

## FROM BERKELEY TO SOUTH AFRICA: FRAGMENTS

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“You know and understand too much to be going about looking for rainbows.” - Richard Wright, *The Outsider* (1954)

“God gave Noah the rainbow sign,/ No more water, the fire next time.” – Spiritual, “Mary Don’t You Weep” (19<sup>th</sup> C.) via James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time* (1963)

“Happy 20 Years to Our Rainbow Nation” – Coca Cola advertisement, billboard on exterior 20+ story building, downtown Johannesburg, South Africa (2014)

### DAY 1

Friendship and Childhood: In a conversation between Achille Mbembe and Ahmed Kathrada, anti-apartheid activist, one of threads that emerged in this first stop on our quest to understand the struggle against racism and the fight against apartheid in particular, was the importance of friendships and other forms of kinship not tied to blood. In this, for Kathrada, the experience of childhood is a crucial moment for the formation of these kinds of relationships, across lines of race, religion, etc. This is certainly a part of my own upbringing in Berkeley, California. Some questions: how do or can institutions precede or succeed these connections? How can institutions, laws, etc. prevent them or produce them? What is the relation between these personal, informal, unregulated relationships and official social structures that can enforce inequalities or equalities?



... & ...

Had Jimi Visited Joburg the Haze Might Have Been Yellow: The videos I’ve seen of Joburg, always 1970s and 80s depictions of apartheid and anti-apartheid movement, depicted a sky, an air of yellow haze, heavy, suggesting the weight of apartheid, the dust kicked up by the enforcement of apartheid and the struggle against—reminiscent of filmic depictions of 1970s and 80s LA with less brilliant sunshine. Sun City in a haze. I took this to be the quality of videotape. But upon arrival, the haze existed, though I learned that it did because of the lack of wind in the winter, the pollution of cars and also from the mines that surround the city. After an unexpected rain, I got a glimpse of clear bright blue skies—but like LA, the haze returned quickly.

Here in Joburg we are housed at the Wits Institute of Social and Economic Research (WISER) at Wits University (the University of the Witwatersrand). The origins of the university are related to mining in the area, and gold mining near Joburg that made the city wealthy. There is a very strong history of engineering at the university—the science of mineral extraction, and the buildings on campus still reflect that research and education (as do some of the office buildings downtown, where huge billboards advertise the “community”

benefits produced by the work of AngloAfrican, a major mining company).

Joburg scenes:

beautiful graffiti

lunch in Maboneng, local gentrification scene

downtown Joburg as Downton L.A., circa 2004 (before takeover?)

small business on the streets, hair shops, cell phone shops, restaurants

folks shopping, socializing, standing

except for Maboneng, no white people walking on the street

Museum Africa, housed in an old market hall

exhibition of documentary photography, “The Rise and Fall of Apartheid: Photography and the Bureaucracy of Everyday Life”.

a small room of artistic responses to apartheid, the great work of South African painter Gavin Jantjes

... & ...

“The Soweto Bus Tour”: The experience of the bus we will be traveling on is an interesting one. On this first evening, during introductions by the organizers at the welcome party, they spoke about the idea of the mobile workshop, its possibilities for thought and discussion. And they put on the table what I had wondered about after our first bus ride through downtown Joburg that day—the prospect of the gaze of ghetto tourism. The example of the tourist who comes to see Soweto, the site of antiapartheid resistance, watching from the bus window, is our measure. In one sense, the nature of our undertaking resists such a gaze, one that consumes without engagement and self-reflection. In another, it seems nearly impossible, especially for folks like

myself—new to South Africa, without depth of connection, American and white—to avoid completely such a trip. And this would be/has been true, not only here but in almost any instance when one’s very presence in a place makes inequalities visible, whether symbolically or actually. Which is to say, it doesn’t matter whether I was born and raised in Berkeley, CA, when I ride my bicycle through South Berkeley, I wave the flag of gentrification and displacement. Such are the consequences of inequalities that we struggle to comprehend, to see.

Mexico vs. Netherlands: The Netherlands beat Mexico, scoring twice in the last five minutes, finally on a penalty probably undeserved. The urge to interpret this result when we are in South Africa, when we talk about the importance of Zwarte Piet in Dutch society and identity...

... & ...

