The Mosaic Presents

The Adventures of AGS

Albert Gallatin In South Africa

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INTRODUCTION
Brittany Habermehl & Paolina Lu

In January 2011, the Albert Gallatin Scholars traveled to South Africa guided by the theme “Arts in Times of Social Change.” During our two weeks there, we stayed in Johannesburg, Kruger National Park and Cape Town. We visited galleries, went on safari, ate zebra, spoke with local artists, toured wineries, walked through Soweto, went to the beach and talked about apartheid. Throughout the trip, we struggled to reconcile what we had heard and read about South Africa before traveling with our daily experiences, and to negotiate our own roles as scholars, tourists, young people and individuals.

While we were in South Africa, Johannesburg residents, or “Jo’burgers,” told us that, “Cape Town isn’t a real African city,” or, “South Africa is not really African.” If a city in Africa is not an “African city,” and a country in Africa is not an “African country,” then what is “African”?

Point of view is an important issue when writing about Africa and assessing authenticity, because natives and visitors view each city very differently. In accordance with our theme, we studied a spectrum of artistic representations of Africa, including a documentary on Johannesburg titled *Unhinged: Surviving Jo’burg*, directed by Adrian Loveland. In many ways, Loveland, as a native of the city, possesses more authority than a visiting academic, and he chose to represent Jo’burg through a humorous documentary in a largely positive light, while still including qualifications concerning poverty and crime.

Some leading analysts of the issues involved in representing African cities include Achille Mbembe, Sarah Nuttall and Michael Watts. In “Writing the World from an African Metropolis,” the introduction to the 2004 special issue of *Public Culture* titled “Johannesburg—The Elusive Metropolis,” Mbembe and Nuttall propose what they claim is a new approach to the study and representation of Africa. They argue that the continent has historically been studied as something completely apart from the rest of the world, as the incarnation of legacies of unjust colonial and postcolonial policy. To combat this, Mbembe and Nuttall focus on the positive aspects of the cities, and their approach aims to be hopeful about the future of these coun-
tries, attract foreign investment and prolematize any homogeneous image of this incredibly diverse continent. In an emphatic response to the special issue, Watts attacks Mbembe and Nuttall’s project, advocating for studies of Africa that produce a solid foundation of scholarship upon which redressive policy can be built. Watts focuses more on the excess of urban poverty, and states that doing otherwise is irresponsible.

Many, including Mbembe and Nuttall, argue that “Africa” is an academic invention that originated in the work of early colonial geographers and anthropologists whose writings and perceptions still influence the way that the global community imagines Africa. Africa is “historically and socially constructed (indeed, in some sense arbitrary),” but at the same time it is “real”—a “category within which, and according to which, people must live.” There is no singularly correct answer to the question of “What is South Africa?” or “What is Art in Times of Social Change?” South Africa is a diverse country with a multitude of narratives, some that anchor themselves in the history and legacy of the apartheid regime, and some that do not. Each one of the contributions to this year’s Mosaic aims to add to this narrative plentitude by providing representations of the country from a wide array of viewpoints.
With a practical tone, but with a slight swell of pride in their voices, South Africans will offer the count of official languages in their country—11: “Sepedi, Sesotho, Setswana, siSwati, Tshivenda, Xitsonga, Afrikaans, English, isiNdebele, isiXhosa, and isiZulu.” The constitution of South Africa codifies a greater variety of languages than anyone but a devoted polyglot could competently handle—just naming them from memory can seem daunting to an outsider. The majority of these languages are, of course, African, and come from several linguistic groups. Xhosa, Zulu, Swati, and Ndebele constitute the Nguni group; Sotho, Pedi, and Tswana, form the Sotho group; Tsonga and Venda are outliers. English, introduced to South Africa by the British, needs no introduction here.

South Africa’s eleventh official language, Afrikaans, is much younger than the other ten. It has its roots in the Dutch spoken by colonists who arrived in South Africa in the 17th and 18th centuries. It also has a marked—and at times ignominious—place in South Africa’s history, as it was, along with English, one of the two official languages of the government prior to and throughout the era of apartheid, from 1948 to 1993. When it became by mandate a required language of instruction for black South Africans in 1974, the riots and resultant police response two years later in Soweto left hundreds dead and became emblematic of the cruelty of the apartheid regime.

As the protestors at Soweto made clear, the Afrikaans language was intimately symbolic of the oppressive government. But during the Albert Gallatin Scholars’ stay in Johannesburg, it was Afrikaans that we heard spoken most often. English seemed to be used only out of courtesy for us; most of our guides and hosts communicated amongst themselves in this putative tongue of apartheid, this language that launched riots.

I didn’t understand Afrikaans—neither its place in history nor its role in contemporary culture. Moreover, I scarcely knew which questions to ask, let alone how I could ask them without embarrassing...
myself or raising the hackles of the people I met. Here was a sym-

bol of apartheid that was also a living language, a mother tongue to

many, and one learned later by many more. I wanted to know: What

had happened to Afrikaans? How had a language, a mode of encod-
ing and expressing human thought, become such a charged symbol

of culture and politics, and how had it fallen back to a place in every-
day life? Had it “redeemed itself” somehow of its oppressive con-
notation, and should it have needed to? And, finally, the most reduc-
tive, most self-indulgent, of my questions: Can a language oppress?

As I hinted, Afrikaans resembles neither English nor the Bantu
languages native to the region; it was neither introduced to South
Africa as a full-fledged foreign language, nor was it spoken there by
indigenes. Its Dutch linguistic heritage is a well-known fact—but the
relationship of Dutch to Afrikaans is not truly comparable to, say, that
of the Queen’s English to our twangy, rhoticized American dialect, or
that of French to Québécois. Rather, Afrikaans is Dutch after a hearty
extrusion through the minds of non-Dutch immigrants, slaves, and
natives, starting mainly in 1652 with the establishment of a Dutch
trading post on the Cape of Good Hope.

Linguists, persnickety as they are, disagree on how exactly to
classify Afrikaans. It seems that it was once on its way to becoming
a creole—a consistent but very mixed language that emerges from
a more ad hoc, broken pidgin, such as those that arise in centers of
immigration or among the imported slaves on a plantation. However,
Afrikaans is closer to its parent language than is typical of a true cre-
ole. It’s possible that, since many of the immigrant communities that
contributed to the development of Afrikaans were European, the
disruption to Dutch was less severe than that caused by speakers
of more linguistically-estranged languages as they struggled to get
their lips around Germanic words.

Personally, I see a link between Afrikaans’ halted creolization
and the fact that it was eventually adopted in full by a demograph-
ic—the descendents of the Dutch—who had spoken it all along. By
the late 18th century, the vernacular that would become Afrikaans
had drifted far enough from Dutch to
warrant consideration as a separate lan-
guage, with its grammar and vocabulary
showing the signs of creolization and admixture. As British encroachment on
Dutch territory increased throughout the

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| MOST SELF-INDULGENT OF |
| MY QUESTIONS: CAN A |
| LANGUAGE OPPRESS? |
mid-19th century, the Afrikaners, as they came to call themselves, sought to culturally consolidate themselves in defense. Afrikaans, though by its nature a language of mixing ethnicities and cultures, was still representative of Dutch continuity in South Africa. However, by 1925, the government had replaced Dutch with Afrikaans as one of its two official languages. That is a truncated account of how a creolized language, a manifestation of diversity, became iconic of the Afrikaners—not to mention all other speakers of the language, many of whom would suffer under Afrikaner sovereignty.

A language, however, cannot be like a flag, an inert symbol of a culture or, more abstractly, a state. Its function in society makes it much more problematic, partly because common speech is a sign of—and a means of maintaining—cultural continuity. As linguist and psychologist Edward Sapir notes, even tiny communities of a few individuals nestled well within larger cultures share esoteric sets of idioms and manners of speaking (such as in-jokes and slang) which reinforce the social bonds between the members and hamper the incursion of any outsider. Conversely, this very fact makes a national common speech counterintuitive, since smaller communities across a country are not engaged in the constant cultural interchange that fosters a single spoken dialect.

Or rather, they weren’t so engaged, until modern technology made it possible, and modern politics made it desirable. Sapir is again on point: Before the outblown “ideal of the sovereign nation” and the concordant urge towards cohesive nationwide culture, populations seldom antagonized linguistic differences. Instead, other tokens of culture—religion, citizenship, and perceived common ancestry—were more heavily emphasized. But this changed. Languages, in their capacity to represent culture, also became symbols of national hegemony, increasing in consistency and becoming points of contention between cultures-cum-states. The espousal of Afrikaans by the embattled South African Dutch follows from this historical
context. Their distinctly Africanized language would symbolize their distinctly Africanized culture, legitimizing their political and cultural struggle against the wholly foreign British.

