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Space Invaders: border crossing in Dan Halter’s Heartland

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**Abstract**

Using springstone sculpture and woven paper photographs, the Zimbabwean-born artist Daniel Halter draws from African craft traditions to expose the precariousness of migrant experiences in South Africa. Halter, who lives in Cape Town, exposes the ironic tensions between hostility towards migrants and metaphors of inclusiveness in the post-apartheid nation. This essay reads metaphors of belonging, border crossing, and nationalism evoked by Halter’s materials and modes of production. Building from Ranjana Khanna’s work on demetaphorization – an undoing of discourses of community – and Edward Casey and Mary Watkin’s analysis of the border as always already undone by its lived functions, the essay argues Halter addresses the immigrant’s position uncovering the borderland as both a porous zone and a metaphor of exclusion. By weaving, Halter addresses this condition through an interdependency that, following Derrida’s work on hospitality, offers a framework to reconsider discourses of citizenship and nationalism in southern Africa.

10:25 am, 16 September 2009, Wanderers Taxi Rank Johannesburg. A peculiar image is staged at the bustling minibus depot in Johannesburg’s city center (Figure 1, 2013). Below the usual crowded jumble of busses and travelers in the depot’s cinderblock walls lies a pile of tartan print bags, arranged so that each bag forms one pixel of the creatures from the Atari video game *Space Invaders.* The pixel is central, as on closer inspection, the viewer notices this image is woven: interlaced paper shreds form the photograph’s pixels. These plastic bags, pejoratively called “Ghana Must Go Bags” in Nigeria, “Türken Koffer” or “Polen Tasche” in Germany, “Guyanese Samsonite” in the Caribbean, a “Bangladeshi Bag” in the UK, and a “Shangaan” or “Zimbabwe” bag in South Africa, make clear reference to the immigrant, doubled in the reference to the space invader the bags form.¹

Weaving, the plastic print bag, and the migrant form the core of Daniel Halter’s practice as an artist. His intervention at Wanderers emphasizes the urgency with which South Africa must address its own growing anxiety and hostility toward migrants, while simultaneously referencing the complex layers of national identity and belonging that characterize his own citizenship. Born in 1977, the final year of Rhodesian rule, and subsequently raised in Zimbabwe, Halter currently lives and works in Cape Town, South Africa. These shifting

¹Smith, “An Interview with Dan Halter.”

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national identities, coupled by having Swiss immigrant parents, put questions of displacement and migration at the core of Halter’s experience. As an artist trained in Cape Town, Halter draws from diverse traditions of African craft production, which are often turned into mass-produced curios for South Africa’s tourist markets, purchased as ahistorical documents of Africanness, often obfuscating the plurality of traditions, identities, and modes of production throughout the continent. Halter’s engagement with these traditions critically examines the construction of Africanness globally and also reflects upon the violence and hyperinflation that characterize the Mugabe regime in Zimbabwe and the anxiety of the immigrant in South Africa. His work reflects on the fractured senses of belonging and identity that characterize everyday life for many of South Africa’s migrants.

**Stone Tablets/Bitter Pills** (Figure 2, 2005) exemplifies Halter’s critical engagement with craft. Carving a series of ecstasy tablets from various stones from Zimbabwe on the scale of landmines, he references traditions of Shona soapstone sculpture and the Zimbabwean pop singer Rozalla’s UK rave-hit “Everybody’s Free to Feel Good.” Released at the height of the “summer of love” – here, a reference to the growing popularity of rave culture in the early 1990s – ironically juxtaposes the popularity of ecstasy in the rave scene, and the popularity of Rozalla’s song, with a culture of repression and declining values in her homeland. Halter reemphasizes this connection through a video piece, **Untitled (Zimbabwean Queen of Rave)**, which uses “Everybody’s Free to Feel Good” as a soundtrack to contrasting images of British youths dancing at raves and toyi-toying protests meant to draw contrasts between the two dances, and highlight the irony of Rozalla’s song in a Zimbabwean context where few are

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2Conversation with the artist, 19 August 2015; Smith, “An Interview with Dan Halter.”
3For an introduction to issues of “Africanness” and curio markets, see: Kasfir, “African Art and Authenticity.”
free to feel good. Stone Tablets/Bitter Pills are stamped with logos commonly found on the top of the drug tablets. The perched eagle – the national symbol of Zimbabwe derived from soapstone sculptures found at Great Zimbabwe, the eleventh-century seat of power for Shona chiefs – implicates problems of national identity in stark contrast to the feel-good experience of an ecstasy-fueled club night.4

