

Changing African Cityscapes – Regional
Claims of African Labor at South African-
owned Shopping Malls

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Introduction

The rights of those who labor to exercise some level of individual and collective control over labor processes (over what is produced as well as over how it shall be produced) is crucial to any conception of democracy and freedom. Long-standing concerns over the conditions of labor and the right of redress in the event of unreasonable burdens or sufferings (such as those that result in shortened life expectancy) need to be reinforced on a more global scale...It also highlights respect for the dignity of labor and of the laborer within the global system of production, exchange and consumption (Harvey 2000).

On the 27 August 1997, Shoprite supermarket opened its doors in Maputo, the capital city of Mozambique. In most cities of the United States, the opening of a food store would elicit only minor attention, perhaps a side-column in the local news. In Mozambique, Shoprite's arrival was an event. The store was swamped with people who had been crushing its designer-tiled entrances to gain access to the store when it opened. Much fanfare, hype and local town gossip had preceded this event. On the day itself, celebrities were in attendance and a public rally was held at the Center (*Demos*, August 1997). Of the two major newspapers in the country, all ran front-page coverage of Shoprite's opening. Months after the event, debates continued to rage in the newspapers and amongst Maputans about the benefits and disadvantages to Maputo and Mozambique of this new South African arrival.

Shopping in Southern Africa had a racial geography since the growth of the mining towns and the brutal separation of black people from land ownership in the 1900's. When beautiful malls were built in South Africa in the 1960s, they were built close to white suburbs and in the central business districts where Africans could only visit with special pass books. As a young girl growing up in a 'colored' area in Lansdowne, Cape Town, we bought groceries at a Shoprite

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supermarket 'on the other side of the tracks'. This store was the second store opened by Shoprite's founder, Mr Barney Rogut, in 1967. Its first store was opened in 1966 in Wynberg, Cape Town, an area bordering a middle class 'colored' suburb and wealthier white suburbs. The little Shoprite supermarket on the 'white side' of Lansdowne (marked off by the bridge over the railway tracks) that I walked to on bare feet, is now part of the largest retail chain in Africa. Shoprite's 'Cape to Cairo' expansion is part of a new phase of retail accumulation in the 1990s, made possible by thirty-seven years of racialized retailing and the exploitation of black labor in South Africa. This paper foregrounds the workers of Southern Africa whose labor power is often hidden from view when the story of wealth and power accumulation in South and Southern Africa is told.

The end of apartheid rule in South Africa in 1994 opened up a new regional moment and a new regional space, where the 'definition of the possible' for the southern African region changed and South Africa was reintegrated into the region (Simon 2001). South Africa's transition conferred a new respectability on the region's policies and projects, catapulting South Africa from pariah to regional liberator. Democracy, however, has had many unintended outcomes. At the same time as the incumbent President Thabo Mbeki declared his *African Renaissance* in the early 1990s, many Southern African countries deepened economic liberalization and privatization and released state enterprises for sale to mainly private, foreign investors (BusinessMap SA 2000, 2001, 2003, 2004; Soderbaum 2002; Daniel, Habib and Southall 2003; Miller 2005; UNCTAD World Report 2005). Liberated by South Africa's democratization from the limits of racialized capitalism, restless South African retail capitalists were now free to explore new possibilities for accumulation in the rest of Africa.

This paper argues that the new investment activities of South African retailers in Africa shape regional geographic imaginaries. About four times more is exported from South Africa to other parts of Africa than is imported. South African investment has increased from R9bn to R30bn between 1997 and 2002. South African investment in SADC between 1994 and 2003 was twenty-

five percent of total FDI flows into the region.² Regional perceptions of South African economic strength are reinforced by the African retail expansion of South African multinationals, of which the Shoprite-owned shopping malls are a major part. The changing environment of consumption in host countries and the character of the new retail investment, specifically shopping malls, provide the context for changing regional imaginaries. The high levels of visibility of the retail sector bring with it a new set of expectations in host countries about democratic South Africa's regional role. If expectations of regional development for host countries are frustrated in some ways, a renewed charge of South African regional exploitation in the post-Apartheid era will open up the possibility of enhanced tensions between South Africa and its African neighbors. Regional debates have questioned South Africa's regional hegemony and charged that South Africa is the principal beneficiary of post-apartheid regional integration (Naidu 2004; Soyinka, *Mail & Guardian*, September 3, 1999). Workers complained bitterly in strikes at Shoprite in Zambia that the company had benefited from its African expansion to the detriment of the workers in the host countries. Claims of an "African Renaissance" will become unsustainable in the face of growing regional dissatisfaction.

New political fault-lines are cohering around these growing expectations of the benefits that South African economic expansion should have for local communities and host countries. The paper first discusses the concept of 'geographical imaginaries', drawing on an earlier article. The section that follows provides a brief overview of retailing in Southern Africa. The post-Apartheid regional moment and the expansion of South African multinationals have opened up new sites of contradiction between African workers, on the one hand, and South African capital, on the other, as well as new loci of conflict between African citizens (and local farmers) and South African multinational corporations. These points of tension are modest but significant new 'spaces of hope' in African cities threatened by stagnation and unemployment, with possibilities for new regional resistances. The paper concludes with a report on a controversy over dumping at the

Centro Commercial in Mozambique, and a strike by Shoprite workers at Manda Hill shopping mall in Zambia as cases of new regional resistance (Miller 2005).

Principal findings presented here are based on fieldwork for a doctoral dissertation completed in 2004. In Zambia, interviews were conducted with 50 workers at two stores in Shoprite in Lusaka, Zambia – Manda Hill and Cairo Road, conducted between 2000 and 2003. Cairo Road is the smaller of the two stores, so most of the interview material came from workers at the new shopping mall, Manda Hill, where the Shoprite supermarket is the anchor store. The interviews are based on a snowball sample of workers, with an attempt to stratify the sample by reaching permanent, casual, male and female workers in different occupational grades. Table 3 shows the breakdown of the workers in the sample by gender and job status. Most of the interviewed workers were male, permanent and between the ages of 25 and 35. Casual workers interviewed were younger, ranging from 20 to 25. The permanent workforce comprises just over one third (99) of the total (260), with the remaining 161 being casuals. While casualisation is pervasive within Shoprite, permanent workers make up the majority of the daily workforce because they work at least twice as many hours as casuals, and also do the large number of overtime hours that are required on the shop-floor. This sample is therefore taken to be representative of day-to-day shop-floor interactions at Shoprite in the urban context of Lusaka. A series of visits to eleven supermarkets around the country, including the Copperbelt and rural provinces, also formed part of the background research for this case study.