But this exclusive link was contrived. Afrikaans was, is, and has always been spoken by more than just white Afrikaners—that is how it came to exist. With this fact established, we can return to Soweto, 1976. When the Afrikaner government decreed education in Afrikaans compulsory for black students in 1974, it was not to suppress the native culture by substituting one symbol of culture (the home languages of the students) with another. Indeed, it was the apartheid government that insisted black students be taught only in their home language for the first few years of their education, hoping that this would accentuate the ethnic differences of the various native groups and culturally divide South Africa’s black population much in the same way the townships were organized to segregate them physically. This desire to divide was the same impulse that brought the Afrikaners to adopt and codify Afrikaans: Speaking different languages, the thinking went, the black South Africans would never attain the national awareness needed to cooperate and resist the government.

In fact, the 1974 Afrikaans Medium Decree was a maneuver against the dominance of English, and it was no surprise attack. Decades before, in the 1950s, a commission created by the Department of Bantu Education recommended that students in black schools be required to learn only one of the two official languages. The Department had blanched and insisted on both, “fearing that if only one language were to be chosen, it would be English.” For Afrikaans to be spurned would be an affront to Afrikaner hegemony, it seemed, and so all black students would have to learn it, whether they liked it or not.

The government did not realize how strongly the students would not like it. “I have not consulted the African people on the language issue and I’m not going to,” stated Punt Jansen, Deputy Minister of Bantu Education. The authorities overestimated their success in sowing ignorance and division amongst the black students, and the rest is arduous but triumphant history. South Africa’s oppressed minori-
ties, it turns out, were well aware of how much Afrikaans meant as a symbol to the government, and English, the other relatively common tongue, seemed much more attractive by comparison. When the apartheid regime collapsed in 1994, that the immediate negotiations were held in English testifies to the language’s role among the anti-apartheid leadership.

Ultimately, what is there to learn from this wending story of culture, language, and politics? Lots, I think, but mainly that language is too great a beast to try to control, even abstractly, as in symbolism. Languages change quickly, and the cultures that use and modify them change at an even faster rate. Afrikaans could not have stayed the “language of the oppressor” forever, for it only ever acted as a symbol through cultural construal—the Afrikaans of the Afrikaners was a spin, and it never truly belonged to them. Compare this, for example, to the character of something like the swastika, a true symbol: it will be much longer yet before a European can view one without thinking of atrocities. Afrikaans, as I saw firsthand, is rightfully spoken without shame.

I have one last question, an important one: With all this attention on the European languages in South Africa, should we worry that the native tongues are diminished? After all that the people of South Africa have been through, it’s time to trust in their democracy—there is no good to come of trying to decide, from the outside, what they should speak. Already too often is language a victim of human schemes.
By the late 1960s, much of the earlier revolutionary momentum in South Africa, which had been built in the 1950s through the work of groups like the African National Congress, seemed to have been successfully turned back by the apartheid regime through violence, censorship and other forms of repression. However, a new force started to develop out of this demoralizing political situation—the high school students of Johannesburg’s predominately black South Western Townships, a conglomeration of settlements known collectively as Soweto. The students’ parents had been deeply affected by the harsh responses of the ruling political powers to the agitation of the earlier anti-apartheid movement: They were afraid of the consequences of political action and were legitimately concerned with just being able to keep their jobs, if they had them. The young students of Soweto, however, were in a unique position to take up the revolutionary struggle—a struggle that culminated in the important Soweto Uprising of 1976.

In some of Soweto’s high schools in the 1960s there existed room for considerable political development despite the increasingly oppressive apartheid pedagogy and curriculum. There were several reasons why, not the least of which being that the young people “were a fresh generation ...unfamiliar with the bitterness of defeat.”¹ They simply had not had the same experiences as their parents, and this opened them up to more political possibilities. Outside of this, two key institutions that, on the surface, appeared relatively harmless in the face of the white power structure actually provided invaluable political cover for the development of the radical consciousness of Soweto’s students to develop. Student Christian organizations and debating societies, both of which were allowed to gain impressive footholds in Soweto schools, became two of the most important spaces for the student movement’s nascent leadership to develop. The relative political safe-

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**SOUTH AFRICAN WHITES TRIED TO FOOL THE REST OF THE WORLD BY GIVING SPEECHES ON “MULTINATIONAL DEVELOPMENT,” “PLURAL DEMOCRACY,” AND INDEPENDENT “HOMELANDS”**
ty provided by these two groups inside the school buildings laid the groundwork for the mass protest movement that took place outside of them.

The most notable of the Christian organizations was the Student Christian Movement (SCM). This group, which had many members at most Soweto high schools, became more and more influenced by the revolutionary Black Consciousness movement of Steve Biko through its religious arm, “Black Theology.” Students quickly picked up the ideas of radical thinkers such as Biko, and SCM meetings became increasingly politicized. At the same time, a similar and related process was happening in the debating societies. Even before these clubs started debating politically relevant topics, they helped students “develop confidence on public platforms and learn important intellectual skills.” As SCM became more radical, its members, along with members of the South African Student’s Movement (SASM), started taking on leadership positions on debate teams and pushing those groups to become more politically engaged. This was important for a few reasons. First, the SASM and SCM leaders who essentially took over the debate teams now had a platform from which to radicalize the rest of their schools, because after the teams started talking about issues of real relevance to students they became wildly
popular. Second, the teams provided opportunities for identifying and developing new leaders. Finally, debate teams from different schools met during matches, which in turn helped to strengthen links between leaders across school boundaries.³

SASM, which began in 1968 as the African Student Movement, played a central role in the lead-up to and execution of the Soweto insurrection. The group originally focused on transforming the education system, specifically by increasing student control of school operations through Student Representative Councils. In the 1970s, SASM developed important ties to the college-based South African Students’ Organization (SASO), which provided crucial political direction for the students. Outside of the organizational relationship between the two groups, a number of SASO members (some of whom had actually been kicked out of their colleges for their political activity) moved on to become teachers in Soweto schools. This put them in position to become key role models and leaders for the younger students. By the mid-70s, SASM was well organized enough to attract attention from the South African Security Police, but the group managed to resist the repression. In short, an extraordinarily strong culture of empowerment and radicalism emerged at a few Soweto high schools through the confluence of all these developments. This kind of culture could not have developed elsewhere in South Africa.

The Soweto Uprising occurred in direct response to the apartheid regime’s attempt to establish Afrikaans, the language of the white ruling political party, as the official language of instruction in schools. That move prompted massive school boycotts by students. On June 16, 1976, hundreds of students took part in what was intended as a peaceful march to Soweto’s Orlando stadium, where they planned to rally against the enforcement of Afrikaans-language instruction. However, they were met with brutal police violence on their way, and riots quickly broke out in response. Some estimates put the number of dead over the coming days well into the hundreds. The revolt continued to spread, and by July 4 the state responded by backing off of its policy of Afrikaans as the medium of instruction. By this point however, that relatively small concession was not enough. The students wanted to bring down the entire apartheid regime.⁴ A key move came when the students began organizing their
parents. A series of three successful general strikes were organized. One anti-apartheid activist noted that: “We adults have very little to do with what’s going on...the children tell their parents they must stay at home. You’d be amazed to hear a thirteen-year-old saying ‘Daddy, on Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday you are staying home from work...’”

The students of Soweto provided the leadership and fearlessness sorely needed by the anti-apartheid struggle; in doing so, they reignited a movement that led directly (although not without more than a decade of struggle) to the democratic election of Nelson Mandela as South African president in 1994. The students began by recognizing the unjustness of their situation in the schools and, through action and increasingly strong ties with each other and with other movements, came to a sophisticated understanding of the societal breadth of the issues that they were facing. Here in the United States, today, with increasing attempts to demoralize and disorganize workers, deep cuts in education, and a more and more scripted, dehumanizing curriculum (at least for poor kids), it might be time to take another serious look at this history, and to look to the students of Soweto for leadership once again.

Citations

2. Ibid., p. 303
3. Ibid., pp. 306-307
5. Source: Hector Pieterson Memorial. Orlando West, Soweto, South Africa.
Traveling to South Africa just 20 short years after apartheid was abolished, I expected to find race to be the central issue of sociopolitical discourse. While questions of race are undoubtedly a key component to any discussion of present-day South Africa, I found the most pressing issues in the cities we visited to be globalization, urbanization and, most importantly, class.