A protective fortress, Great Zimbabwe, is crafted largely from soapstone and a more valued and harder rock, springstone, also a material used in Shona sculpture, one of the most visible and famous art traditions in Zimbabwe.5 More recently, Halter sculpted a large work in springstone entitled The Ears of the Hippo (Figure 3, 2013), of a woman (Halter refers to her as a refugee) crossing a river with a child strapped to her back.6 While the springstone walls of Great Zimbabwe may offer protection, in The Ears of the Hippo, the rock becomes threatening: the woman and child are surrounded by a crocodile and hippo sculpted to appear as though lurking below the surface of a river, implied by the gallery’s floor. Clad in a tartan print dress whose pattern is derived from the woven plastic bag she carries on her head, the woman’s precarious position undermines the solidity of the national metaphors that the springstone sculpture traditionally represents.

As the central artwork of Halter’s 2013 Heartland exhibition, The Ears of the Hippo directly addresses a component central to Halter’s larger body of work: metaphors of belonging and citizenship, marking the always already undone conditions of community, national

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4 UNESCO, “Great Zimbabwe National Monument.”
5 Kasfir provides a detailed analysis of stone sculpture revival and its intertwined narratives of Western modernism and Shona traditionalism in 1960's and 1970's Rhodesia (Contemporary African Art, 68–78).
6 Conversation with the artist, 19 August 2015.
Heartland and Halter’s 2012 exhibition Double Entry examine citizenship, sovereignty, and rights by exposing the diminished power of the border’s political force, considering the alien’s presence in South Africa – ironically played on in the Wanderers image – to foreground the complexities of national identity and belonging that their presence raises in South Africa.7

Halter examines the border as situated between two extremes: an abstract and legally produced force and, on the other hand, a physical terrain the migrant must navigate. The material construction of Halter’s work visualizes such struggles: springstone sculpture, the tartan print of the plastic-weave bag on which the artist sews several short aphorisms referencing migration, and the act of weaving itself each make reference to the condition of migration. Such concerns are further emphasized in what Halter weaves in Heartland: images of the South Africa–Zimbabwe border, legal documents such as constitutions, and short texts (John Cheever’s “The Swimmer,” Ray Bradbury’s “The Veldt,” and Carl Sagan’s “Pale Blue Dot”), which all make reference to understanding of inhabiting space through metaphor.

Metaphor and metonym – weaving as a material practice of border crossing and springstone as a signifier of Zimbabwean identity – in Halter’s practice are equally at work in the border as an abstract and legally produced concept which gives form to a nation, separating

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7On the relations between post-apartheid immigration law and the materiality of the border see Peberdy, “Imagining Immigration.”
it from that which is foreign, or alien. By extension, the border defines the limits of belonging in the space it demarcates on a map, making it a crucial idea explored in Halter’s work. Recently, the postcolonial feminist scholar Ranjana Khanna has read the power of asylum, referencing both the hospital and political asylum as sites of refuge and imprisonment or enclosure simultaneously, as a discourse of unbelonging, where diaspora’s technologies undo the power of metaphor, whose violence conceals the exclusion and loss, especially palpable for those living under the condition of asylum. My essay builds on Khanna’s work, emphasizing the relations between asylum, hospitality, and immigration and the analysis of the phenomenological and social structures of the border by the philosopher Edward Casey and the liberation psychologist Mary Watkins to understand how the border’s lived and social functions (what Casey and Watkins call a borderland) undermine its power. As the border is produced through law, contrasting with the boundary as a natural edge, it enframes the nation through language. The border, demarcating inside from out, defines community by setting limits, separating those who belong from the other. Thus, the border along with home and homeland become metaphors that constitute belonging in both a communal and legal sense, creating the grounds for the exchange of hospitality between host and guest. The metaphors of border and hospitality in particular, Halter’s work shows, are often in conflict with the principles they purport to have. Ultimately, such questions are vital in Halter’s South African context, where anti-immigrant hostilities continue to intensify, despite national ideologies of inclusiveness and universal human rights. In this context, I argue that, in its formal and thematic structure, Halter’s work evokes the border as a site of contestation and yet points to the ways in which it is constantly overcome. By marking the border’s metaphoric power as undone, both through the lack of protection that home offers and through the literal practices of border crossing that occur on it, Heartland reveals the lack of safety experienced by Zimbabweans both in Zimbabwe and the hostility faced upon their arrival in South Africa.