Shoprite has opened up three branches in Mozambique – Maputo, Xai-Xai and Beira. Surveys and semi-structured interviews were conducted with twenty-seven workers from Shoprite-Maputo between 1999 and 2001. The workers in the sample were chosen through snow-balling. However, with the help of the workers themselves, an effort was made to attain a sample that was stratified by gender and occupational status. In order to facilitate a comparison with the Zambian case study, the same methodology was applied to research at Shoprite-Maputo. The sample was smaller because of interview translations from Portuguese to English. Shoprite-Maputo had created 169 jobs at their Maputo store (at the time of doing the research), a small number in a primarily agricultural economy where one third of the urban population lack employment opportunities (Department of Trade and Industry, Mozambique, 1996: 21).

Malling' Africa – changing geographic imaginaries and regional claim-making

While 'Afropessimism' dominates contemporary accounts of African societies, these analyses overlook or underestimate the impact that new South African investment is having on Southern Africa and the continent more generally (Arrighi 2002; Ferguson 1999; Ouchou 2001; Saul and Leys 1999). Stagnation and decline are the overarching metaphors of 'Afropessimists' for a continent redlined by 'globalization' and devastated by the AIDs epidemic. While other less-developed regions of the world have enjoyed significant growth spurts, Sub-Saharan Africa's share of world GNP has fallen dramatically (Arrighi 2002). Conflict and genocide have sown devastation and warlordism in the midst of this material deprivation. Yet, in the midst of this ailing social environment, a new development has emerged.

A new regional moment is shaping the workplace experiences of African workers and leading to new, boundary-drawing strategies for African workers (Miller 2005). Southern Africa is dominated by South Africa, the region's economic sub-hegemonic power. Uneven capital flows concentrate money and power in particular geographical places to the detriment of others, leading to unequal levels of development between and within regions and nations and the underdevelopment of 'developing' nations (Arrighi and Saul 1973; Wallerstein and Martin 1992; Harvey 1989. Southern African Regional Poverty Network (SARPN), Pretoria 2004). While natural geographical conditions explain the initial contours of uneven development, social forces intervene in the more complex processes of differentiation and equalization that occur under capitalism (Smith 1990). Sometimes referred to as "enclave economies" or economic islands capital accumulation develops the most profitable sectors of the economy to the detriment of other sectors, creating uneven capital flows (Seidman and Makgetla 1980). South Africa has been the chief beneficiary within the Southern African region of uneven regional development, comprising \$130bn of the ten main countries \$160bn in 1998 output. In 2001, South Africa's total exports (\$3.7b) were five times that of its imports (\$856m) in Africa. Relations of economic dependency have thus continued into the post-Apartheid phase.

Workers at Shoprite in post-apartheid southern Africa are implicated in a politics of scale where rights and claims may be asserted at local, metropolitan, regional, national and global levels. I

employ the concept of 'claim-making' to delineate these spatialised contestations and competing regionalisms. Claim-making as a concept delineates these spatialised contestations and competing regionalisms. 'Scalar' translations – pragmatically shifting reference points between one geographical level and another – shape the ways that how local resistance achieves national, regional or global purchase. How do the reference points of workers – constructed through race, gender, class – assume a geographical dimension?

Perrot (1986) elaborates on the formation of working class dispositions through a concrete historical analysis of the French working class in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The concept of dispositions, he contends, shows how workers see themselves as part of a greater whole. He points to the referential moment in working class dispositions, arguing that workers construct their images of themselves in relation to some other. Perrot analyzes the French working class and asks a relevant question: "How did he (the worker) conceive of this whole over time and space?"

This working class defined itself by its enemies, its limits, its consciousness of a shared "fate" and a shared exploitation, its vision of the future. All of this, often voiced by militants who were both mediators and spokesmen, was crystallized in words and images, a language that became an instance of reality, a reference that in turn structured the imagination (Perrot 1986).

To shift from the national level to cross-national and regional imaginaries, the historical work of Cooper (1996) and Silver (2003) is evocative. Cooper's study of 'the labour question' in French and British Africa shows how the geographical idea of 'empire' was inserted into African working-class imaginaries in the first half of the twentieth century, thus providing useful cross-cultural insights. African trade unionists used European labour standards as a reference point for their own claims. Workers appropriated specific geographical and hegemonic representations of 'empire' into their claim-making. The absence of any reference to regional levels of claim-making in Cooper's account may suggest that the regional level was not relevant to workers' claim-making processes during the colonial period.

If the phase of 'empire' suggested European metropolitan conditions as the universal frame of reference for African workers, how does southern Africa insert itself into workers' regional imaginaries? The regional moment in working class dispositions begs a deeper understanding of how the region is produced and how the politics of boundary-making should proceed. 'Making'

boundaries points to the geographical envisioning – or ‘imaginary’ – on the part of workers. Historically, race, gender, ethnicity and nationality were employed in various ways by workers and labor movements to exclude some sections of the global working class from this associational community. ‘North–South’ divisions and tensions between workers in Northern, highly developed countries and workers in less developed regions of the South are an example of the geographical contours of such boundary-making processes. Pragmatic solidarity strategies between workers of the North and South can be inspired by these differences in the geographies of labour. Making these exclusionary boundaries is often a defensive strategy actively employed by workers themselves, as Arrighi (1990) points out with reference to the early days of the neo-liberal counter-revolution:

Whenever faced with the predisposition of capital to treat labour as an undifferentiated mass with no individuality other than a differential capability to augment the value of capital, proletarians have rebelled. Almost invariably they have seized upon or created anew whatever combination of distinctive traits (age, sex, colour, and assorted geographic specificities) they could use to impose on capital some kind of special treatment. As a consequence, patriarchy, racism and nationalchauvinism have been integral to the making of the world labour movement. . .and live on in one form or another in most proletarian ideologies and organizations (Arrighi 1990).

Thus, divisions within the working class are not made only by ‘class enemies’, but are actively constructed from within. Silver (2003) identifies three forms of boundary-drawing strategies: labour market segmentation, bounding citizenship, and exclusionary, non-class identities (for example, race, ethnicity, gender). Adapting Perrot’s question, we may then ask, ‘How did she (the worker) conceive of this whole over regional time and space?’ How do workers’ notions of inclusion and exclusion take on a geographical character? If working class dispositions and the establishment of collective identities require a common set of values and goals, how do these common objectives become articulated at a particular geographical scale?

Shoprite workers at the shopping malls in Lusaka privilege the regional over the local or national scales in their geographic reference points. Shopping mall workers are included in the ‘space of consumption’ through their position as company employees. Their claims, however, are directed at the regional company and its head-office in South Africa and to a lesser extent at their national

governments, rather than at their local managers. While national and other levels retain importance for workers, regional claim-making has become an important spatial strategy for retail workers at these shopping malls. The Shoprite workplace is an important agent of a new regional imagination amongst these retail workers. Workers claim inclusion into the regional company on an equal basis with South African workers, privileging ties to South Africa that go through the company. The South African reference point in workers' claims is interpreted here as a geographic imaginary expressed as regional claims.