We cannot talk about class, however, without talking about race. This is true in the United States, and it is certainly true in South Africa. It is (relatively) easy to draw up a new constitution in which race plays no structural part, but inequality and the legacy of apartheid permeate the entire makeup of South African society. Class structures do not just occur at random—they are the product of myriad factors. In South Africa's history, race has been the dominant factor in the determination of class, and this dominance was extended to extreme lengths under the Afrikaner system of apartheid in the latter half of the twentieth century.

This division was always readily apparent to us, but it became clearest when we drove through the country. When we arrived in “Jo’burg,” a bus took us to our lovely hotel in upscale Sandton. On the way we passed lush mansions that would not be out of place in Beverly Hills and, just minutes later, shacks slapped together with whatever was available—mostly tin and old tires. Every city has a township on the outskirts, and every township has a shantytown. The shantytowns house an ever-burgeoning population of disillusioned South Africans who migrated to cities for the promise of work and prosperity, only to discover that the jobs they sought had never existed. Despite the many relief programs the African National Congress (ANC) has created over the last 20 years, the country lost about 100,000 jobs each year throughout the 1990s and 1 million alone in 2001, while unemployment has bounced around from 30 percent to almost 50 percent in recent years.

Every museum we visited and every expert with whom we spoke told the same story of the anti-apartheid struggle as a struggle for racial justice, plain and simple. The poverty of the black South Afri-
cans was a symptom of the disease that was apartheid. Therefore, when apartheid was finally overthrown, there was a sense that the war had been won. Yes, there were problems, but things would get better because the basic infrastructure had been fixed. All that was needed was time.

Unfortunately, however, this has not proven to be true. There is a forgotten player in this story of struggle and victory—the South African Communist Party (SACP). For 40 years (1950-1990) the SACP and the ANC were allies. In fact, “after their flight into exile they came to appear almost as Siamese twins, inseparable without causing the death of one or both.” 3 There was significant overlap between their members and in their missions. In fact, the SACP clearly stated that its immediate objectives were the end of apartheid and the national liberation of South Africans from the oppressive colonial control of the Afrikaners. It saw the end of apartheid and establishment of a democracy as a fundamental step in the direction of a socialist South Africa. 4 Throughout the twentieth century the ANC became a more radical and working-class organization. The SACP, the ANC, and the SACTU (South African Congress of Trade Unions) were known as the triple alliance, united in their opposition to apartheid. 5

In its first two years of power the ANC adopted a fairly leftist reconstruction and development program, but quickly dropped it in fa-
vor of a “neoliberal growth, employment and redistribution policy” including privatization, deregulation and trade liberalization.\textsuperscript{6} By 1996, Thabo Mbeki, the second president of post-apartheid South Africa, had declared himself a “Thatcherite.” Taxes were cut for the rich, tariffs protecting unionized workers were abandoned and hundreds of thousands of South Africans had their water and electricity shut off and were even evicted because they could not pay their bills.\textsuperscript{7}

There is a general sense of progress in South Africa. As Tom Harms, our wonderful tour guide, told us again and again, “there are still problems but it’s getting better and better all the time.” And there are, of course, success stories within the black South African community—but only a few. Many today criticize the leaders of the ANC for living decadent lifestyles while those who put them in power still struggle to make ends meet. While there is the illusion of universal progress and the incomes of the top quintile of black South Africans have risen significantly, the bottom 40 percent are actually doing worse today than they were 20 years ago.\textsuperscript{8}

The ANC has largely abandoned its radical ties from its days in exile. This is understandable from a political standpoint—radical ties mean marginalization and the ANC was vying for political control in the 1990s. But the SACP and the ANC needed each other. Together, they painted a more complete picture of the struggles of South Africans; while the ANC focused on the emancipation of black South Africans, the SACP focused on the emancipation of the working class. By working together, they could see the overlap between the two—the majority of the working class was black, and the majority of blacks were working-class. Therefore, the parties’ interests were closely aligned. While the ANC has created relief programs and established affirmative action in education and employment, these measures are a drop in the bucket compared to hundreds of years of colonialism, exploitation, segregation and apartheid.

Karl Marx believed that history happens in stages, and that no subsequent stage could happen without the preceding ones. Socialism could not exist without capitalism existing first. What we see today may be the reverse. Perhaps a true capitalist democracy cannot
exist in South Africa without the country first undergoing a stage of socialism. South Africa is considered to be in a “post-apartheid” era. If one simply examines the country’s constitution, legislation and general political and legal structure, this is true. But the economic, social and political state of the country when this democracy was first established was a product of apartheid through and through, and the effects of apartheid continue to be apparent. Capitalism reinforces class structures—those who start out poor will become poorer, and those who start out rich will become richer. Capitalism may be colorblind, but people are not and the specter of apartheid lives on in the racially neutral reign of capitalism. The SACP has been largely forgotten in the story of struggle against and victory over apartheid. However, without radical redistribution of wealth, however, this is a victory in name only.

Citations


5. Ellis and Sechaba


7. Desai

8. Mattes
(Blackout. From the speakers comes the sounds of a chorus chanting, 
*Ha-Boh-Yah* 
*Ha-Boh-Yah* 
*Ha-Boh-Yah* 
As the lights slowly rise, the chanting fades out. Standing center is NYU Steinhardt Professor JUDYIE AL-BILALI. She addresses her acting class.)

**JUDYIE**: Good morning class! Today is the day of our big performance! I hope you have memorized your lines and are ready, and I hope you have invited people. It’s not much of a show if we don’t have an audience.

All right. Let’s warm up. Just start by breathing.

In. Out.

(Lightbulb) You know. I’ve been thinking a lot about the way in which you all seem to be obsessed with Harry Potter. I think that our obsession with these figures like Harry Potter, these powerful beings, is that they represent the full extent of human potential. We don’t watch because we like to see little boys and girls playing with wands. We watch because we see all that we can become. That’s what we are doing here. That’s what our theatre work is. It’s us reaching for our full potential as humans, and our full potential as a society.

Anyway. Breathe in. And out.

(RYAN WELDON removes JUDYIE’s wig and becomes himself.)

**RYAN**: Judyie Al-Bilali, my acting teacher, and her philosophies on life and theatre. She’s a theatre artist who worked for several years and founded a theatre company in South Africa. Knowing that I was going to be traveling to South Africa, I was drawn into everything she had to say. Our trip to South Africa was based around the theme of “Arts in Times of Social Change.” I went with the hope of finding examples of the theatre that actively played a role in social change. As an actor and theatre artist, I was searching for evidence of my art form as a valuable tool in social exchange. I thought, where better than South Africa, the home of Tony Award-winning playwright Athol
Fugard, and Grammy Award-winning singer Miriam Makeba, and the Grammy-Award winning composer for *The Lion King*, Lebo M.? Their performance work all spoke to a desire for change.

I remember sitting in the audience at a performance of *The Lion King*. Nala, as she faced exile from her home, sang her longing goodbye to her fellow lionesses.

(RYAN puts on a lioness mask, transforming into NALA.)

**NALA**: And where the journey may lead me
Let your prayers be my guide
I cannot stay here, my family
But I’ll remember my pride
*Fatshe leso lea halalela* (The land of our ancestors is holy)
*Fatshe leso lea halalela*
*Fatshe leso lea halalela*

(RYAN removes the mask.)

**RYAN**: How many South African artists were exiled from their homeland? How many expressed their longing to return home in their artwork? Well, as deep as all these heart-breaking exiles are, the first example that comes to mind when I think of leaving Africa is a less serious one.

(RYAN places on a blonde wig to become a MEAN GIRL.)

**KAREN**: So if you’re from Africa, why are you white?
**GRETCHEN**: Oh my god Karen, you can’t just ask people why they’re white!

(RYAN removes the wig.)

**RYAN**: That reminds me! When we stood in the South African National Gallery, we were introduced to the Museum Director, Riason Naidoo. We had been told that he was the first non-white Director. I guess we all just assumed that meant black. But then he came out, and he was obviously of Indian origin, and I thought, Why are you Indian? Oh my god Ryan, you can’t just ask people why they’re Indi-
an! I guess I jumped to a lot of assumptions about what South Africa would be like. First of all, I expected to only hear one song there:

\textit{Zamina mina eh eh} (Come)
\textit{Waka Waka eh eh} (Do it)
\textit{Zamina mina zangalewa} (Who asked you to come?)

This time for Africa

Running off the plane after we landed, I practically screamed, “I’M IN AFRICA,” and then burst into Shakira’s anthem for all of Africa! I had pretty much listened to that song the entire plane ride over—18 hours of torture.