Unbelonging

Halter’s intervention at the Wanderers depot characterizes the migrant as outside the fabric of the nation. His pun literalizes the alien. The “space invader,” now linked with the migrant, exemplifies unbelonging and makes direct reference to the hostility African migrants face in South Africa. Due to political and economic displacement, approximately 2.2 million immigrants – 71% of whom are African – live in South Africa, seeking safer living conditions and informal employment opportunities. Due to their shared border with South Africa, political repression, and rapid hyperinflation, Zimbabweans compose the vast majority of these immigrants. African migrants arriving in South Africa face tremendous hostility. The *Guardian* reported that during an intense period of anti-immigrant violence in April 2015, five immigrants were killed in Durban, South Africa, and the threat of further violence

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8Khanna develops her understanding of technologies from Martin Heidegger’s understanding of technology as “a way of revealing,” that becomes closely aligned with building and dwelling in Heidegger’s thought (“Unbelonging: In Motion,” 114–8). Also see Heidegger, “The Question Concerning Technology.”
10Wilkinson, “Do Five Million Immigrants Live in SA?”
11“Most Immigrants to SA from Zimbabwe.”
left many immigrant-owned shops in Johannesburg shuttered.\textsuperscript{12} In 2008, anti-immigrant violence gripped the international media, as riots and attacks on migrants left 62 dead and over 10,000 persons displaced.\textsuperscript{13} The violence does not stem directly from xenophobia as an irrational fear of the other, but rather from lack of basic resources, injustice, or political propaganda (including the perception that jobs are being taken by immigrants).\textsuperscript{14} The conveners of a major conference addressing the anti-immigrant riots, working across the social sciences at University of Witwatersrand, argue that we need to think beyond the rioters and address “the business and political classes,” the government and financial elite of South Africa contributing to the nation’s wealth inequality, propelling sentiments of injustice and deprivation among the perpetrators of violence, whose: “gardens were being pruned by undocumented Zimbabweans, Mozambicans and Malawians.”\textsuperscript{15}

The titular reference of \textit{Heartland}, an anagram of the artist’s own name (“Dan Halter”), additionally calls to mind other metaphors for home. \textit{Heartland} evokes the physical structure one lives as well as one’s national identity or cultural affiliation. Yet, \textit{Heartland} continually exposes the metaphor of a heartland as undone – signifiers of Zimbabwean identity in Halter’s repurposing elicit the opposite of a national affiliation. Instead, Halter’s materials – springstone and weaving – reveal the very material conditions of displacement from that heartland, what Khanna calls an unbelonging that questions the metaphors of a \textit{sensus communus} (understood as both common sense and a sense of community), and instead yield a condition of unbelonging that calls into question the protective and inclusive gestures of community, asylum, or hospitality.\textsuperscript{16} Khanna theorizes unbelonging as a post-colonial unraveling of Shaftesbury, Kant’s, and Vico’s examinations of the \textit{sensus communus}. An emergent theme in eighteenth-century philosophy, the \textit{sensus communus}, is frequently explicated through visual metaphors, gigantism in particular, to theorize a civic and affiliative nature of community.\textsuperscript{17} However, Khanna argues that at the \textit{sensus communus}, “disintegrate[s] into demetaphorization” as the colonial gives way to the post-colonial.\textsuperscript{18} As the \textit{sensus communus} is framed through metaphor – for example, judgment as universal and disinterested in Kant’s work – its demetaphorized status refers to the metaphor’s dwindling power to enframe community in the post-colonial.\textsuperscript{19}

When Halter unspools 225 kilometers of red yarn – the approximate length of the Zimbabwe–South Africa border – while driving his car along a service road parallel to the border, he demetaphorizes the border’s power (Figures 4 and 5, 2010). The border’s abstract function deteriorates in its literalness. During Halter’s intervention, the unspooled yarn near the Beitbridge crossing resembles trickles of blood more than the red line that a surveyor