In the war-torn landscape of Mozambique and the economic reversals in Zambia, the shopping mall becomes the symbolic container of a renewed stab at modernity (Godd 1993; Jackson 1996; Marks and Bezzoli 2001; Morris 1993). During the period of nationalized industry in Mozambique and Zambia, local Indian traders and the government owned shops and wholesale stores. These stores experienced constant commodity shortages. Lack of infrastructure development in the cities and poor service provision also contributed to economic decline and stagnant urban centers, where peeling building facades were a graphic index of urban decline. The decline of national economic growth and commodity prices for key mineral exports led to demoralization and failed expectations in the nationalist projects of Zambia and Mozambique. In the uneven African cityscape, these bright, modern outlets are part of a new urban development – in contrast to the old central business districts, which are decaying (Ryan 2005). When South African investors build new shopping centers in these impoverished African cities, the contrast between these new malls and the old city environment produced an apparent urban 'dualism', where modernity and urban underdevelopment stood side by side.

Struck by the image in Lusaka of women in traditional wraps and head cloths carrying water in clay pots, against the background of a gleaming office block, Ferguson, however, challenges these 'dualist habits of thought' that contrast urban and rural. Rejecting the binaries of 'traditional' and 'modern' when confronted by the extreme unevenness of Zambian urban development, he argues that such mixtures are in the nature of development in less developed contexts (Ferguson 1999). Ferguson's observations support Trotsky's notion of the 'leap-frog' character of development in less developed societies.

The laws of history have nothing in common with a pedantic schematism. Unevenness, the most general law of the historic process, reveals itself most sharply and complexly in the destiny of the backward countries. Under the whip of external necessity their backward culture is compelled to make leaps. From the universal law of unevenness thus derives another law of combined development – by which we mean a drawing together of the different stages of the journey, a combining of separate steps, an amalgam of archaic with more contemporary forms (Trotsky 1977).

Ferguson's (and Trotsky's) cautions notwithstanding, the insertion of the most modern technologies into declining African landscapes produces a cultural rupture that penetrates ever-widening social layers and has dramatic social consequences. Such truncated commodification of society such as shopping malls changes everyday life in a far-reaching way, particularly in the sphere of consumption. The diversified consumption that the shopping mall allows serves different local markets.

The impact of expanded commodity distribution on social relations in African countries is observed by earlier writers. Almost two decades ago, Phimister (1987) highlighted the development of new needs in Africa with the advance of commodity relations and the corresponding withdrawal of labor from agriculture. Observing these changing urban environments and the creation of 'new needs' between 1890 and the 1950s, Arrighi and Saul highlight the transformative nature of internal consumption patterns.

In analyzing the process whereby the sale of labor-time became a necessity for the African population of Rhodesia, attention must be focused upon...the transformation of 'discretionary cash requirements into 'necessary' requirements (Arrighi and Saul 1973).

The dominance of money in social relations expands as cash is required to participate in the new realms of social exchange, as observed. Local consumption patterns shift as more local consumers are drawn into the new shopping mall consumption. The shopping mall becomes the conduit for drawing larger numbers of African citizens into the money economy and circuits of capital accumulation. New consumer needs and lifestyles emerge as old, traditional social relations are disrupted to make way for global, consumer lifestyles. The presence of these shopping mall outlets dramatically alters urban imaginaries and the landscapes of consumption, even for those who are unable to participate in these new 'cultures of consumption'.

Uneven regional development and Shoprite's retail expansion in the 1990s

Uneven regional development continues in the geographies of the new shopping malls. As local economies declined in Africa during the subsequent phases of nationalization and structural adjustment, African cities registered these declines dramatically. The geography of malls in Zambia and Mozambique follows the models of American cities, side-stepping the clutter of the old CBDs and opening up shopping malls in undeveloped land within driving distance of these old CBDs. The stark contrast of these glitzy malls with dilapidated urban environments testifies to the uneven and combined nature of capitalist development, where less developed countries often taken a dramatic and truncated step into advanced urban technologies. Successive phases of retail development in South Africa have agglomerated resources, infrastructure, technical know-how and capital for reinvestment within powerful corporate entities. The post-Apartheid opening that is currently being captured by South African retail multinationals has been facilitated by strong phases of national retail accumulation in South Africa, on the one hand, and weak phases of national retail accumulation in Mozambique and Zambia, on the other (Ariyo and Afeikhena, 1999: 201-213; Kolala 2000; Pitcher 2003).

As one of the largest retail multinationals in South Africa, Shoprite made R70m/\$10m available for reinvestment in Africa in 1999 (Shoprite Company reports, 1999 – 2005, www.shoprite.co.za). With an overtraded local market, it leveraged its powerful conglomerate towards an African expansion. Other retail multinationals faced with a similarly crowded local market have employed expansion strategies in other global regions such as Europe and Australia. General Equity unit trusts at seven percent make up the third biggest slice in South African retail behind banks, financial services and mining resources, the same sectors expanding in Africa. The Shoprite group's historical experience in Africa since the 1960s through their clothing chain, Pep Stores, and their supermarkets in the black-run 'homelands' (nominally independent states) of South Africa gave them some organizational advantages. This experience with black consumer markets, their surplus capital and bold organizational leadership in the company's upper echelons positioned them to best penetrate a consumer market perceived as 'high-risk' and with low consumer savings. Their absorption of other retailers like OK Bazaars added to this sense of 'African know-how' (Interview, Fritz, General Manager of Zambia Shoprite, November 2000;

Financial Mail, 11 July 1997; Macmillan 2005; Makoka 2005; Meyer 2002; Portes 2003; Weatherspoon & Reardon 2003).

The retail sector in South Africa has been in a long-term low for a number of years. Competition is tough and South African retailers have used strategies of consolidation, new kinds of retail stores and expansion into other parts of Africa to cope with these challenges. Managers describe the domestic market as “sluggish and capricious” while marketing directors say they have never seen such “deep lows and high peaks” of consumer spending. Financial analysts argue, however, that the eighty-five percent rise in the Retail Index since its September 1998 low, suggests a continued recovery in the retail sector. Over the past few years, competition has narrowed to three large players, Shoprite, Pick ‘n Pay and Spar (Tiger Foods) as consolidation of the retail industry has occurred. As Shoprite lost market share in South Africa to large competitors like Pick ‘n Pay and Spar’s flexible, new ‘action stores’, Shoprite, along with other South African retailers like Game, Steers, Debonairs, Engen, ProFurn, the J D Group and Wimpy have used expansion into other African countries as a response to heightened competition. Shoprite has taken its excess cash and headed for the African countries north of South African borders, extending as far as Egypt in North Africa ((Shoprite Company reports, 2004, www.shoprite.co.za).