SIBUSISO: 18 hours? That’s nothing! Try six years!

RYAN: Six years? Where were you going? Around the world... 1,000 times?

SIBUSISO: No. That’s how long our \textit{Train to 2010} took.

RYAN: Oh yeah, Sibusiso! Your play about South Africa preparing to host the World Cup! But, the play was only two hours.

SIBUSISO: Yes, but the amount of time it took for South Africa to prepare itself for the World Cup? Six years. That’s where my inspiration for the \textit{Train to 2010} came from. What happened to South Africans during those six years when South Africa prepared to show its best face to the international community? As an artist, it is my job simply to tell my truth, to tell what I saw happening in my country. In the theatre, we have to look backward in order to move forward. Unfortunately, what I found was that too many leaders were only looking forward, pushing the train faster and faster, not caring who was run over in the process. \textit{Train to 2010} gave me the chance to tell this truth. My truth.

RYAN: Traveling around Johannesburg and Cape Town, I kept coming back to Sibusiso’s words. I was an artist. What was my truth? What was I seeing here? I kept seeing so much art, so many different artists, but I was still waiting for that moment of inspiration. That moment that would scream \textit{THIS IS WHAT YOU HAVE BEEN LOOKING FOR}! Little did I know, my moment was just getting ready for me.

(The lights switch to illuminate a makeup table. RYAN walks over to it, transforming into PIETER-DIRK UYS. While PIETER-DIRK speaks he dresses himself for the role of EVITA.)

PIETER-DIRK: It’s the 1970s. South Africa is shit. I’m working as a
journalist, and there are all these rumors throughout the country about embezzlements, and thefts, and murders. Well, with all the censorship at the time, it was impossible for me to write about these facts. I mean, “rumors.” So I created a character. A woman who spoke these rumors as freely as she pleased. Under her guise I published monthly columns about the horrors of the government. The public fell in love with her, and soon, someone gave her the name, “The Evita of Pretoria.” Evita. I liked it. So, I chose the most common surname I could think of, Bezuidenhout, and Evita Bezuidenhout was born.

(RYAN, now fully dressed and made-up, has become EVITA)

EVITA: OH GOD! Please do not listen to that man. He is a disgrace to me. He mocks and makes jokes of a sweet, innocent lady like myself. I don’t know how many letters I have received from fans telling me that they are on my side. I mean, after all, I am THE MOST FAMOUS WHITE WOMAN IN SOUTH AFRICA! I have traveled to Australia, the United Kingdom, Canada, Holland, Germany and Scandavia. I have danced the toyi-toyi with Desmond Tutu in his garden. I have spoken about the evils of apartheid and the South African government, directly to their faces. And I have never been shut down.

(EVITA removes the wig to become RYAN.)

RYAN: Here she was. She came to me in passing. A brief comment made on a tour of Cape Town. I was fascinated. Evita was my favorite movie as a child. I could sing along, and knew it forwards and backwards. And here, here in South Africa, was a new Evita. A new Evita who stared into the face of apartheid and said, “It is time for change!” I imagined her in my mind, standing triumphantly as apartheid fell, and singing to her followers:

Don’t cry for me...South Africa  
The truth is I never left you.

(RYAN puts the wig back on, becoming EVITA once more.)

EVITA: Stop! Cut that nonsense out. Of course my work didn’t end when apartheid fell. Apartheid was a regime that killed people. Now we have a democratic government. And what does that government do? It just lets people die. Pieter-Dirk Uys, that crazy performance artists says, “AIDS comes when you come.” And all I can think is how can you make jokes about AIDS! (Begins to look through a box of ribbons) Now which one of these colors is for AIDS. Oh yes, red! But I’m wearing red. I guess I’ll have to change my outfit first.
(Lights dim on EVITA. As they rise RYAN is washing the make-up off of his face as he becomes himself again.)

RYAN: Standing in the mirror, I think: Of course Evita’s work couldn’t stop. After coming home, I immediately began researching her. It turns out that for two years after her creation Pieter didn’t perform her, but during that time people continued to talk about her, and be affected by things she had said. She wasn’t ever performed, but she was alive in the community. That kind of presence can never leave, and must always face the issues of the day.

It suddenly clicked. Performance becomes a part of our social consciousness, and when those vital characters latch onto our minds and our hearts, change becomes as easy as switching from a red dress to a blue one. Performance awakens a social awareness, and screams at people, “This character is a part of you! LISTEN! WAKE UP!” It reminds me of this song. Actually, a South African song. I’m sure you know it. So sing along. Or hum along if you’re too shy.

In the jungle, the mighty jungle
The lion sleeps tonight
In the jungle, the quiet jungle
The lion sleeps tonight

(The song continues as the lights fade out.)

Works Referenced

Before I visited South Africa, I knew that one out of every eight people in the country is HIV-positive, but I had to see it to believe it. I came to South Africa looking for evidence of the AIDS epidemic, yet I found very little in my everyday adventures. The epidemic in South Africa has flourished partly due to governmental inaction. During Nelson Mandela’s presidency, the government was largely silent about the disease. During Thabo Mbeki’s presidency, some government officials—including Mbeki himself—questioned whether AIDS was even a result of HIV. The paralyzing impact of the disease on the nation has been experienced directly by those who treat the sick. In South Africa, traditional medicine practiced by healers, or sangomas, and conventional medicine practiced by licensed physicians have historically been two distinct forms of healthcare. 

Sangomas practice healthcare methods that differ significantly from those of conventional physicians. Conventional doctors record patient histories, perform physical examinations, send samples for laboratory tests if necessary and dispense prescriptions. Medicine ingredients and possible side effects are made known to patients. In traditional medicine, the type of illness is revealed to the sangomas by the patient’s ancestors. Then, the sangomas determine what is making the patient ill without treating the symptoms. Medication is produced from natural products with no chemicals added but the toxicity of the ingredients is not usually known. Traditional healing focuses on the health of the mind and spirit as well as the health of the body.

I am fascinated by the idea of what can happen if these two realms of medicine work together. I want to imagine a healthcare system that is effective for everyone—rich and poor, villagers and city-dwellers. In reality, this integration has already taken place in many areas of need. In an effort to bridge the gap in AIDS education between rich and poor South Africans, sangomas throughout the country are being offered healthcare training to better diagnose AIDS and refer their patients to proper healthcare providers. Many of the healers once believed that HIV/AIDS was
a curse from the spirit world and that patients had been bewitched. Some claimed they could cure AIDS—and many who have not been trained still do. One compelling example of the ongoing effort to bridge the gap between conventional and traditional medicine is the relationship between Miriam Tembe, a local sangoma in South Africa’s Kwazulu-Natal region, and Zandile, a patient. Zandile came to see Miriam after her feet swelled and she developed a hacking cough. Zandile thought she had been bewitched by neighbors, but Miriam knew how to spot the symptoms of tuberculosis, which often accompanies HIV infection. She consulted the spirit world as usual, then sent Zandile for an HIV test. The results were positive. With Miriam’s support, Zandile began taking antiretroviral drugs and has regained her strength and health.

Despite Miriam’s HIV training, she is still a traditional sangoma who first and foremost consults the ancestors. Miriam sits on a mat on the floor of a dumba during one of her consultation sessions. Dumbas are rooms where ancestors are believed to reside, and during sangoma visits, these are the consulting rooms. Miriam looks intently at a pile of bones in front of her while beaded necklaces line her neck and a leopard skin cap sits on her head. The walls of the room are covered with customary sangoma tools, such as gourds, animal skins and strings of teeth. The cupboards within the room are Miriam’s own pharmacy, stocked with bottles and jars of natural powders and liquids. This image contrasts sharply with what I have always thought of as a doctor’s office. For a second, I think, How can this ever work? It’s not medicine.

Maybe it isn’t scientific medicine, but it provides many with comfort and attention, aspects of healthcare that don’t have to be administered by an MD. Sangomas offer advice, follow traditional customs, assure privacy and, most importantly, serve their community. I believe that sangomas like Miriam who have the trust of their communities are what South Africa needs most to overcome the HIV epidemic. If each village in South Africa had a sangoma who was trained to identify HIV and then recommend and oversee proper treatment of residents in need, the country would be well on the way to controlling the epidemic. The implications of this potential, and of the possibility that it could be realized, are incredible: longer life expectancy, fewer orphans, reduced poverty and, most importantly, less disease.