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{12} Smith, “Johannesburg’s Foreign Shop Owners.”
\bibitem{13} I use anti-immigrant rather than xenophobia, following commentary by journalists and scholars convened at a colloquium at the University of Witwatersrand in Johannesburg shortly after the 2008 riots, where many of these commentators argued that “xenophobic” attitude does not accurately capture the socioeconomic motivations for violence. See Verryn, “Foreword,” vii and “S Africa to Set Up Migrant Camps.”
\bibitem{14} Nieftagodien, “Xenophobia in Alexandra,” 68, 72.
\bibitem{17} Ibid., 111–3. Khanna specifically engages Shaftesbury, Vico, and Kant for their use of visual and metaphorical narratives of community that were framed by colonialism, and challenged by post-colonialism. Shaftesbury’s emphasis on good humor as an affiliative force guiding community into being, Vico’s studies on rhetoric which resolve themselves in forms of linguistic equity, and finally Kant’s attention to judgment as a universal process whereby the self thinks with the other while retaining her own subjectivity theorize the \textit{sensus communus} through limits in which the other looms as monstrous, emphasizing, for Khanna, the need to think gigantism and threat through Hatoum’s work.
\bibitem{18} Ibid., 111–3.
\bibitem{19} Ibid., 112, 120.
\end{thebibliography}
traces on a map to make a border. Suggesting the impossibility of protection that the red line as border offers in its abstracted form, the blood-colored yarn emphasizes the danger the migrant faces crossing the border. Thus, its protective power dwindles as the material danger it constructs becomes exposed.

Figure 4. Dan Halter, *V.I.P. Border* (2010). 225 km of red yarn, equivalent in length to the distance of the border between Zimbabwe and South Africa custom-made into a Velvet rope. 94.64-m long, gold stanchions.

Figure 5. Dan Halter, *V.I.P. Border* (2010). Performance.
The border as a surveyor's red line on a map, drawn on paper rather than literally defining an area with a history predating such surveys, renders the border an abstraction, not a literal event. Halter later repurposes the unspooled red yarn, twisting it into the velvet ropes familiar to airline passenger and museum-goers alike. Meant to provide a pathway to safely navigate customs control and to protect the work of art from encroaching viewers, such ropes actually bring the viewer into closer proximity to the woven pieces in Halter's exhibition, ironically protecting the mountains of worthless Zimbabwean dollars stuffed into a plastic weave bag sitting in the center of the gallery floor. As Halter inverts the ideas of value – the handmade is brought into contact with the viewer, and the valueless is repurposed as spectacle – he reuses the border, retaining its wholeness, but alters its form. The border again shows the diminishing power to protect.

When Halter amplifies the scale of the video game creature at Wanderers, the migrant's occupation is marked both in its presence within the framework of South Africa and through exclusion as alien. The inassimibility of the alien leads us back to a second crucial component of Khanna's unbelonging. The unassimibility of the alien, unable to be fully incorporated within the framework of the nation, undermines the universalism of Kant's disinterested forms of judgment that underpin his understanding of esthetics and the sensus communus. Instead, the alien's arrival, as in The Ears of the Hippo, makes her apart from the nation as community and yet a part of it as alien; her arrival necessitates a negotiation of “hospitality and potential hostility.” Derrida draws a close relationship between hospitality and hostility in the Latin hostis, which signifies both the stranger and enemy in the French and English understandings of the host. Thus, Derrida exposes the work of hospitality as a necessary exchange between these two understandings – the right of the state and rights themselves – but also in a condition of being made and remade, writing: “The frontier turns out to be caught in a juridico-political turbulence, in the process of destructuration-restructuration, challenging existing norms.” The border, as I will argue shortly, necessarily exposes the conditions of the frontier, reshaping and destroying understandings of inside and outside, belonging and not. When such conditions between citizen and not are always becoming undone, we begin to see that the metaphors of security, protection, and national identification metaphorized by the border undo themselves, giving way to unbelonging.

Specifically, the Palestinian artist Mona Hatoum's film Measures of Distance exemplifies unbelonging per Khanna. Measures of Distance foregrounds technologies of communication, in particular letters sent between Hatoum's mother living in Beirut and Hatoum in London. Hatoum reads the letters throughout the film both in Arabic and English, often obfuscating the clarity of the message. She also overlays the Arabic script of the letters on a shower curtain that simultaneously reveal and conceal the mother’s naked body. In this interplay between the intimate and the opaque, Hatoum both marks the body as enframed by the technology of writing and emphasizes its inability to fully disclose subjectivity; we hear but not fully, just as we see and yet legibility always eludes the viewer. The tensions between revealing and concealing, visually and sonically represented in Measures of