A pattern in this new retail investment is the opening up of new shopping malls with a supermarket (Shoprite) as an anchor store. These shopping malls make a dramatic change to the local consumption and urban environments. The South African multinational retailer, Shoprite, has spearheaded this kind of development in fifteen (one in four) African countries. Shoprite forms a joint consortium with a local minority shareholder. The consortium owns the new shopping mall. Other companies, primarily South African, rent retail space in these stores, from which a significant proportion of Shoprite’s profits derive. A characteristic cluster of stores is Hi-Fi Corporation (belonging to the ProFurn group), Truworths, First National Bank, Game Discount stores, Edgars and the fast food stores like Debonairs and Steers. There has also been an increase in local spending and domestic credit that has increased local demand for goods. Inflows of grants and development finance have contributed to increased liquidity in some countries (Brümmerhoff 1998). The rapid increase in money supply in a number of countries could be related to major credit extension to the private sector and credit granted to government structures. This is

particularly applicable to Zambia and Zimbabwe where, according to statistics compiled for the Committee of Central Bank Governors, total domestic credit extension showed sharp increases during 1997.

Internal consumptive markets are also heterogeneous. Despite high levels of general poverty, internal elites have significant savings and consumptive capacity, sometimes generated by earnings in foreign currency (dollars; rands). Local expatriates, government elites and middle class professionals are significant customers for the new supermarkets. Some of these markets have local peculiarities. For example, company management reported that Angolan diplomats and international community workers cross the border for olive oils, bakery items and other specialist items at the rural supermarket in Solwezi province, a market which Shoprite management in Zambia have learnt to cater for in this branch (Interview, General Manager, Zambia, August 2003). Trade unionists also argued that there was pent-up demand that had no outlet as long as the retail and services sectors were run as poorly-stocked, state-owned enterprises. People had money, they report, but had to go to South Africa to buy commodities that they now find inside Zambia at South African companies (Interviews, NUCIW officials, Lusaka region, August 2002).

Tourism is a new area of demand that affects the shifting patterns of consumption in many African countries. The prevalence of tourism in recent economic activity demonstrates the nature of Africa's economic growth sites. Foreign and South African tourists are propelling a highly skewed economic development that caters for the activities and consumptive activities of leisure classes while local development is neglected. Middle class consumers in Mozambique may shop at the same South African store in the capital, Maputo, or in the Johannesburg border town of Nelspruit. Working class consumers have made use of Shoprite's promotional activities to buy basic consumer items such as fish oil, eggs, washing powder, rice, bread and milk (although these promotions appear to be less now as the company is more established and tax breaks for the company's first five years in both countries are over).

Demand for goods from Shoprite's supermarkets also comes from the informal sector. Informal traders in Mozambique and Zambia source some of their basic items from Shoprite. In Zambia,

one store in Lusaka has been converted into a primarily wholesale store to cater for small shop owners from rural areas. In rural areas where Shoprite has outlets, informal traders buy from Shoprite and resell to local consumers, sometimes just outside of the company's premises.³ New patterns of consumption and distribution thus develop as the Shoprite supermarkets and shopping centers extend from the city into rural towns.

While deindustrialization could be seen as a threat to Shoprite's growth in African countries, the withdrawal of large companies from a local environment can stimulate Shoprite's growth as competition intensifies and Shoprite is able to eliminate smaller, local competitors. In the Copperbelt, Anglo-American's pull-out in 2001 led to smaller businesses going under and the capture of local market share for Shoprite that had previously belonged to these competitors (Telephone Interview, Zambian Regional Manager, April 2002).

While distribution to the informal sector may be better served by the expansion of wholesale stores, Shoprite is wedded to its shopping mall style of development. The company aims for a uniform brand image in its supermarkets and the shopping mall creates an appropriate consumer environment for the Shoprite brand. There is a fear from managers that if their style of operation differs in less developed African locales diverges from its South African style of operation, it will be subject to charges of racism (Interview, Fritz, General Manager of Zambia Shoprite, November 2000).

The African retail expansion is a step towards South Africa's global expansion. The expanded African market is absorbing surplus capital in South Africa and commodity surpluses from South Africa, potentially expanding the manufacture of goods inside South Africa. South African retailers benefit from regional economies of scale as they expand their distribution to regional consumer markets. In contrast to Afro-pessimist accounts of Africa's marginalization, the expansion of South African companies produces dynamic economic and social relations that

³ This is a tension-ridden collaboration as one incident in Solwezi showed when one of these traders came into the store and loudly shouted slogans protesting against Shoprite. This incident was partly provoked because the shop was regulating the amount of its supplies to the traders.

change the geographic imaginaries of workers at these foreign, South African firms, as the case studies below demonstrate.

Centro Commercial in Maputo, Mozambique

Shoprite is a filthy-rich multinational, (with) billions of US dollars in property. Shoprite has had the chance to grow with Apartheid. Mozambican traders have had to fight war and the competition of the informal sector...Many people were very happy when Shoprite opened. People went there in their droves. I was the only one objecting...What kind of regionalization is this? (Interview, Carlos Cardoso, Metical Editor, August 1999).⁴

The Shoprite store is situated on the edge of the Maputo CBD. It is located in an L-shaped, single-storey mall of shops, many of them South African-owned (Truworths, Pep stores). To access the store by car, one often has to cross large “dongas” (huge holes in the road), with construction work-teams competing with cars. Once in the enclosed and guarded parking area of the mall, neat cobbled stones cover the parking area. The mall’s entrance is made of beautiful modern paving, and the welcoming entrance to Shoprite is the wide, brightly-lit doorway characteristic of many “First-World” supermarkets. Once inside, fresh dairy products, rows of fresh fruit, signs denoting “specials” on promotion and aisle demarcations, rows (about 8) of neatly-attired black women cashiers, black male floor managers in corporate-style shirts and dark pants, race around with clipboards monitoring the shop-floor. Cashiers speak English if requested: in short, everything you would expect if you walked into a well-run, American supermarket. Given the generalized context of straw shacks, ailing infrastructure, “shibalo” labor relations between Portuguese expatriates and subservient, multi-tasked locals, entering Shoprite is like crossing a boundary in space and time, a truly breath-snatching experience.