These potential outcomes have more often than not been consid-
ered impossible, specifically for the nations of Africa. But why? Having immersed myself in global public health and culture studies, I believe that culturally aware physicians will have stronger bonds with their patients and create atmospheres of trust and reliability. South Africa is blessed with two separate forces of healthcare: tradition and convention. Many villagers only have access to sangomas, so their health concerns never make it to hospitals and clinics. Imagine sangomas and physicians working together to form a network of communication that would address the needs of all citizens, no matter to what race they belong or from what disease they suffer. The training of sangomas is a small step in this direction, and soon, I believe, more integration will occur.

Medicine and traditional healing may not always agree in methodology or implementation, but I commend the South African government and people for understanding that both aspects of healthcare are important to their society. Sangomas are trusted within their communities and provide ritualistic and traditional peace of mind. If sangomas can then recommend conventional treatment, South Africans might be more likely to listen. At the end of the day, sangomas and doctors both want to save lives. If the gap between them is bridged, South Africa may imagine a day in which it is no longer known for having the world’s highest percentage of people infected with HIV.

Citations


“BE A MAN WHO IS NOT AFRAID TO KNOW HIS HIV STATUS”

Ryan Giggs Professional Soccer Player Manchester United
Somehow, for a second, I was stunned. It was not as if there was no reason for it to be there. In fact, once I got around to thinking about it, there was really no reason—no acceptable reason—for it not to be there. But the fact is I simply had not expected to find a Holocaust Museum in South Africa.

You may be surprised, as I was, to learn that South Africa’s apartheid system can trace its origins (at least partially) to the Holocaust. On Sept. 1, 1939, Adolf Hitler’s Nazi army invaded Poland, which at the time was an ally of Great Britain. South African Prime Minister Louis Botha and future Prime Minister Jan Smuts felt that, as a British colony, the Union of South Africa was obligated to side with Great Britain and its allies (including Poland) in any war, but many South Africans, particularly Dutch-descended Afrikaners who resented British colonial rule, wanted South Africa to be at least neutral, if not pro-Axis. In fact, South Africa had several groups whose members sympathized with the Nazi Party. Two of these groups were the “Greyshirts” and the “Ossewabrandwag” (OB), or “Ox-Wagon Guard.” Members of these organizations “adopted the Swastika badge, gave the Hitler salute, [and] threatened death to the Jews.” By 1940, the OB claimed 250,000 members. Eight years later, these groups would help sweep the pro-apartheid National Party into power.

To be sure, apartheid and the Holocaust have several key aspects in common. Both systems were based on racism—Nazism on the “ideals” of anti-Semitism and Aryan supremacy, apartheid on the more general goal of white supremacy. Both systems disenfranchised and dehumanized their often unarmed victims, on whom they relied heavily for cheap labor. Black South Africans earned very low wages working for their white oppressors in mining, manufacturing, and agriculture, while the Nazis used Jews and other concentration camp prisoners as slave laborers in farms, factories, and mines to advance the Nazi war effort. Both South African blacks and European Jews provided cheap labor for many companies which are still internationally recognized today, such as IBM, Ford, and Bayer. Additionally, just as Hitler’s army invaded several European countries, the South African government interfered with and committed acts of
sabotage against the governments of several neighboring countries to prevent perceived threats to the apartheid system.\(^5\) On the bright side, however, both European Jews and South African blacks were supported and assisted by people who were not victimized the way they were.\(^6\)

However, there are also many significant ways in which apartheid and the Holocaust are different. The main differences between the two are that Hitler and his Nazi party sought to exterminate the Jews, who made up only a small minority of Germany’s population (505,000 of Germany’s 67 million people when Hitler came to power in 1933), while South Africa’s apartheid government sought to disenfranchise and exile—but not eliminate—their country’s blacks, who made up a large majority of the population (almost 11 million of the 16 million living in South Africa in 1960).\(^7\) In addition, South African leaders were more nuanced in their rhetoric than the Nazis, giving speeches on “multinational development,” “plural democracy,” and independent “homelands.”\(^8\) But perhaps the most significant difference between the two systems of oppression is that the apartheid system eventually collapsed on itself thanks to multiracial resistance and the efforts of F. W. de Klerk and Nelson Mandela, among others, while it took a world war to prevent Hitler and his regime from exterminating the Jewish people.

From the victim’s perspective, one of the major differences between apartheid and the Holocaust is that while the Jews could not effectively fight the Nazis, black South Africans could and did resist the apartheid government through violence, organization, and passive resistance. In his workbook for high school students, “Strangers in Their Own Country,” educator William Bigelow quotes a film called Afrikaner Experience as saying that South African whites “[have] needed black muscles to work the land for [them] but [they have] always lived in fear that those same muscles would one day take the land from [them].”\(^9\) Black South Africans and their allies attempted several times to use this dependence and fear as a weapon in their fight for freedom. Another major difference was that South African blacks also had a country to fight for, while even if they had been able to fight, the Jews had no homeland, no country of their own to fight for the founding of Israel.

The ending of each conflict
gave its victims a new lease on life, as it were. In 1948, the state of Israel declared its independence, giving the Jewish people a land to call their own after thousands of years in the Diaspora. Jews started new lives in Europe, Israel, and the Americas. In 1994, South Africa held its first democratic election, electing Nelson Mandela its first black President, and shortly thereafter adopting what is widely regarded as the world’s most liberal constitution. The state of Israel has never really known peace, and many South African blacks still live in shantytowns (as we saw firsthand), but the two nations seem to be on the right track.

The end of each conflict also brought a chance for its victims to punish their oppressors and to gain reparations and reconciliation from them. The Allied forces, in taking over Germany immediately after the war, attempted to de-nazify the country by removing high-ranking Nazis from public office and reforming lower-ranking ones. In October 1945, the International Military Tribunal began what would come to be known as the Nuremberg Trials, in which Nazi officials were tried for war crimes and crimes against humanity. Although, by many accounts, this tribunal was not completely successful in bringing the Nazis to justice, it did serve as the foundation for several later reconciliation proceedings, including South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission. This commission, chaired by Archbishop Desmond Tutu, was convened to hear the stories of the
oppressors and the oppressed and to make recommendations on retribution and reparations.\textsuperscript{12} And although the Committee may, as some claim, have been plagued by scandal, it has still been used as a blueprint for reconciliation proceedings in several countries.

In addition, and perhaps most importantly, museums and memorials to these two systems of oppression have been built around the world. Museums and memorials to periods of history such as the apartheid era and the Holocaust can be great things because they help to ensure that the events that took place during these periods remain in the public memory. They also enable future generations and other groups who did not directly experience these historical events to gain an understanding of what life was like for those who did live through them.

However, like everything else, museums do have some drawbacks, but these seem minor when compared to the service they perform in keeping the events they memorialize in the public memory. One may argue that learning about an event in a museum distances one from the reality of the event. To this argument, I would reply that time can do the same thing, as it can be very difficult to truly grasp the reality of an event that happened even a few decades before, even for someone who experienced it firsthand. One can also state that because museums have limited budgets, they cannot afford to preserve all existing artifacts from a particular historical period. I would counter by arguing that if there were multiple museums to a certain era, these museums between them would be able to preserve almost all important artifacts of the era in question, and perhaps even to lend them to each other. Finally, one may argue that events such as apartheid and the Holocaust are too tragic to be contained in a museum. I would answer that no matter how tragic a period of history is, it would be even more tragic for society to forget that period of history, and that almost anything is better than nothing at all.

An Apartheid Museum has been built in Johannesburg, South Africa, and having visited it, I can say that it is tremendously informative and well worth the trip. Holocaust museums have been built in countries ranging from Argentina to Australia.\textsuperscript{13} It makes me very glad to see that there are so many different Holocaust Museums all
over the world, but it saddens me that there is only one Apartheid Museum. I believe that more Apartheid Museums should be built all over the world so that people worldwide can educate themselves about this horrible tragedy, and so that nothing like apartheid or the Holocaust can ever happen again.

Citations

5. Bigelow, XI-XII.
8. Bigelow, 44.
9. Ibid., IX.
10. Crowe, 409-413.
11. Ibid., 397.
My intention is not to draw superficial lines between the history and contemporary societies of South Africa and the Republic of Korea (ROK)—I could not impose models of comparison if I tried—but I do desire to make loose connections between the two nations on the basis of their both being late-developing nations with a recent history of colonization. My motivations are perhaps self-serving in that what I am trying to answer has more to do with figuring out modern South Korean society for myself and understanding my place as a Korean American. Nonetheless, I was drawn to South Africa for a reason, and during my stay my reaction to the country was hugely influenced by the prevalence of the connections between it and South Korea. The two are, of course, drastically different even in their shared experiences: namely, the South African narrative of colonization is a relatively familiar and deep rooted one, while that of ROK is one of East colonizing East. In South Africa, race has become a Sisyphean boulder; in South Korea, colonizer and colonized look the same and share much of the same culture, as well as a largely peaceful history with respect to each other. The West has had a different impact on each of these nations, but both nations have been pushing, and will continue to push, themselves through a sieve of Western ideas, perhaps without an understanding of what they are seeking. The observations presented here reflect my concerns with modernization and contemporary social tensions. The process of writing this is as much a method of self-reflection as it is a proposition of questions concerning the contemporary circumstances of the historic tension between East and West.