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20ibid.
21Khanna describes this inassimibility as melancholia, drawing from Abraham and Torok’s psychoanalytic theories of mourning – a process of introjection where the loss is metaphorically incorporated into the self through language – and melancholia where the failure to mourn introduces borders within the subject that “tells a story of hospitality and civil war” (“Technologies of Belonging,” 121–2).
22ibid., 122.
23Derrida, Of Hospitality, 51, 75, 77.
Distance, emphasize the role of the letter as a technology of communication whose arrival is often difficult or impossible. The letter in Measures of Distance, emphasizing the family exile from Palestine and the difficulties of navigating Beirut, also reveals the presence of the father coming between mother and daughter, equally exposing the undone metaphors of protection home and homeland connote in an age of asylum (a literal space of unbelonging). Khanna’s reading emphasizes the interrelation between vision and hearing, explored through the letter, in Hatoum’s film, pointing to Heidegger’s relation between hören (to hear/notice/see) and gehören (to belong to) as an opening of the world. Hatoum then emphasizes communicative networks as a metaphor of distancing, both the separation the father creates and the difficulty communicating between Beirut and London. Pure visibility and belonging are never achieved, and technology denies the metaphysical primacy of Heidegger’s belonging. Hatoum’s work troubles the idea of full communication, becoming a technology of unbelonging. 24

As with hören, Heidegger reads the metaphors of building and the bridge, both architecturally present in the Beitbridge crossing between South Africa and Zimbabwe, which is referenced in Heartland, to arrive at an understanding of being in the world unfolding through dwelling. 25 The bridge, rather than an enjoining metaphor, becomes a border checkpoint at Beitbridge. Instead, Halter foregrounds movement, emphasizing technologies of diaspora. For example, the plastic-weave bags stitched with phrases such as “Vote with Your Feet” or “Ghana Must Go” (Figure 6, 2013) shape the migrant’s experience of the world through movement, not the stasis of dwelling. As both a technology of transporting one’s possessions and a metaphor of diaspora, the bag undoes the protective metaphors of dwelling that Heidegger emphasizes in his work, which are equally referenced in the springstone of The Ears of the Hippo as an image of Great Zimbabwe.

The Ears of the Hippo represents the process of migration, the act of the woman moving elsewhere. Yet, its use of springstone simultaneously evokes metaphors of national citizenship and belonging through reference to Great Zimbabwe, as the image of migration undoes such metaphors of Zimbabwean identity. Springstone’s association with indigenous forms of production is redoubled in the use of a tartan print. Each bears with it a sense of tradition, national identity, and heritage. However, it is notable that the luxury wool that clothes the woman is woven into the same tartan pattern that adorns the plastic-weave bags. Tartan, traditionally associated with familial ancestry, tribal heritage, and a homeland, now shrouds the woman and child in the distinctive print of the bags, coming to symbolize the migrant. Halter commissioned Johnston’s of Elgin, a luxury tartan loom company, to produce the fabric during a 2010 residency at the Glenfiddich Distillery in Scotland. The high-end tartan is imbued with a certain sense of irony. As a luxury good, its plastic-weave print might bring to mind other images of transience, such as the airport duty-free shops where Gucci handbags and bottles of scotch are sold in an untaxed zone of transnational commerce. Yet, Halter makes the luxury good a referent to a disposable commodity – the plastic-weave bag, which, he tells me, he intends to register as a tartan for the amakwerekwere (a pejorative term that works across South Africa’s languages to refer to immigrants – connoting skin color and referring to those thought to be from more remote and uncivilized parts of the continent). 26 He thereby exposes the placelessness and unbelonging of the immigrant who

26Conversation with the artist, 19 August 2015. On the term amakwerekwere, see Nyamnjoh, Insiders & Outsiders, 31, 39.
crosses the border under a very different set of conditions, facing hostile border controls and animals alike. *The Ears of the Hippo*, as a symbol of heraldry for the migrant, calls attention to the confluences of disposability, the commodity, and refugee jointly symbolizing global circulations of people and goods. A symbol of homeland, the tartan now represents the migrant, undoing the national symbols of protection it shrouds, leading its subject to seek refuge abroad.