Like Southern Africa, the contours of uneven development are starkly visible at this local scale as well. The “First World” shopping experience belies the “Third World” urban degradation beyond

⁴. Cardoso was assassinated in November 2000. His assassination was linked to his investigation of the privatization of Mozambique’s largest national bank, Commercial Bank of Mozambique(BCM).

the paved parking lot of the *Centro Commercial* (Commercial Center). Flanked by a diversity of housing, the Center is sandwiched between beautiful houses and middle-range apartments on its east - what Mozambicans have called “cement city”. To its north and west there is a sprawling, high-density township abuzz with people, informal markets, and stalls selling second-hand clothing. Old and dilapidated formal structures of stone or brick township housing are hemmed in by informal cane housing in the fronts and backs while the roads are sandy and pot-holed. of the Modeled on the US shopping mall, the Shoprite Center - *Centro Commercial* - takes up about 12 500 sqm for the shops and 12 500 ha for the car park of downtown municipal property. The Center entailed an initial capital outlay of R5.4m (less than US\$1m). To a statistical observer, this event carries little meaning. To local Maputans, however, this store has changed the nature of their lives as consumers dramatically. No longer limited to shopping in open, “mosquito-infested markets” as one resident described them, shopping at Shoprite marks a new consumer era for Maputans. This includes those with very little money who make regular use of the promotional sales at the store. For many Mozambicans Shoprite's investment is ‘um bom investimento’, a good investment. There are new jobs where there were no jobs. Shoprite has built new infrastructure and imported new consumption patterns. Consumers have access to a range of commodities that they had limited access to in the recent past - fruit juices, processed meats, different kinds of cleaning detergents, etc. Maputans who aspire to modern ‘cultures of consumption’ may find new commodities and services in cell-phone shops, CD stores, banks and clothing shops that are increasingly accessible through television and other visual media (Interviews: Jose Cabaco, Investment Advisor; Carlos Cardoso, Editor, *Metical*; Shoprite workers, local residents; Shoprite Mozambican managers; Sept. 1999).⁵

Opinion internally is divided, however. Local traders think that the special privileges given to Shoprite by the state and the local municipality give Shoprite an unfair advantage, (as the opening quote by the *Metical* editor suggested). One issue where growing regional tensions are evident is

⁵ The Editor of *Metical*, a local faxed newspaper, estimated that the land cost \$2.20 per sqm. Land in the downtown area normally costs \$100 per sqm. Th cheapest land in that area is \$30per sqm.

the periodic controversy around ‘dumping’ from South Africa. About two years ago a huge public furor erupted in Maputo. The agent of consumer modernization in Mozambique, Shoprite, was caught dumping expired foodstuffs on the shelves of its ritzy new store in the *Centro Commercial*. The reaction to this discovery was loud and contentious. Maputan consumers asked whether South Africans thought they could be sold rotten wares. Was this to be the *African Renaissance*, South Africa using the region as its backyard for dumping, they asked in public commentaries? The local reaction suspiciously wondered whether Shoprite was selling perishable goods that could not be sold in South Africa, to Maputan consumers.

When interviewed, Shoprite management tried to explain that the expired dates were not intentional but a consequence of Shoprite’s regional distribution mechanisms. Retail companies characteristically buy discounted goods wholesale that have short expiry dates. This system, they argue, worked well for South African stores. Mozambique obtains its stock from the warehouse in Gauteng, South Africa. New problems were encountered with the cross-border regional distribution system. Border problems sometimes caused distribution delays. Also, as a store that targets working class consumers, turnover was not always as quick in Maputo as in South African stores, hence the unanticipated expiry of goods.

Some Maputans disputed Shoprite’s explanations. They are accustomed to buying groceries and other durable goods from Nelspruit, the South African-Mozambican cross-border town that Maputans call “Thank-you, Maputo” (because of the Mozambican subsidy to the town’s phenomenal economic expansion in the last decade). Some consumers went back to shopping at the same Shoprite in Nelspruit, a porous site on the Mozambican-South African border. More forgiving consumers or those with less choice said they needed to ‘give Shoprite a chance.’ Black Mozambican trainee managers at Shoprite-Maputo, caught in the middle of local loyalties and company loyalties, argued that this was the kind of regional development that was to be expected.

Turnover in South Africa is difficult. They finish their stock in Maputo. Of course they do things to suit them. They are the big ones so what they want, happens. It’s a story. It happened before. It won’t change. Dumping in Africa has always been happening. It’s happening now in a modern way (Interview, Mozambican Trainee Manager, Mozambique, September, 1999).

Most black Mozambican managers identify with the company’s reliance on South African supplies, arguing that controversies over dumping obscure the extent to which consumer

standards have been improved by Shoprite's retailing presence. This controversy over dumping has also been an issue in Zambia in the past, pointing to regional concerns over the impact of South Africa's expansion on local supply chains and the competitive advantages of large, foreign multinationals over local villagers, traders and businessmen. In a similar contestation over the regional benefits of Shoprite's expansion, workers at the new South African-owned shopping malls occupy a contradictory location in relation to the privilege of employment in countries with unemployment levels ranging between 30 and 50 percent, and the problems they encounter at these companies.

Malls and the supermarket as a workspace – comparing Manda Hill (Lusaka, Zambia) and Centro Commercial (Maputo, Mozambique)

While Ferguson's (1999: 12) workers attest to an 'ethnography of decline'⁶, being part of a shopping mall locates Shoprite workers in the heart of urban capitalism. South African stores have placed these retail workers within a realm of expectation offering modernity after Zambia's failed copper dreams. Hence the company's claim that Shoprite is providing 'world-class merchandising' (Shoprite company reports, 1999. www.shoprite.co.za). Working in this 'space of consumption' puts the employee in the midst of this promise of modernity. Retail workers share this space, even when they are excluded as consumers. The grandeur of their work environment is not lost on the Shoprite staff.

We have seen different kinds of food displays and sometimes on our plates, if we manage to buy them (Interview, male permanent worker, August 2000).

I see Shoprite as a powerful company. . . even the way their buildings are, the way they display their merchandise (Interview, male permanent shelf-packer, August 2002).

⁶ Ferguson (1999) comments on the overwhelming sense of 'decline and despair' he found while doing his research on the Copperbelt in Zambia.

Manda Hill Complex in the capital city of Lusaka is a centerpiece of Shoprite's Zambian investment, with a cost of US\$20m for the shopping centre. Employees and managers were drawn from the state shops when the company first started out in Zambia. The center takes up 22 260 sq m, of which Shoprite occupies 4 608 square meters (Email communication, Center Manager, Kangwa Mukuka, 5 October 2002). The complex is 20% owned by Zambia Venture Capital and 80% Commonwealth Africa Investment, the name under which Shoprite trades in Zambia. There are about 56 tenants at the store. Shoprite and Game (general merchandising retail multinational) – both South African-owned - are the two anchor tenants. Shoprite-Manda Hill (in Lusaka) is by far the largest of the firm's eighteen Zambian supermarkets.⁷ It is not only Manda Hill's larger physical size that makes it Shoprite's Zambian flagship, but also because Manda Hill has been the only shopping mall of its kind to date.