There remains a distinct hint of shame which touches a once colonized people, urging them to be proud because they have nothing else but pride, like a child unable to reason passion. This is the only way I can describe the presence of collective memory in South Korea. I always detect a trace of confusion in older generations: why did this happen, and how? A close memory of a whole, independent nation is not possible in Korea; the nation was colonized by Japan in 1910, marking the end of its last
dynasty. After colonization came the Korean War and the 38th parallel, a line drawn on a map by two American colonels. With such a history, its present population understands helplessness. However, they are not a helpless people. In less than half a century, South Korea’s economy and industry have expanded dramatically, and modernization, or perhaps an ability to compete with the West, is clung to as a source of pride. The same seems to be true in South Africa, which did not unilaterally seek to adopt Western culture but instead grappled with reclaiming its identity as an African nation.

One of the most difficult components of the South African identity to comprehend holistically is its relationship to its continent. There seems to be more community within specific cities than across the entire nation, more of an urge to reach across Africa than to establish nationalism: from the way South Africans identified so strongly with anybody who was African, regardless of where on the continent they were from, to the way the cities seemed to present themselves to tourists—as truly African cities, as facets of a whole—there was a sense of unification that was difficult to pinpoint, perhaps more so for me as an American. I have to wonder if this collectivity is also possible in Asia, or if the continent has too many nations within itself at which to point a defensive finger.

The lounge and the restaurant in our hotel in Johannesburg were called “The Lords” and “The Colony,” respectively. This suggests that South Africa’s experience as a colonized nation may not be not a fresh wound; indeed, during my time there I could not discern a popular collective sentiment toward colonization—the descendants of the colonizers are as South African as those of the colonized, and the hatchet of European colonization of Africa seems to have been buried. Apartheid, not colonization, is the wound in South Africa that bleeds like the Japanese occupation of South Korea, of which the memory of the Other, the Lord, the Colonizer still stirs violent tremors of grief. Perhaps the trauma of race in
South Africa can be likened to the division of North and South Korea, which is a tale of torn families more than it is one of a radical communist anomaly. When I was in Seoul last summer, I asked several people what the popular conception of the North is, and every single person’s first reaction was to say that North and South Korea did not choose to be separated, and the South is not so anxious about the North as the rest of the world may be. South Korea does not see its northern neighbor as the Other. South Africans—at least black South Africans—seem to have lost the Other with the end of apartheid. I cannot imagine how South African society has adapted to this change, partly because I cannot imagine modern South Korea without Japan.

The trees in South Africa remind me of those in Korea; pleasant and light, and not as formidable as the pines in my hometown in California. In Korea, one of the present dangers is the loss of a reverence for nature, which at times seems a condition of modernization; but there is still an understanding of Korea as a mountainous land, a small yet vibrant landscape with cold beaches on the east and warmer beaches on the west, with islands dotting the horizon on which people still live with an understanding of nature as an uncontrollable, life-giving force. Agriculture quilts the countryside, and some of the most satisfying experiences involve driving through tunnels underneath mountains and onto winding dirt roads to arrive at a small restaurant nestled in a forest which serves food taken from the mountain itself. Perhaps because we spent most of our time in South Africa in large cities, I felt the same danger of a changing relationship between man and nature, especially in light of the bounty of resources. Nonetheless there is still something to be felt of an older, maybe more worn, relationship with the environment. As in South Korea, this connection seems stronger among lower classes. Both countries, however, still define ‘resource’ in a broader sense than does the West, in a way that embraces the place of humans in an extra-human system.

Korean society is structured on a specific, venerable fabric—the double-edged sword of Confucianism and its ritualistic, communal tenets inevitably clash with and are at times forced to cede to modernism. Thus when my parents visit their homeland they cannot understand the society they left, and what made the nation theirs is...
no longer entirely present. There is growing disparity and confusion between generations, and a strange need for Confucianism as a can-
on to coexist with the aversion some modern Koreans have toward such an anti-Western creed. The South African nation and its contin-
ent are completely foreign to me. I do not know what the people of this land hold dear, and I do not know what has been forced to fade for the sake of “progress.” I do not even know if such values are accessible by those living in the country today, for it has such a long history of oppression by the West. What were the pre-colonial inhabitants’ ideologies, and are they in any way still relevant? What marks this society? If there is nothing there, then is this society more “suited” for modernization? Is this society less vulnerable to the social scars of following capitalism and industry? Is there any reason for South Africans to protest development? In Korean society, it has always seemed that a space exists between ancient and modern in which we can either rest to understand the defining social behaviors, or find tension caused by rapid economic development. Is there such a space in African society? What defines its current population, other than the recent struggle?
I'm Just Doing My Job
Sophie Elias

I’m Just Doing My Job is a photograph of two women eating tripe off the body of a nude woman. The picture is a bit jarring, partly because it is so simple—the characters seem very natural, and the background is blank. It is the work of Zanele Muholi, created in response to a hotly debated incident in which Kenny Kunene—a wealthy South African—threw a party and served food on nude models. “I ate sushi off a black girl in Johannesburg. In Cape Town, I ate it off a white girl,” he boasted. Asked to comment, one model said, “I’m just doing my job.”

Muholi was one of the South African artists who fascinated the Albert Gallatin Scholars most as a group. The goal of her work, as stated on her website, is “mapping and archiving a visual history of black lesbians in post-apartheid South Africa.” When we met her,
she surprised many of us with her claim that lesbians in South Africa need to dress the part, in an overtly masculine style, recasting what may seem to be a superficial decision—what clothes to wear—into a vital statement. For Muholi, all art and all expression is political.

Indeed, most of the art we saw in South Africa confronted important issues very directly and intimately. Some of it was slapping satire, such as Anton Kannemayer’s cartoon-style *Alphabet of Democracy* (X is for Xenophobia, T is for Tutu, C is for Cultural and Historical Verse, NOT Hate Speech...),\(^3\) while other work was photojournalistic—particularly the pictures we saw at a photography workshop in Johannesburg, which examined themes such as urbanization and immigration.

The idea that all art is political has many adherents in our culture. Still, when I hear that art must “aspire to a complete and radical reconstruction of society”—as Andre Breton, Diego Rivera and Leon Trotsky wrote in 1938—do I have any idea what that might mean?\(^4\) Maybe I’ll make a poster that says “HOPE,” or stand up on Open Mic Night and drop a heated spoken-word poem on Islamophobia. Will I be saying anything new, or getting anything done?

In the museums and galleries of South Africa, however, there was a sense of purpose. A gallery director we met in Cape Town argued that European and American artists have lost sight of the role of politics in art, while in South Africa it remains obvious and urgent. I was standing next to a Kannemayer portrait of President Jacob Zuma entitled “F is for Fat Cat,” and I had to nod my head in agreement. It suddenly seemed so clear: This was a society in which art really was crucial.

However, my instant appreciation of his idea is far too shallow. From the comfort of the United States, we observe the struggles of faraway countries, and we brand them with their difficulties. You say “Africa,” I think of starving children. Is this okay? It’s not a new question. As I hail the artists of South Africa for their political engagement, I project my own notions of African problems onto them. I now realize that there is a more effective way to hear that gallery director’s words. We need to examine the way we define Africa; and furthermore, we can’t sit back and admire South Africa’s use of art without questioning how we define our own.\(\Rightarrow\)
Citations

A symbol of the diversity of the “rainbow nation,” the jersey of the South African national football team is composed of eleven different threads. Each thread represents one of the different national languages of South Africa. This jersey represents the new South Africa. Where the Apartheid violently suppressed diversity, the new South Africa prides itself on its diverse citizens. Still struggling to break the notions of segregation instilled in people through the Apartheid, many obstacles remain for the South African people. The pride of the nation is its diversity, its rainbow appearance. The following photographs represent a small portion of the individuals that I met—people who, I believe, speak to the new South Africa.
Abu, Mujie and Tauriq, Bo-Kaap, Cape Town
Garth, Cape Town
Lana,
Stellenbosch
We’ve all felt that need to sing in the shower, to belt out whatever song perfectly matched our mood. This singing is therapeutic—it can help us feel better about our day or work through our emotions. However, it is rare that we’ve felt the need to sing in public, to “embarrass” ourselves by raising our voices in song when others can hear us. In America, the right to sing in public is only gifted to those whom the masses agree have talent. In South Africa, singing is a much more equal-opportunity activity. Song has been used, over the years, to move people to action. A good example of this is South African President Jacob Zuma’s association with the song “Umshini Wami.” The title of the song translates in English to “Bring Me My Machine Gun,” and the song was a popular fight song in its day, although it is now sung at political rallies supporting him. As literary theorist Liz Gunner writes: “The presence of ‘Umshini Wami’, once publicly performed by Zuma, became part of a widening consciousness of song as a catalyst for popular debate in the South African public sphere. The discussions it triggered took place under trees, at bus stops, in taxis, shebeens, coffee shops and bars, as well as in the electronic and print media.”