Thinking about the Family: The question presented by the seminar is that of the non-racial: how to envision a world that is not racial, in which race does not structure our lives, producing and reproducing inequalities local and global. In part because I am away from my family, from my wife Sonia and son Lucien, whom I think about all the time, I have been thinking about my own family and the non-racial. In one way, we are living post-racial lives, in the aftermath of race. But this post-racial is only a dream; truly it means that we have made our way to whiteness. Perhaps only the names suggest something else: the Abramowitsch and Manrique most clearly, but even the Christie and Stromberg if one were to go back far enough. Arrival to whiteness of course does not mean the end of racial identity, but it does mean to live a life in which racial identity increases rather than decreases access to the protections and

opportunities provided by government institutions. But we must be clear that struggles against racism cannot simply work to deliver everyone to the status of what whiteness currently provides—because that can never happen—intrinsically, these institutions protect racial discrimination even if they don’t like to admit that race exists as an identifying or determining factor in life. If we are to pursue an idea of the non-racial, if we must think beyond the idea of deliverance to what already exists, and must think beyond the narrative of progression suggested by my grandparents, from Nazi Germany to the realization of freedom, equality, and access in Berkeley, CA. Surely: drop me, my last name, my ancestry in some neighborhoods in Eastern Europe or in the wrong house in Germany, Holland, Denmark and we might see that my arrival is provisional. Indeed, there is no with-time arrival from racism and there never will be. So we must work against racism to make the alternative.

## DAY 2

An opening question about racial terminology:

The anti, the non, the post (anti-racist, non-racial, post-racial)...

Are these not competing terms but part of a process, linked in our thinking about race: from antiracist struggle, to thinking about nonracial social organization, and forward to post racial futures?

For an American like myself, without a great deal of knowledge (yet) about the long struggle against apartheid in South Africa, the “non-racial” is a very confusing, somewhat troubling term. There is too much that it seems to want to cover up... or is that I have been

conditioned to see too much of what is not—or does not have to be—there?

## DAY 3

Angela Davis: “We need to rethink workings of racism—the racist functioning of the apparatus even in the absence of the usual actors.”

We arrived late on Tuesday after a bus ride made much longer by the process of crossing the border from South Africa into Swaziland. It took a while, and what made it strange is that this wasn’t because of particularly tight security. Leaving South Africa, our passports were glanced at individually, matched to faces. But entering Swaziland, at night, meant that passport control was an open caravan, one door open and no line. It reminded me of a food truck. People pushed up to give 5 passports at a time, which the officials took fairly randomly. They took passports into the caravan, stamped them, and passed them back out, not always in the same groupings or to the same person who had given them in the first place. The connection between body and passport was non-existent. After reclaiming our passports, we simply walked across the border with no other checks, only a guard watching on. The whole experience reminds me that the passport is such an arbitrary document. Despite the computer chips and other “security” features, in the end it’s still just an identity card that has a limited relationship to our lived identity and breathing body—the bones, blood, muscles, brain that walks, talks, and moves from one country to another.

On Tuesday and Wednesday night, we stayed at Mlilwane Nature Reserve in Swaziland, an independent country/kingdom Northeast of Johannesburg. It is surrounded primarily by South Africa, but also

has borders with Mozambique and Botswana. On the grounds of the lodging and the road in there were wildebeest, springbok, and warthogs. The rooms cone or half-egg-shaped cabins; stick framings and straw covering for walls. The apex of the cone about 15 or 18 feet high. With only a small door, they were very dark inside, and something about the darkness and the circular structure of the room helped me to sleep very well.

#### DAY 4

Poems from Wopko Jensma, *Where White is the Color, Where Black is the Number* (1974). A white South African poet and artist, he wrote in the various languages and idioms of South Africa.

“Fear Freedom”:

after freedom struck my country  
after the thousands dead  
i am the only one left  
the only one to know  
the only one guilty  
the only one to resist death  
before my people’s bones  
before flowers of freedom country  
  
before my people knew no nothing  
before flowers were flesh  
i am the only one  
the only one with no gun  
the only one no one suspected  
the only one  
after my eyes were burnt out  
after remains of whitewashed bones

... & ...