The Shoprite supermarkets represent a new phase in South Africa's relations with the region. The new Shoprite *Centro Commercial* heralded a new era in retailing for many ordinary Mozambicans who in the past were excluded from the hotels and stores developed for the tourists and foreign aid communities. Shoprite-Manda Hill has had a similarly dramatic effect on urban lifestyles and consumer choices in Lusaka, Zambia. This confers an enhanced status on workers outside of their workplaces, a status that does not correspond to their conditions within the workplace.

Workers are aware of their relatively privileged position, not least because they were specially selected from around the country to make up the staff at this store. They are also aware of the improved retail ambience of Shoprite-Manda Hill. In all eleven stores that I visited, workers followed the uniform dress code of the company, projecting a pristine image that corresponded to the upmarket environs of the mall. Interviewed workers often cited the Shoprite uniform as one reason why Zambians initially assumed that Shoprite staff was part of a labor elite. The suggestive, imaginary reach of the mall brings the expanded global consumptive universe within

⁷ The three other medium-sized outlets are in Lusaka and in the Copperbelt towns of Ndola and Kitwe. The remaining fourteen stores employ fewer than a hundred workers each.

the reach of the retail worker. Any perceived or real deprivation due to wage levels is thrown into sharp relief when working in such commodity havens, a contrast that creates the equivalent of Hirschman's 'tunnel effect', whereby increased hopes for social mobility are frustrated by social inequality (Hirschman 1981).

Both Zambian and Mozambican workers enjoy an enhanced status as workers at a powerful, South African multinational company with branches all over Africa. In these poor environments, their smart uniforms and appearance sets them apart from poorer nationals. Unlike workers from the older mining and manufacturing sectors, these retail workers work in a modern shopping mall environment that is cleaner and smarter. Despite this "foreign enclave" status, almost ninety percent of workers in both cities responded that there was nothing about work at Shoprite that they loved and had to be coaxed to find something positive to say about their work environment. Once they were coaxed, they were able to find positive elements in their work, but their embittered feelings made their initial response to this question a highly negative one.

Workers in Zambia and Mozambique find their work conditions degrading because of low wages, long hours and multi-tasking. These conditions are offset for more skilled workers (clerks and controllers) who feel that they have benefited from multi-skilling. The ravages of unemployment are also avoided through work at Shoprite. Even if their work conditions are unsatisfactory, it is better than the insecurity of life without a job.

Both sets of workers felt that the extent of South African control over the shop-floor undermined the autonomy and efficiency of local management for whom they had little respect, with only one or two exceptions. All workers looked to South Africa as the standard-bearer of the region based on its higher levels of industrialization and their knowledge of better conditions for workers. Workers similarly ignored the internal heterogeneity of South African retail workers, creating an idealized notion of retail work in South Africa based on some inaccurate assumptions. While they are correct about the better conditions for workers in South Africa, the declining conditions and growing insecurities of South African workers were something they were largely unaware of.

The Shoprite company magazine and transport workers in the regional firm emerged as important sources of information for workers in both countries. The newspaper is distributed regularly on the shop-floor from head office and workers circulate amongst themselves the copies that they

receive and what they have read. Images such as the festivities attached to particular social occasions such as weddings, engagements and birthdays had a profound impact on workers in countries where these crucial social occasions are becoming an unattainable luxury. High levels of local poverty and unemployment and illness and death due to AIDs and other causes stretches workers' wages across extended family and friendship networks, causing stress and high levels of responsibility for these relatively younger workers. Porous regional borders also allow information about South Africa to circulate amongst Southern Africans.

Workers were unaware of the *African Renaissance*.⁸ For workers, Shoprite's geographic expansion in Africa is a far more immediate example of a *Renaissance* than the grander political aims of an *African Renaissance*. Enhanced regional expectations were linked to the perceived profitability and success of this large, South African multinational.

Regional claims were strongly evident based on the idea that all workers in a company should get not equal pay but the same pay for the same work. The right to profit-making and economic expansion was acknowledged by workers, but the decent treatment of workers was a corresponding outcome that they expected from this economic success. Workers attributed uneven standards between themselves and South African workers to the effect of regional discrimination by South Africa against poorer countries that South Africa could take advantage of. Notions of regional geometries of power were thus prevalent amongst workers.

Despite the overwhelming similarities in the responses of workers in both countries to the same set of questions, there are significant differences in the conditions of work between workers at Shoprite-Maputo and workers at Shoprite-Manda Hill. An approximate regional geometry of standards suggests that Zambian Shoprite workers have the worst conditions when compared with South African and Mozambican Shoprite workers. This could be one factor in the strike that took place in Zambia in June 2003. Conditions of Shoprite workers in Zambia appear to be the worst amongst the three countries. Zambian permanent workers were doing the most overtime and

⁸ Yet when informed by the researcher, they generally thought it was a good idea.

unpaid overtime work for the least wages per month when compared with Mozambique and South Africa.

Exploitation of Shoprite workers through the use of casual labor appears to be the pattern in Mozambique. Shoprite-Maputo workers are also paid well below averages for formal sector workers in the national labor market. Casual workers in South Africa are paid around 1.7 times more than their *Zambian* counterparts. Casual workers in Mozambique, although they earn more per month, earn less in real terms as they are working a full week of 49.7 hours. The category of casual worker (“eventuals”) is being used in violation of the Mozambican Labor Law through the repeated renewal of these contracts.

Casual workers in South Africa and Zambia work between nineteen and twenty-four hours per week, so there is a relationship between their low wage rates and their under-employment. South African permanents are earning almost twice as much as permanent workers in Mozambique who also earn more than their *Zambian* counterparts. The cost of casual labor is cheaper in Mozambique but only constitutes a minority of the workforce, unlike in Zambia. This is possibly because these casuals are full-time equivalents, whereas in Zambia two casual workers make up one full-time equivalent. Mozambican workers earn less than other formal sector workers in their national labor market. *Zambian* permanent workers earn more than the \$59 minimum legislated wage for shop-workers in the grade of cashier. However, this does not indicate what the actual average minimum wage is in the retail and services sectors. (The wage rates are for workers in the rate of shelf-packers. Clerks earn higher incomes than those cited below.)

While most workers in Zambia were unionized and had a Recognition Agreement with the company, workers in Mozambique had been unable to get the majority of votes needed for a Recognition Agreement. The company was thus able to restrict wage increases and abuse labor legislation restricting the renewal of contracts for casuals. Uneven union representation did not, however, protect the *Zambian* workers from becoming the most exploited amongst Shoprite workers in the three countries.