In South Africa, song was a way to gather forces and give everyone a part in the rebellion. The fighters of apartheid would gather people in large rooms and lead them in song and dance to energize them for a fight or a march. The power of song, underestimated in most of the world, is fully utilized in South Africa. In America, we may compare this to “Lift Every Voice and Sing,” the so-called “Black National Anthem” that activist James Weldon Johnson wrote as a response to Jim Crow laws and the racism of the 20th century. Singing the song was a way to unite people and encourage their fervor. Everyone has a voice and uses it. It is interesting to note the change in the usage of song over time. Before leaving for South Africa, we watched Amandla, which focused specifically on the music of the revolution in South Africa. This film documented the use of music in the fight for freedom and equality. There were many memorable scenes of morale-boosting group song sessions. There
were cuts to images of children singing “Kill the white dogs” and people singing as they marched and danced the *toi toi* (a dance meant to intimidate with chanting and foot stomping). Despite the vivid imagery forced upon us by these lyrics, one must look past the violence to the bigger understanding—even the toddlers wanted freedom from oppression.

The fighters took songs and made them their own, adapting them for their own purposes. This tradition has carried through to the present. In an article about Miriam Makeba and Hugh Masekela, two prominent South African musicians and freedom fighters, William Kinnaly wrote, “Music is the medium through which Makeba and Masekela convey a deep attachment to South Africa, their homeland. Every word they sing, every note they play reveals the traditions and history of the land from which they’ve been exiled.” Until she died in 2008, Makeba continued to sing about the hardships of South Africa.

During our trip to South Africa, we visited Soweto (short for South Western Townships). This is where Nelson Mandela lives, and although slightly better off than other townships, Soweto still held an overwhelming amount of impoverished black South Africans. This township had one tourist-friendly street, and Mandela’s house, which drew in tourist revenue. The people lived in one- and two-room homes with only basic amenities. Along Vilakazi Street, peddlers had set up stalls in an attempt to sell their “traditional African goods.” While walking through the township, we were continuously approached by children asking for money in exchange for a song. They were happy for even the smallest denomination of rand. The songs they sang for us were a mixture of popular American songs and traditional African songs. I was personally struck by one young boy who asked to share his song with us. As he sang, in a mixture of English and Xhosa, he created a beat on his chest with his hand. After finishing his song, he explained that he had created both the song and its lyrics. The lyrics sung in Xhosa meant “God save Soweto” and asked for blessings for the people. This young boy had seen the
suffering of the people around him and composed a song to spread their stories. He sang his song to us in hopes of both earning money for his family and telling other people of the suffering he witnessed.

The actions of this young boy mimic the actions of the revolutionary leaders of the past. They created songs, usually when in exile, to spread hope and messages of success. The power of song to move people is still strong today. The young boy who sang to us hoped that we would be moved by his song of suffering to give money to help him ease the burdens on his family. It is interesting to note that the usage of song has changed from a rallying cry to action to a tool to extract money from tourists. However, even in the latter form, song is still powerful and I felt compelled to give money to this child. The tradition of song has been passed down through generations, and though it has changed form, it has never lost its power. Song gives everyone a voice and a way to express their concerns, and the tradition of using song to obtain one’s desires continues.
Our group’s visit to the Workers’ Museum in Newtown was one of the most shocking—and the most inspiring—moments of my personal experience of South Africa. This workers’ compound, refurbished and opened as a museum in 2010, was built in 1913 and housed municipal electric workers, artisans, and domestic workers until 1976.¹ The laborers, mostly native African farmers, had traveled from what were now called their “homelands,” leaving their families behind, to earn enough money for a plough, cattle, firearms, or anything else that might help the future of their family and farms. Because of the rapidly changing South African economy, vast migration to industrial areas, and new laws restricting the settling of African families in urban centers, mining or municipal labor became one of the only ways for men living in rural areas to support their families.² Migrant laborers lived under miserable conditions with strict rules and no rights; they had no choice, but it didn’t mean they had no voice.

As we walked around the cramped concrete bunk beds, assembly-line toilets and showers, and the horrifying punishment room where workers would have buckets of ice thrown on their heads or experience similar humiliation and pain, one room caught my attention. It was filled with song: displays of musical instruments from the compound, lyrics of songs composed by the workers printed on the wall, and recordings of some of these folk songs playing on overhead speakers. In the songs, the laborers promised their families they would return; they spoke of the beauty of their farmlands and homes; they lamented their daily tragedies; they dreamed of mutiny against their abusive employers; they yearned and cried. One curator’s explanation, below a display of a handheld concertina, read: “Songs, music, and dance helped migrants bridge the gaps between their lives in the city and in the rural areas. The rhythms in the music often integrated the repetitive sound of people walking.” According to the texts in this particular room, the wistful songs about lost families and homes seemed to help the migrant workers build a sense of shared experience and empathy, while the songs about rebellion and the hardships of hard labor helped make daily life tolerable.
The most famous form of music to emerge from migrant labor compounds was *isicathamiya*, a type of Zulu call-and-response song performed by an all-male choir. The style, including the chord structure and harmonies, is believed to date back to the turn of the twentieth century, inspired by minstrel and vaudeville acts that traveled from the United States to perform in developing South African cities. The choral and harmonic qualities may also have roots in rural Christian missions, where native South Africans were encouraged to learn hymns. But the lyrics and the signature foot-stomping rhythm that accompanies *isicathamiya* remain faithful to the rural Zulu tradition, making the genre symbolic of the constant awareness of the laborers’ distance from home, as well as the conflicted feelings about assimilation into an urbanized environment.

“Siyolila Sonke” (“We Shall All Lament”), a song written by the *isicathamiya* choir The Durban High Stars, expresses both mourning and a call for action:

**Leader:** *Sikhala...*
*We are yearning...*

**Choir:** *Sikhala ngezwe elathathwa yizizwana.*
*We are yearning for our land, which was snatched from us by foreigners. Zinayo indawo yokulala elizweni lokhokho bethu. These foreigners are now residing in the country of our ancestors.*

**Leader:** *Wozza!*
*Come!*

**Choir:** *Woz’ woz’!*
*Come, come!*

**Leader:** *mSuthu...
Sotho...*

**Choir:** *mSuthu nomXhosa hlanganane! Sotho and Xhosa, unite!*

**Leader:** *Nani... And you...*

**Choir:** *Nani maZulu hlanganane! And you Zulus, unite!*

**Leader:** *Elizwe... In the land...*

**Choir:** *Elizweni lokhokho bethu. In the land of our ancestors.*
Competitions between these choirs, often held in spare rooms of community centers or hostel basements, have provided a creative outlet and entertainment for migrant workers over the past century. Certain choirs, such as the Evening Birds and the Crocodiles, gained considerable popularity for their compositions and skills; some choirs were even given record deals. As with any genre of folk music, the subject matter of popular isicathamiya songs shifts with the political climate, and the tradition of these songs provides a unique insight into the lives and emotions of a systematically silenced and oppressed group. One of the common themes has been the strange limbo in which the workers are caught. They must adapt to an urban environment while attempting to maintain their Zulu identities. “Vela Mfowethu” (“Reveal Yourself, Brother”) expresses the guilt and conflict that a worker might feel:

Kunje! Kunje! nje mfowethu!
   It’s bad, bad, brother!
Washiya ikhaya kanye nabantwana.
   You left your home and children.
Yasuk’insizwa.
   The gentleman went away.
Yayosebenza eGoli.
   He went to work in Johannesburg.
Yafik’eGoli kukuhole kunjena,
   He found good things in Johannesburg,
Yabalahla bantwana ekhaya.
   But he deserted his family.
Obuyel’ ekhaya mtaka baba!
   Go back home, brother!
Izingane zilala zingadlile mfowethu.
   The children go to sleep without food, brother.
Of South African choral singing during times of political strife and oppression, Abdullah Ibrahim, a world-renowned jazz musician from Cape Town, has said: “The thing that saved us was music. So the music was—it’s not even what we’d call ‘liberation music.’ It was part of liberating ourselves.” Although Ibrahim was not discussing isi-cathamiya, the connection between the folk music of migrant laborers dwelling in hostels and those songs being sung at street protests is vital: while music can change the world, it also tends to change us. Isicathamiya and other genres that were sung in compounds like the one we visited gave a voice and a sense of dignity to abused workers and—because single-sex labor hostels still exist in South Africa today—continue to be a creative expression of Zulu tradition in urban transition.