Jensma also wrote poems that reached beyond the South African context. He wrote poems, in English and Afrikaans, for Malcolm X, John Coltrane, and Thelonious Monk, among others, and some poems in a kind of American blues vernacular. And this in particular made me (and some others) uneasy with the idea of a simple celebration of a poet “transcending” race or speaking/occupying a variety of voices, especially considering the long history of the white uses of black speech/music/culture. Here’s the first section of “Black Bottom Stomp”:

she sings her sorrows no more  
no booze bottles

ma rainey dear—  
my black-rim hat don’t fit  
my head’s polluted with grief

also my *binsey poplars*  
all felled, felled, are all felled  
gone

mama, da bleeding moon  
cuts no ice, split no dice—

bloody bustin—oh hell  
if i died her  
oh yea, my day’d neva eva end

This poem and the others dedicated to black Americans in the 1960s also raise questions about Jensma’s source of inspiration and material. During the Black Arts movement in the U.S. there were many, many poems

about Coltrane and Malcolm. So many that there exists in the terminology of Black Arts scholarship, “the Coltrane poem” and “the Malcolm poem.” According to the South African History Online website, Jensma exhibited his art in NYC in 1968, right in the midst of the explosion of Black Arts activity (the massive anthology *Black Fire*, edited by Amiri Baraka and Larry Neal, was published that year). This small clue, begging for more research, suggests so much. Jensma’s case is fascinating because of these contexts and influences, what they produce and allow. Personally, those poems in his “own” “voice”—that of a white South African—are much more powerful, much more resonant than any American-style blues poem.

#### DAY 5

bus ride swaziland to durban  
sugar cane all over the place...

bus discussion, a few notes/thoughts:  
Angela Davis: the BPP not only black people—yup, yup, a history neglected  
the non racial and ventriloquism  
roles asked to occupy when speaking—speech as performance  
a personal archive—place in history, to own their/our own history  
what kind of criticism are we about? important to have care about the people who we bear witness to  
intimate violence and political violence—the relation between  
how did books circulate in apartheid South Africa? (thinking also about Dolores Goddefroy’s amazing record collection)  
an emotional approach

troublesome, but not in a bad sense  
my thoughts: all power to the people  
search for human encounter involves a risk  
the fact of not wanting to know  
interrogate indifference  
vulnerability  
finding the self in the black consciousness

... & ...

prawn shack tunes call to mind vacationspot, anytown,  
anycountry—costa rica, florida, hawaii: the macarena,  
jump around, etc.  
missing my family much much

... & ...

a few beers at blue waters hotel in durban—miami  
beachfront?  
listening to poet richard quaz roodt talk about work-  
ing in downtown Joburg—the drug called nyope all  
around, craziness...

## DAY 6

At the BAT centre in Durban, the evening.

Activist Ashwin Desai, came of age in the Black  
Consciousness Movement, identified himself as a Black  
South African, in Black Student Unions, etc.: “I’ve nev-  
er felt more Indian than I do now, after Apartheid.”

Desai: “what did we do wrong, in this beautiful strug-  
gle, recognized all over the world?”

Durban site of multi-ethnic alliances against apart-  
heid—thinking about multi-ethnic coalitions and alli-  
ances in the Bay Area in the 1960s and 70s... the role of  
black thought and blackness in each...

... & ...

End of the night: Brazil won, but Neymar kneed in the  
back: his world cup over, nearly paralyzed... joy and  
pain in another rainbow nation...

## DAY 7

This morning I saw the sun rise over the Indian Ocean.  
I ran along the waterfront, where people were out early  
(6:30): swimming, running, biking, playing volleyball,  
playing soccer, walking, praying, fishing.

As it emerged from the horizon, the sun glowed red,  
hazy, full, diffused into the sky, grey, yellow, blues,  
purples.

Despite the midcentury beachfront high-rises with  
names like Las Vegas or Blue Waters (the name of  
our hotel) the beach feels open—open to Durban. Just  
behind the oceanfront strip are more high-rise apart-  
ments, no shacks certainly, but working people.

Driving around Durban, the persistence of colonial and  
apartheid architecture, buildings, monuments is very  
noticeable. One wonders, when you try to remake a  
society, to undo the structures that have existed, that  
have oppressed and privileged, that have made un-  
equal hierarchies, how the landscape holds onto what  
came before. Even if new monuments and buildings are

constructed, the streets, parks, and spaces remain. The  
thinking remains. Think, under apartheid: separate  
walkways and entrances, parts of the hospitals, distinct  
breaks in city neighborhoods. The thinking remains.