There was a suggestion from Shoprite-Maputo workers that, while the status of workers has been elevated in South Africa after democratic transition, their status has been downgraded in Mozambique. While *Zambian* workers articulated a consistent lack of faith in the nation-state and

a realization that they were on their own, Mozambican workers at Shoprite still seemed to suffer from feelings of betrayal and abandonment by the country as a whole and by the government. These differences could play an important role in the morale of workers and their capacity to strike, with the realism of Zambian workers aiding their resistance while the frustrated hopes and demoralization of Mozambican workers disable their capacity for collective action.

There was a greater ambivalence amongst Mozambican workers about the positive impact of foreign investment for the country. They were almost unanimous that the foreign investors were a good idea, unlike their more critical Zambian counterparts who observed that South Africa benefits more than Zambia in the economic relationship with South African companies. Although both Zambian and Mozambican workers articulated the same regional claims for inclusion into the company, a more critical regionalist disposition was emerging amongst the Zambian workers. As their expectations of South African foreign investors were declining, they demonstrated a willingness to voice a counter-hegemonic disposition to the regional freedom for foreign investors. For the Shoprite-Zambian workers, the interests of workers and the interests of the country had to correspond. They could not accept that their interests as workers were not the same as that of the country; hence their argument that the failure to treat workers as human beings necessarily meant the companies were not good for Zambia. The Mozambican workers, on the other hand, felt that they had to suppress their separate, sectional interests for the sake of the country. As workers, their problems were subordinate to the larger problems of the country's economic growth. The supermarkets appeared to benefit the country in a variety of ways, including that they embodied development for Mozambique. Their exploitation was one unfortunate outcome of a process that was essentially good for their country.

Mozambican workers did not cite racist attitudes amongst South African 'boers' as a reason for regional discrimination. This is perhaps because their contact with white management is mostly with Portuguese expatriates.⁹

⁹ A limitation in the research is that the focus on relations with South Africa failed to sufficiently explore the peculiarities of the Portuguese-Mozambican relationship.

Unlike the Zambian workers, workers in Mozambique did not comment on the shopping mall ambience of their workplace or the wider choices available to consumers. They recognized that Shoprite and South African companies were creating much-needed employment and that Shoprite was a large multinational company. They seemed to be less impressed with the “cosmopolitan” space of the shopping mall and more aware of their uniforms and appearance in the community and the false impressions their neat uniforms created.

In Zambia, new foreign investors brought renewed “expectations of modernity”, and the failure of foreign investors to live up to these expectations has provoked militant criticism in the public sphere and even within the ranks of government (Interview, Deputy Minister of Labor, August 2003). Failures of previous “expectations of modernity” such as that in the 1960s and 1970s have perhaps endowed Zambians with a greater realism and empathy for the plight of workers who bear the brunt of failed economic initiatives. For Mozambique, this is their first round of “expectations of modernity”, given a past of civil war and limited capitalist development. There are still illusions that capitalist modernity will lift the country out of its devastated national state, and the increasing growth rate in Mozambique and rapid urban development underway reinforce these illusions.

Public discourse about foreign investors has shifted more rapidly in Zambia. The disastrous effects of wholesale privatization are already economically visible. The Deputy Minister of Labor attacked the role of private investors, saying they had raided the Zambian economy and that, in effect, the Zambian government had paved the way for this “accumulation by dispossession” (Harvey 2003; Interview, Deputy Minister of Labor, Lusaka, Zambia, August 2003).

Mozambican public discourse still points to the necessities of neo-liberal privatization and they are still very uncritical about the intervention of new foreign investors.

Within their workplaces, interviews with workers showed a high level of dissatisfaction. Workers made comparisons with South Africa workers and regional claims were emerging. Different conditions and different national realities, however, create different capacities for resistance and the assertion of regional demands. National differences in the responses of workers seem to suggest defeatism amongst the Mozambican workforce. While workers have the same regional claims, their regional dispositions and expectations vary. In Zambia, regional claims were cohering into regional demands (as the strike discussed below shows), while in Mozambique

regional claims were leading to feelings of disempowerment and alienation. The regional claims of workers can therefore have different regional outcomes, depending on a range of contingent and historical factors.¹⁰

The Mozambican workers that I interviewed in Shoprite suggested that their national counterparts were still infused with the “expectations of modernity” that new foreign investment could bring, comprehensible perhaps against a backdrop of civil war, urban breakdown and restricted capitalist development. The suggestion is that there are still perceptions that capitalist modernity and South African investment will lift the country out of its devastated national state. The increasing growth rate in Mozambique and the rapid urban development underway reinforce these perceptions. Mozambican public discourse still points to the necessities of neo-liberal privatization and they are still very uncritical about the intervention of new foreign investors.

As can be seen from the case studies, there are high levels of comparability in the regional perceptions of workers at Shoprite in Mozambique and Zambia in relation to their workplaces. For these workers, the ‘definition of the possible’ had indeed taken on a new regional dimension.

‘Spaces of Hope’ and the strike at Manda Hill

When workers began a 3-day work stoppage at the eighteen Zambian stores of Shoprite, a South African retail multinational, on 21 June 2003, this was surely no extraordinary event. But African labor has travelled a convoluted path. This strike marks a turning point in labour relations for Zambian workers. Cowed by chronic unemployment, a discredited ex-president who was elected into government office after being the trade union federation’s president, a ravaged economy and aggressive, “no-holds-barred” privatisation, risking dismissal would appear foolhardy for any ‘rational economic actor’. Yet these workers put their livelihoods and the livelihoods of the extended families they support, on the line. This was, indeed, a remarkable dispute. This strike

¹⁰ The stores were opened within a year of each other, so neither store is significantly older than the other – *Manda Hill* in 1996 and *Centro Commercial* in 1997.

marked a turning point in labor relations for Zambian workers and was one of the first strikes at the foreign stores of Shoprite, now Africa's largest retailer.

The strike attracted a lot of public attention. Newspapers headlined reports of the strike, Zambian TV headlined the strike action for two days, interviewing workers on TV, radios ran updates about the strike, and human rights groups also commented on the strike.

After the down-tools we were receiving a lot of comments from the people - the public - saying that the worker is not being cared for. Letters were being written (Interview, NUCIW Negotiation Team Leader and Deputy General Secretary for Finance, Kitwe, August 2003).