Citations

In trying to prepare myself for our trip to South Africa, I found that I didn’t really know what to expect to see once we arrived. On some level, I think I was working with the misguided stereotype of Africa as an exotic land, totally removed from the Westernized world that I know. But on another level, I was aware of the naïveté and almost patronizing ignorance of that view. So I was stuck at square one, and could only guess that there would be some mix of the exotic and the familiar. Though my guess turned out to some extent to be right, I found that I was still surprised by what we saw.

The bus ride from the airport when we first arrived in Johannesburg gave us a lot to take in. Looking out the window, I could see Shell stations, car dealerships and KFCs galore, scattered indiscriminately between townships jam-packed with rusty, aluminum-walled huts. My immediate reaction was one of surprise at how Westernized the city was. At the time, I knew there was something off about my assessment, but I couldn’t put my finger on it—and certainly in retrospect, ‘Westernized’ doesn’t seem like quite the right word.

Globalization is definitely old news, but I believe we’re much more aware of it now than we’ve ever been. I check the MSNBC and BBC World News apps on my iPod about a million times a day, so I can see what’s happening in the world as soon as it happens. The age of waiting to read the news of the day in the evening newspaper is over. At this point, globalization is beyond inevitable. Everything that’s produced anywhere becomes the property of the world. Should we be surprised to see people in South Africa wearing jeans, drinking Coke and downloading music on their Macs? If it were a different day and age—perhaps, but I think we’re moving into the era now where we should be surprised not to see these things when we travel the world.
So many people are still hung up on this antiquated idea of the “American Dream” of blue jeans, television and Coca-Cola. I admit that, until recently, I was one of them. Newsweek columnist Fareed Zakaria speaks in his 2008 article, “The Rise of the Rest,” of “post-America.” This is an essential point in the discussion of globalization. From what we experienced in South Africa, and what I’ve noticed while traveling in Europe and Australia, things that we once believed to be uniquely American have lost their novelty in the eyes of the rest of the world.

This principle of globalization works just as well in reverse. American audiences have adopted foreign celebrities such as Hugh Laurie, Audrey Hepburn, Nicole Kidman, Shakira, Justin Bieber and countless others, oftentimes without even considering their foreignness. It’s not that we don’t know they’re foreign—it’s just not something we think about. For most of us, a movie star is just a movie star. Not an English or Australian movie star. Just a movie star. In the same way that in South Africa, a Coke is just a Coke. Not an American Coke. Just a Coke. Zakaria is right in his insistence that these “once quintessentially American icons have been usurped by the natives.” So really, the concept of “Americanization” or “Westernization” has become obsolete as globalization has picked up speed.

The play Train to 2010, and a lot of the art we saw in South Africa, spoke to some of the inequalities apparent in South Africa. In the rush to prepare for the World Cup, the nation fast-tracked development projects to make the country look pretty for the world media that would soon be pouring in, but clearly left a lot of people in the dust. Globalization is great—but its cost can be just as great. According to many of the people we met on our trip, the hype and enthusiasm leading up to the World Cup was fantastic, but has died down significantly now that the tournament is over. It might be too soon to tell what the ramifications of the World Cup will be, but one can only hope that South Africa will not get caught up in the rat race of Westernization, especially in a time when “Westernization” has evolved into “globalization,” and will happen of its own accord in good time.
THE (AFRICAN) SKY
Willie Almack
Sometimes, the sky was too big:
we of skinny bands of overcast,
we shivered in it, with it.

The first night it opened itself up,
formed an uncertain mouth of peach sunset,
found me through the sleepy gray tint of a bus window,
and mollified me as it does its children.

I took a photo of a KFC.
I took a photo of a popsicle wrapper with a lion on it.

It was at its most capacious in Soweto,
streaked with cirrus stretch-marks,
straining to contain what rustles below:
an infirm firmament.

I could not take a photo of them.
I didn’t shudder at the shutter,
I didn’t even lift the lens.

All was half-wild, half-tame...
We raced, in pursuit of a rhinoceros,
churning the soil with charred rubber.

Not a glance at us.
American animals loom in the road:
this one crossed it.

We were chased, chasing, by some scruffy Afrikaners.
“All that driving, just for a...?”
He spoke English, but like our guide,
his word for the animal was different,
more intimate, nearer to something undisclosed.

That word now roils at the top of my skull
like smoke beneath a ceiling.

I took a photo of the sky.
It possessed me and I possessed it.
I want to bring something back to the United States, something that is distinctly “South African”—whatever that means. I want to find a souvenir that is one of a kind, that has a story, a history, an identity, a level of authenticity above the mundane items of most gift shops and markets.

I look in the museums. I see photos—too common, there are probably millions of these same images floating around. I see books about art, culture, protest. Too expensive, too removed from the place. I can get them on Amazon. Prints, posters, key chains and T-shirts clutter the stores. Do I need another shirt? Does anyone I know need another shirt? If I want to support these museums, maybe I should just donate. I buy some postcards. Some prints. No keychains.

I look in the big markets of Johannesburg. Everywhere there are masks, animal carvings, South African soccer jerseys, fabrics, clothing, CDs of African music, Big Five T-shirts. I ask where this mask is from. “Zimbabwe,” he replies. This elephant carving. “Mozambique,” they say. This cloth. “Ghana,” she answers. Above me is a giant sign. It says, “This is Africa—We Bargain” in bold letters for every hungry tourist to devour. Is this Africa?

I look in the giant malls that are springing up over the larger cities. The looking does not last long. The malls are no different than those back home. The big brands dominate. People eat in food courts between purchases. Multi-level, multi-floored complexes. One mall is called Nelson Mandela Square. I’m not sure if I will bump into him here, but I keep my eyes open. There is a poster of a woman’s leg. Different brand names imposed over it. The poster tells us to brand ourselves. I leave without branding or buying.

I look in the hotel for a free souvenir. Soap, shampoo—authentic enough for a gift? Towels, linens, magazines. All the same. Nothing authentic or special. I decide to keep looking but take some shampoo for future showers.
I look on the side of the road. A market by a waterfall. We stop to admire the view. The usual assortment of animal figurines, bowls, fabrics, vuvuzelas. A friend directs me towards something different. Plastic bottle art. Twelve or fifteen strands of recycled bottles, tubs, containers make a semi-permeable refuse curtain. I can’t buy the whole thing. How will I fit it on the plane? I buy one strand. 50 Rand. It is crumpled in a plastic bag above my head on the bus. To whom will I give this? “Here is my recycled art project from South Africa.”

I look in the national park. What makes a better purchase than something natural, rugged, primal... The shirts are too expensive. I cannot afford a safari hat, and I also do not feel qualified to wear one. I want a lion’s face on something. That is my mission. I cannot find the right gift. Too many cartoonish animals on too many tacky goods. I buy a popsicle and water. A national park and a theme park are not that different.

I look in another large market, this one in Cape Town. Animal carvings, masks, soccer jerseys. Animal carvings, masks, soccer jerseys. Animal carvings. Masks. Soccer Jerseys. I don’t want to bargain. I want something real. Everything here I have seen everywhere else. A friend points me in the direction of more recycled goods. This time it is a radio made of bottle caps, wires, bits of metal and some kind of circuit. She plugs it in. It works. Do I buy? The bus is leaving. I’m running late. I don’t know. The price is high. She offers it for less. The price is still high. The bus is still leaving. I am still late. He buys it. Does that mean I have to? I can’t say no. I feel bad. Why is that? Does buying this really help anyone? Will it work in the United States? Will I ever even think about it again? I buy it.


I am home. The United States. The photos have been given away. The postcards, sent. The bottle art lies in a plastic bag crumpled in the other room. I will hang it up soon. Once the snow melts. Probably. The recycled bottle cap radio lies lifeless on top of my stove. I don’t know how to make it work. I haven’t really tried. I’ll figure it out. It’s my only African souvenir.