result of this idiosyncratic exercise caused an intricate debate, throughout the files, on image quality, appropriateness of cameras used, and the technological skills of semi-professional and amateur photographers.[72] In Martha Swarts van Wyk's case, who had indicated that she originated from the Kuruman area, and both her parents had been classified as "coloureds," as was her husband, the renegotiation and inspection eventually

[71] Interestingly, Pretoria advised magistrates and commissioners to remain conservative with regard to reproduction of new photographs in case images proved inappropriate. The registrar asked his regional addressees to keep in mind costs and other expenditures that would incur.

[72] Some of the applications were indeed rejected due to alleged lack of image quality or, generally, because the photographs did not correspond with the requirements set out for registration.

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incited the magistrate in Deban [sic], a village 70 km West of Kuruman, to reclassify her as "native."[73]

Impersonation

A narrative trope of a different kind that emerges in the archives of population registration in the Eastern Cape is a phenomenon called "impersonation," a term the magistrates and native commissioners used to describe cases in which an individual had assumed another person's identity and had thereby committed an offence. On one hand, these cases of impersonation voiced the administration's claim to detect, identify and prosecute all those men (and women), who would not align themselves to the prescriptions of the law.[74] On another hand, the concern with impersonation disclosed the ambiguities of colonial discourse, which threatened to undermine its own authority from within. Ironically, and inevitably perhaps, the fantasy of a panoptic system of individual identification produced loopholes and counter-acts, and the files mirror a growing anxiety among state bureaucrats slumbering beneath the rampant accumulation of technocratic data. The logics of bureaucratic identification, grounded on an archive organised along a prescribed set of classificatory categories, ultimately determined what administrative personnel would inevitably envision as possible (com)plots and how they would make sense of colonial subjects' responses to the *dompas* system.[75]

One narrative around a particular case of impersonation is worth being quoted at this point:

> On 15th July, 1960 a Bantu purporting to be abovenamed, approached the Registering Officer at Langa and produced reference book N. 2246319 with a view to renewing his employment permit. On being scrutinised it became apparent that there had been some tampering with the photograph in the book. The Bantu in question was referred to me for investigation. The man whose photo appears is the reference book now, claimed to be Mlungu John Philip and was able to answer all questions in connection with the entries in the book perfectly satisfactorily. He was also

[73] The reclassification was simply noted by the magistrate on the N.V.R. 7 form. See KAB, 2/KMN 22, N 1/23/2, volume 1, Martha Swarts van Wyk, 17 March 1956.

[74] I have not encountered a single case of a woman being charged with or suspected of impersonation in the Western Cape Archives.

[75] Impersonation was but one anxiety haunting this archive, though I would argue it was a constitutive one. For a broader discussion on the categories and classifications framing colonial archives, and the limitations and frailties they produce in colonial knowledge production see in particular the work of Ann L. Stoler. At this point my argument echoes her "'In Cold Blood:' Hierarchies of Credibility and the Politics of Colonial Narratives," *Representations* 37 (1992), 151–189; Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain*.

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> able to answer questions about Kentani and Butterworth, which fact leads me to believe that he comes from the Kentani District.

The one fact which aroused great suspicion, however, was that according to the records at Langa, Mlungu John Philip is a man of 55 years of age whereas the person interviewed was not more than 23–25 years old.

The suspected impersonator was thereupon charged with being in this area illegally and also with mutilating or altering a reference book. He was admitted to bail in the sum of £10 while further investigation was carried out.

A Photostat copy of the C. 26 Card of N.I.N. 2246319 reveals that the reference book has been tampered with.

The impersonator has, however, now disappeared from Cape Town and cannot be traced by the Police. His £10 bail has been estreated [sic] and, as he cannot be found, the charges against him have been withdrawn. As far as can be ascertained, the correct John Philip is at home in your District.[76]

As for many others, the advancement of this case dissolved among the conglomerate of correspondence on other issues, and the response from Kentani was not preserved in the file. Such as response would probably have rendered an account of the Kentani magistrate's interrogation of local headmen and members of the community, and possible responses to the photograph of the alleged impostor. But the text quoted already provides insights into what I have called the bureaucracy's desire for semblance, and the importance of the integrity of the *dompas* as an object and image mentioned at the very beginning of this essay. Yet, what is of greater importance at this point is that the narratives of impersonation, although authored and mediated by state bureaucrats, precisely though unintentionally uncover practices of impersonation by those forced into the reference book system. Pretending to be someone else, impersonating and miming another person could, as the case described above shows, mean that people resorted to the "manipulation" and "tampering" of the reference book *photograph*. And while on one hand the commissioner based his suspicion on semblance, on the other hand the man who "claimed to be Mlungu John Philip" anchored his impersonation, mimesis or play, to recall Benjamin's concept, in the "inexhaustible reservoir of experimenting procedures" provided by photographic mediation.