**From border to boundary**

Woven photographic reproductions, tattered plastic-weave bags, and interventions at the Beitbridge crossing emphasize Halter’s consistent engagement with the border as a symbol of the hostility and anxiety the migrant faces in her arrival in the host country. Halter conceptualizes migration in *Heartland* through two different schemas: as a legal entity,
in works such as *The South African Constitution*, where Halter reproduces a document endowed with giving rights and protecting the border by limiting the entry of noncitizens, and, alternatively, as a natural edge, such as in *Great Gray Green Limpopo River* (Figure 7, 2013), where Halter weaves a photograph of the water forming the border between South Africa and Zimbabwe.\(^{27}\) These two schemas place natural phenomena and the abstraction of law into a dialectical tandem, resembling the pairing between border and boundary that Casey and Watkins find at *la frontera* (the Mexico–US border).

27See Peberdy’s, “Imagining Immigration” and Bloch’s, “The Right to Rights?” Both emphasize the exclusion migrants experience in a South Africa constructed to emphasize the extension of rights to disenfranchised South Africans during apartheid. Thus, despite the inclusiveness the post-apartheid state often purports to, its very mandate of inclusiveness often denies rights to immigrants in South Africa.
The border, Casey and Watkins tell us, is a peculiar form of edge that comes into being through law – usually the treaty – making it a culturally constructed abstraction.\textsuperscript{28} To actualize the border, an architecture composed of checkpoints, border fences, and walls is needed.\textsuperscript{29} Conversely, the banks of a river subject to change from flood or drought characterize a different kind of edge: the boundary.\textsuperscript{30} The imprecision of the boundary inevitably overwhelms and overcomes the abstraction of the border. The crumbling edges of the Great Wall of China returning to sand, or, in a cultural sense, the ease by which the drug trade moves across \textit{la frontera} exposes the impurity of the border's force.\textsuperscript{31} In both of these instances, the hypervisible, well-known example of a border as fortress, impenetrable to outsiders, is overcome with relative ease. Walls decay as time passes, tunnels are dug, and smugglers carry drugs using the very technology meant to stop them, each evidencing the ways in which the border's architecture is always already being undone. Halter's numerous interventions at Beitbridge call attention to the border's force being undermined by the ease of movement across the abstract line written on a map. For example, \textit{V.I.P. Border} emphasizes the violence that border as metaphor represents, but Halter also captures the region as boundary: another photograph shows baboons crossing into South Africa in blatant disregard of passport control (Figure 8, 2009), and a 1:1 paper printout of the border from Google Maps lying weakly atop the Beitbridge crossing as truck traffic destroys it, the drivers uninterested in the paper Halter had placed atop the pavement. Despite providing the support upon which laws are written, paper's frail physical construction remains weak when confronted by the necessity of movement through it. Borders remain empowered through metaphors of belonging. Likewise, movement across the edge dispels the metaphor's power, all the while calling our attention to the architectures of force that are created to actualize the border's abstract force. The profound number of people and goods that move across this abstract political line gives way to a different kind of spatial understanding: a borderland.

Casey and Watkins write that borders bring about their own demise, as if by a subtle form of self-undermining – not only from without (that is, a from a failure to hold back overt invasions), but also from within, on their own terms … \textit{borders are always already in the process of becoming boundaries.}\textsuperscript{32} Instead, the border yields to the borderland, such as \textit{la frontera}, where rich forms of exchange and hybridity flourish.\textsuperscript{33} Such exchange, understood in its national dimensions, is the work of hospitality; as Derrida suggests, the home must open to the outside to be habitable.\textsuperscript{34} Thus, the borderland opens the framework of the nation to rethink hospitality.

When Halter reproduces his South African identity booklet (Figure 9, 2013), he signals the ease by which he can move across the border, contrasting it with the threat present in \textit{The Ears of the Hippo}. The passport represents an abstraction of legal force, contrasted with the visual abstraction of the squares of gray, blue, black, and green of \textit{The Great Gray Green Limpopo River}, or the ochre tones laced with delicate razor wire in \textit{South Africa/Zimbabwe Border Fence}. \textit{Pale Blue Dot} (Figure 10, 2013) entangles the differing abstractions that the border–boundary brings into being. One of \textit{Heartland}'s three short texts, \textit{Pale Blue Dot}'s