The first demand was around wages, the primary issue in the strike. Workers said they are unable to support themselves on their current wages. Casual workers felt particularly aggrieved at their income. Permanent workers also spoke out about the bad conditions of casual workers. The second concern was that the increase should be a large increase – demands began at 300% of existing wages - as they believed only a significant increase would begin to solve their problems. Significantly, they had learnt from their attendance at a South African trade union meeting in South Africa that they were the lowest paid in the region, and were very disgruntled about this. They also wanted the Zambian Human Resources manager removed. Their understanding was that an HR manager should act as a mediator between management and the workers, and therefore also represent their interests. Not only was he not playing the mediating role, he was also a Zambian. As a Zambian, he should be able to identify with the problems of Zambian workers.

Workers expressed strong feelings of bitterness over the company's perceived lack of empathy with the challenges that confront them. From the interviews I conducted with some of the workers who had gone on strike, they argued that the exchange between management and workers has been unequal. The investment has been successful and expansion has been possible for the company. Workers at the company, however, experience financial difficulties. . According to these workers, Zambians have allowed South Africans a period of unfettered access to their national economy. South Africans appear to be abusing Zambia's invitation, in their view. The multinational encounter, therefore, is an unequal one.

Regional trade union collaboration between South Africa and other Southern African countries emerged as one impetus behind the retail sector strike. In October 2002, South African Commercial and Catering Workers Union (SACCAWU), the South African retail sector trade union affiliated to Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), organized a national shop stewards' council in Port Elizabeth. This 3-day meeting included the attendance and presentations by company head office management on the first day. Represented at this meeting for the first time were trade union and worker delegates from six other Southern African countries (Lesotho, Swaziland, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Malawi and Namibia). At this meeting, SACCAWU's Research Unit made a presentation on Shoprite's African expansion. Perhaps more importantly, the Southern African delegation actively and informally exchanged information during their time together at this meeting. When the Zambian delegate returned to Lusaka, he was armed with a comparative analysis of wages at Shoprite in the region.

From this comparison, Zambian workers saw that the company pays them the least in the region. They corroborated this information with their own gathered while training new Shoprite employees from newly opening stores in other African countries. This information was an important consideration for workers when they decided to embark on strike action in June 2003. Workers and the Deputy Minister of Labor (Interview, August, 2003) believe that the company should not have been given 'carte-blanche' when they came into South Africa.

It's maybe because of the way they came in. They were given a lot of respect. They were given the freedom to do anything... even if there's a problem they are able to stand; no one will convince them or chase them back to where they came from. So they've got freedom interview, Focus group, Shoprite-Manda Hill worker (September 2003).

While workers at Shoprite tend to look to South African companies for an improvement in their lives, their perceived exclusion and the denial of their regional claims is producing contradictions that have made them turn against the company. As a result of the lack of national expectations, workers have pragmatically set their sights on the regional company. National demands have given way to regional claims. These regional claims are aimed at the company rather than the political institutions of the region such as the Southern African Development Community (SADC). The regional company is the place where their demands for fair working conditions should be met. Discriminatory treatment of South African workers and their regional counterparts

was a source of tension in the past, in the present context, new regional expectations will make such discrimination untenable.

Conclusion

Regional developments in post-Apartheid Southern Africa have spawned two important phenomena. The first is the growth of South African investment in the region (and the continent more broadly). The second is the self-representation by these South African investors as agents of an *African Renaissance*. These significant structural and ideological developments have created a new context for workplaces in Southern Africa. The foreign branches of South African retail companies have given a high visibility to South Africa in the region. Expanding against the backdrop of a declared *African Renaissance*, the style of expansion and the workplace practices of these companies open up a new set of capital-labor dynamics and contradictions.

Despite the significant differences in the national histories of Mozambique and Zambia, workers at these workplaces articulated the same claims for regional inclusion in the firm. While worker claims may be directed at a colonizing power such as Britain or France, at the nation-state in favor of national social compacts, or at the local level towards an individual company, the current geographic pragmatism of workers at Shoprite turns their focus to the regional company and its South African base as a reference point.

Both Zambian and Mozambican groups saw their futures in individualistic terms. Their goals were houses, cars, good jobs with good salaries, decent education for their children. Their political sensibilities were reformist, emphasizing the individual attainment of these objectives. Through their work they would have to secure advancement for themselves and their families. There was no sense that the government would help one attain these objectives in any way. In this sense, the political sensibilities of these workers are post-nationalist and market-oriented. Unlike South African workers who still look to the government for employment programs and national redistribution initiatives, workers in Zambia and Mozambique have put aside any claims on the nation-state for redistribution. Unlike the period of national liberation when workers were characterized as 'rent-seeking elites', workers in these countries now express a strong realism about fending for themselves. Any charges of 'cultures of dependency' would not stand up to scrutiny in relation to these workers. They have decided they are on their own as a political class.

There is no evidence of any illusions about the nation-state. In this sense they have moved beyond the South African experience where many workers still retain some faith in the government they have installed into power. They have seen through the failures of the national liberation (NIEO) experiment and now articulate a market-based demand. Company citizenship is where they locate their entitlement, and it is in the company that all workers in the same grades should be equal.

There was no awareness of the way that casualization has undermined the conditions of both permanent and temporary workers in South Africa. This is partly attributable to the impressionistic way in which knowledge of South African work conditions has been gathered. The nuances of conditions in the South African labor market are not a concern to workers for whom the injustice of being paid amongst the least in the Shoprite region is their central concern.

The new regional imaginaries that emerge out of the regional firm and the new shopping malls open up new possibilities and contradictions. Growing regional contradictions are embodied in the multinational dispute between the multinational South African retail company, Shoprite, and its foreign workplaces. The strike at Shoprite in Zambia (and in 2004 in Malawi) points to some of the potential outcomes of these new contradictions. Bi-national disputes have regional consequences and influence how the local public reacts to disputes and controversy between host country nationals and South African companies. If the relations between South African companies, on the one hand, and host country workers or consumers, on the other hand, are fractious, this will undermine South Africa's proclaimed leadership role in post-Apartheid Southern Africa.

Charges of 'Yankees of Africa' and South African 'sub-imperialism' point to an unanticipated fault-line of political struggle in Southern Africa – a new tension between democratic South Africa and the countries and working classes who were to benefit from this political unity at the regional level. A new imprint has been left on the continent: one that potentially reproduces the global relations of Empire at the regional level. Uneven regional development and heightened regional expectations are already producing Hirschmann's 'tunnel effect' amongst retail workers at Shoprite, whereby increased hopes for social mobility are frustrated by social inequality. If South Africa is perceived by other Southern African countries as the primary beneficiary of post-Apartheid regional economic development, with deepened regional inequality as the outcome of

South Africa's democratic expansion, new regional resistance becomes both possible and likely. New cases of local resistance point to new regional claims in the demands of local communities, where South Africa becomes the reference point for new regional demands.

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