As has been suggested earlier on, the population registration system cleared a space in which the material, visual and semantic stability of the reference book constantly threatened to mutate into other things, other images, and other persons. Some of these mutations were caused by deliberate acts of defiance. Indeed, impersonation might have been coined in terms of forgery and crime by the state bureaucracy. Yet the element

[76] KAB, 1/KNT 127 N1/23/2, volume II, Bantu Affairs Commissioner, Cape Peninsula, Langa, to the Bantu Affairs Commissioner Kentani, 17 August 1960.

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of insubordination by those suspected of impersonation emerged from the assumption of a public, administrative identity – the "Native" or the "Bantu" – that didn't necessarily belong to someone else, let alone denoted an individual's personal identity, but rather favoured and facilitated the fabrication of multiple, mimetic subjectivities.[77]

But forms of impersonation were likewise produced by the registration system itself and the scale and complexity of the written and material data produced in the course of the scheme's implementation. The presence of applications, such as the one by Andile Pinkerton Booi, that were never sent from the magistrates' offices in the Eastern Cape to the Central Reference Bureau in Pretoria leave many questions open, among them if Pinkerton Booi reapplied for a reference book, or if he simply acquired a different identity at a later stage, somewhere else.

Conclusion

This paper has explored a set of photographs that would usually be subsumed under *administrative photography* and thereby occupy a very specific and problematic place within the narration of histories of photography in Africa.[78] Administrative photography is generally thought of as having been commissioned by colonial governments and consisting of photographs that categorise people – socially, culturally or racially. And while the literature has accounted for the diversity of photographic images produced e.g. by the police, prison, native and bantu affairs departments, or (government) anthropologists in terms of content, style and format, these photographs tend to be interpreted as visual articulations of "the colonial gaze" and its ideologies, policies and practices of cultural and racial differentiation and segregation.

Obviously, the population registration scheme forced upon South Africans by the apartheid state and the photographs laminated into the reference books that had to be carried by every adult "native" man and woman at any time seemingly epitomise such visual categorisations. The interpretation is commensurate with how the *dompas* has been reflected within political and cultural imaginaries, where the booklet has rightly marked one of the most notorious, panoptic forms of policing by a repressive regime.

The argument proposed here is an attempt to revise some of the assumptions brought forward by the category of administrative photography, and throughout the paper I have tried to direct attention towards material,

[77] See: Cynthia Wu, "Review of Tina Chen, *Double Agency: Acts of Impersonation in Asian and American Literature and Culture*," *Journal of Asian American Studies* 9–2 (2006), 209–212, 210.

[78] See e.g.: Liam M. Buckley, "Cine-film, Film-strips and the Devolution of Colonial Photography in The Gambia," *History of Photography* 34–2 (2010), 147–157.

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visual and semantic instability and un-containment of photographs, even of those that were produced within repressive contexts widely controlled by the state.[79]

The population registration was the first occasion on which the South African state required every man and woman to be photographed. It therefore constitutes a case study that enables us to explore the place of photography within the scheme, the expectations towards the medium, responses to and interpretations of images and, in theoretical terms, to investigate shifts in the narration of history once we focus on its material and visual forms of mediation.[80]

The question of historical narration has been addressed, in the paper, by a reflection on the archive and its discursive forms, its material composition, its inner logics, but also the archive's silences and absences.[81] I hope to have proposed a close reading of texts and images that retraces how the files composed by the magistrates in the former Transkei become suggestive, sometimes also persistent in directing the ways in which we perceive and understand the implementation of "the population registration of natives" in the 1950s and 1960s. But likewise, the paper has tried to argue, these archives might offer, though in a distorted and concealed way, glimpses at forms and means of dissonance.

One such dissonance emerged from the materiality of the registration process as such, as it disclosed the instability and precariousness of the *dompas* as an image and object. The recurrent confusion and disarrangement of names, numbers, photographs and fingerprints called into question the rationality of the registration scheme, as much as it undermined its conceptual, ideological and political assumptions. And while the state bureaucracy aimed at the constitution of an administratively contained subject, classified along ethnic, racial and gender lines, the registration process gave way to unclear proliferation and, it would almost appear, random fabrication.

It is this element of confusion, fabrication – fiction perhaps – that induced me to think about what I have called aesthetics of registration, which draws from an interpretation of the *dompas* photographs along the lines of Walter Benjamin's distinction between semblance and play in his reflections on technological mediation. Within this framework, the paper has tried to argue that the apartheid state's attempt to master the uncontained nature of the subject relied on a particular notion of photography as

[79] Edwards, *Raw Histories*.

[80] Cf. Hayden White, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987); Wolfgang Ernst, *Digital Memory and the Archive* (Minneapolis/London: University of Minnesota Press, 2012).

[81] Cf. Michel R. Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995).

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semblance, and it was precisely the constant exposure of individual men and women to, literally, the bureaucratic apparatus that fuelled the ambition, and anxiety of panoptic surveillance. But on the other hand, the messiness of registration bred an important element of play, mimesis and re-semblance. From the perspective of the state, recurrent acts of impersonation, of people acting (appearing) as if they were someone else had become the epitomes of "native insubordination," deceit and forgery. For those forced into the *dompas* system, impersonation offered a way of asserting themselves in front of an apparatus that was seriously threatening their very humanity.[82]

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