\textsuperscript{28}Casey and Watkins, \textit{Up Against the Wall}, 14.
\textsuperscript{29}ibid., 22.
\textsuperscript{30}ibid., 14–15.
\textsuperscript{31}ibid., 23.
\textsuperscript{32}ibid., 25.
\textsuperscript{33}ibid., 21.
\textsuperscript{34}Derrida, \textit{Of Hospitality}, 61.
purples, reds, and greens pixelate the famous photograph of Earth taken at a distance of six billion kilometers from the Voyager I probe in 1990. Halter accompanies his weaving by reproducing Sagan’s essay, reflecting on the image and on the Earth’s place within the enormousness of the galaxy. Sagan describes the Earth’s placement within the galaxy, using spatial metaphors to urge a move beyond the violence of war and empire. Its physical abstraction, reducing earth to a mere pixel in the giant galaxy, occupies the opposite end of the spectrum to The Freedom Charter (Figure 11, 2013). The charter, adopted in 1955 by the African National Congress, called for a just and equal South Africa and provided a foundation for many human rights protected in the 1994 Constitution. The demands for freedom, peace, friendship, and belonging contained in the Constitution signify a narrative

![Figure 8. Dan Halter, Untitled (Baboons Crossing the Border Fence) (2009). Photographic Lambda print. 130 x 90 cm.](image-url)
of inclusiveness and the extension of civil rights that are simultaneously denied to the migrant who experiences hostility upon arrival to South Africa. However, if we understand *Pale Blue Dot* as a necessary prompt to rethink our relations through home and unbelonging in a gigantic and galactic sense, as Sagan models in his essay, *The Freedom Charter* calls attention to a similar sense of universal belonging undone by the border.\(^{35}\) Post-apartheid South Africa – whose independence relied upon the hospitality granted to ANC exiles and anti-colonial wars abroad – is dependent upon border crossing for its national identity. The Mozambican writer Mia Couto clearly exposes this point, writing to President Zuma in June of 2015 to point out the deeply tragic ironies of the hospitality the ANC received in exile in the face of increasing anti-immigrant hostility in South Africa.\(^{36}\) Reading the ANC Freedom Charter in the age of anti-immigrant violence exposes South Africa as constructed abroad, across its borders, imbuing South Africa’s post-apartheid identity with deep contradictions. Being South African was constructed abroad, in the very territories toward which it now remains hostile. What does this do for the migrant? I want to conclude by suggesting that Halter’s weaving provides avenues for simultaneously giving form to the aforementioned histories of exchange and for reconceptualizing the work of hospitality. To turn to Derrida again, the exchange between host and guest (*hôte* and *hôte*) “incorporate one another at the

\(^{35}\) I am drawing attention to Kant’s connection between universalism and the *sensus communs* here. Derrida emphasizes the problems of universal hospitality in the relation of right and rights extensively in *Of Hospitality*.

\(^{36}\) Couto, “Dear President Zuma.”
moment of excluding one another.”\textsuperscript{37} Incorporating while retaining a definable difference also characterizes the work of weaving.

\textbf{Cuts, lines, weaving, and the making of hospitality}

It likely seems paradoxical that an art historian would spend so much time attending to the political context of \textit{Heartland}, ignoring the obvious: Halter’s decision to weave. Earlier, I discussed the importance of springstone in understanding how Halter crafts a technology of unbelonging against the stability of architecture and the senses of home it evokes. Weaving, the crossing of borders between two surfaces, provides a second formal avenue to understanding the connections between diaspora and borders. In a previous essay on Halter’s work, I discussed weaving in the context of Walter Benjamin’s brief essay \textit{“The

\textsuperscript{37}Derrida, \textit{Of Hospitality}, 81, 125.}
The Freedom Charter

We, the People of South Africa, declare for all our country and the world to know:

that South Africa belongs to all who live in it, black and white, and that no government can justly claim authority over it if based on the will of all the people.

due to human rights of all, the right to enjoy the fruits of their labors, their property, and their inheritance.

equity and justice to all, without distinction of color, race, sex, or belief.

And therefore we, the people of South Africa, stand together—peoples, movements and institutions—by this Freedom Charter. And we pledge ourselves to act together, trusting neither strength nor courage, until the democratic changes have come and are here seen.

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The Freedom Charter 1933

storyteller.” Benjamin’s reading of Nikolai Leskov’s short stories describes the storyteller’s performance, influenced by his journeys, as a confluence of the haptic production of craft and the collective/collected experience of the journeyman’s narrative revealed in the tale; weaving, merging text with textile, becomes a literal fabrication of the story.38

Weaving in *Heartland* does not merely knit together the fragmented series of texts, images, and referents from which Halter draws. Oftentimes, the exhibition pulls strength from the difficult realities that emerge in the juxtaposition and incompatibility between one work and the next. The universally granted rights of constitutions clash with the hostility toward the “space invader” excluded from a system of rights. Likewise, the fractured relations between the border and boundary, host and guest, and disposability and value get captured in the work of weaving: a layering of warp and weft.

Halter produces the woven images by shredding two versions of the same image, and then producing a stable image by incorporating shredded image into the other. Weaving may destroy the image, but the two pieces of paper are not pulped together homogenously: they retain their surface and move over and around one another. The work performs both destruction and drawing in; the negotiations that Derrida and Khanna both argue for are at play in hospitality’s closely aligned interplay between host and hostility.39

Halter’s weaving and Khanna’s work on hospitality and justice depend on the cut. Khanna argues that the cut – outside the frame of the work, and framed through esthetics – interrupts the fabric of existence.40 The cut, fundamental to Halter’s weaving as an act of destruction, enables the accommodation of the other. While not an act of creation in itself, the cut opens up the work up to accommodating new and unknown formations of thought that work against the grain of historical tradition.

Border crossing constitutes *Heartland*’s form and content. The act of cutting references migration – a cut within the frame of the nation, enframed through the metaphor of the border – but it also reconceptualizes value, such as the incorporation of devalued, and now defunct, Zimbabwean dollars and farming maps into Halter’s earlier woven pieces. Such work gives the discarded and valueless new senses of meaning as bearers of history, which also point to Derrida’s distinction between paper’s dwindling value as disposable and its absoluteness in conferring identity to the *sans papiers* (undocumented migrants).41 For Zimbabweans especially, these systems are virtually indistinguishable. Given the absolute value and worthless nature of the substance, Halter’s use of paper, activated through the act of cutting, and referenced through the use of valueless currency and Halter’s own identity booklet, prompts new concepts of justice for alien and citizen alike. Moving across the surface retains the structure of the image, yet the strips of paper cross borders, much like the alien. *Heartland* returns to the demetaphorized status of the *sensus communus*, undoing the power of universal belonging and citizenship. The woven images repeat both the form and theme of the plastic-weave bag, becoming a technology of unbelonging.

The work of weaving inevitably returns to the border. As both are discourses of edges, they depend on the line. Rather than seeing the line as a function of exclusion, the anthropologist Tim Ingold, referencing Paul Klee, reminds us that the line is “out for a walk.” The line, characterized by movement, diverges from dwelling as protection and exclusion, and

instead – drawing from Henri Lefebvre – becomes “architextural” and “meshwork.”

Architecture, as in the springstone of *The Ears of the Hippo*, gives way to movement and diaspora, marking its condition as always already undone. Instead, working through the textile or weaving as meshwork exposes the ways in which movement demetaphorizes the power of citizenship represented by the border as a system of force and law. Instead, these discourses are characterized through movement and interdependence; the threshold of any edge must be crossed by another edge for the weaving to have any structure. The border as a form of line cannot be structured without a discourse of movement that overcomes its exclusion, and, likewise, architecture can only be understood through properties of interdependence as meshwork. *Heartland* understands national identity, in the documents and symbols that constitute it, as undoing the border, a process achieved through weaving and moving over and across the line. By drawing from symbols of national identification, *Heartland* exposes how these metaphors reveal conditions of hostility for both immigrant and citizen. Khanna concludes her reading of the post-colonial undoing of the *sensus communus*, emphasizing that commonality can only be located in “nonidentification” and “unworking.” When Halter shreds a constitution, or unspools yarn at the Beitbridge crossing, his work undoes these metaphors of heartland and what it means to belong in both Zimbabwe and South Africa. By unworking the stability of home in each context, Halter subsequently challenges our understanding of inclusiveness, justice, and citizenship for guest and host alike, questioning the foundational metaphors that guide national identity in South Africa and Zimbabwe.

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**Notes on contributor**

Andrew Hennlich is an assistant professor of Art History at the Gwen Frostic School of Art, Western Michigan University. His research examines the relationships between memory and history in contemporary South African visual culture. Hennlich has published articles in Image and Text, esse, rubric, etc., on artists including William Kentridge and Avant Car Guard, and contributed essays to catalogs for artists including Daniel Halter, Julia Rosa Clark, and Pierre Fouché. Hennlich is currently curating an exhibition: “After the Thrill is Gone: Fashion, Politics and Culture in Contemporary South African Art” at the Richmond Center for Visual Arts (Kalamazoo, MI).

**References**


42Ingold, *Lines: A Brief History*, 73, 80.

43Khanna, “Technologies of Belonging,” 130.