One of the most interesting aspects of the connec-  
tion between apartheid-era and post-apartheid society  
is the way that anti-apartheid spaces differ in these  
two periods. We visited the Rainbow Restaurant on  
Saturday afternoon for lunch. Located in Pinetown, a  
suburb of Durban, a transfer point between the city and  
the country. The Rainbow is a jazz club founded in the  
late 1970s early 1980s by Ben Pretorius, born into an  
Afrikaaner family, and Billy Mthembu. Pretorius spent  
time in London, listening to music, attending Linton  
Kwesi Johnson and Bob Marley concerts, and only de-  
cided to return and remain in South Africa after being  
convinced by a friend that he could start a business  
and use music to support the fight against apartheid.  
Throughout the 80s, the Rainbow hosted jazz musi-  
cians from South Africa and elsewhere, and provided  
one of the few social spaces for black and white South  
Africans to be together. Because of pass laws and cur-  
fews for black South Africans, the Rainbow was a day-  
time joint. And that legacy remains. When we visited,  
we came for lunch, the place was absolutely packed—  
the clinking of beer bottles, the bass, drums, voices of  
the music pointing toward what would be late nights  
in the U.S.

But what is the Rainbow now? With music, with  
the possibility of interaction and mixture across ra-  
cial lines, during apartheid the Rainbow made an ar-  
gument for the Rainbow nation—a society of equality,  
inclusivity, interaction, free from personal and insti-  
tutional racial discrimination. On Saturday afternoon,  
our group from the JWTC entered the Rainbow, and  
we did so with the appearance of the rainbow realized:

international, multi-racial, female and male, queer and straight. And certainly we entered a space in which we were an anomaly. Predominantly male, and almost exclusively black (national and tribal differences aside for the moment), there were few if any South Asian or white people—the Rainbow founder and the current owner/manager being the white exceptions. Though I am not sure what the Rainbow looks and feels like on other days, the fact that regulars wanted not only photographs with us but *of us* suggested to me that our group seemed to the regulars a real surprise: a rainbow in the Rainbow.

When the rainbow—the trademark of this nation and the dream of people around the world, such as those in my home in the San Francisco Bay Area—is a surprise, what does that mean? And when it is a reality, even an expectation—in those hip, multi-racial pockets in Joburg, London, New York, or the Bay Area—what does that mean?

The work of the JWTC bus is to say this: our dreams of possible futures must not assume the rainbow or the absence thereof. Our work is not to sit in the Rainbow on a Saturday afternoon and look for the beginning or the ending of the rainbow; these do not exist. Our work is to see more clearly the drops of water through which the rainbow appears. This is the first step. The next must come from this knowledge, but it won't come from a seminar room in a university, or even from this bus of intellectuals and academics. It will come from minibuses and public buses from Pinetown to Oakland, California—buses as our jazz clubs and homes of the rainbow. Our last stop: the Rainbow Restaurant in Pinetown. Next stop?



## DAY 8

on the bus

through kwazulu natal

to the bantustan of the transkei

accepted independence from south africa in 1970s  
great deal of soil erosion, ex-homeland areas poor soil,  
much soil erosion,

development policies tend to be urban oriented, still  
not much potable water here

dual authority - traditional system has legal and de  
facto authority with municipal structures for services  
much corruption

weather changes from rain and humidity to blue cold  
skies and

the scenery spectacular

brown plains, now forests, canyons, mountains, farms,  
concrete block houses, colored pink, mint green, beige,  
white,

now the sun through the clouds, blue sky

very brown landscape wyoming? montana? colorado?  
the western, the indian, the cowboy, the settler, the  
frontier (see stagecoach at Museum Africa, Spur Steak  
Ranches restaurant chain)

trailblazers...

random thing here: on hair shop ads, photos showing  
the variety of hairstyle choices, rapper Ludacris shows  
up very often for the close cut caesar with intricate  
sideburns and goatee

relation between anticommunism and apartheid; cuba  
and angola/mozambique relation; cuba and mandela's  
release

mandela's house

sliding stone with others.

the sky, the landscape

sharing the personal relation to mandela: mine? a  
schoolkid in berkeley?

the beer? what was it called?

music on the bus, singing

## DAY 9

A few thoughts on interactions:

who speaks? how often? to whom? for what purpose?  
to what end?

who speaks from personal experience? how? for what  
reason?

what are the politics of race and making theory? how it  
is made? for what end? Barbara Christian and the race  
for theory?



theorizing through music, through poetry, through the essay, through dance/performance?  
trying to theorize through personal experience without centering that experience and having it dominate/colonize the ideas  
how do we theorize?  
where does the urge to speak come from?  
how do local contexts open/constrain identities and consciousness? what produces white boys, black boys, etc. in South Africa? In Berkeley, CA?

## DAY 10

We arrived at the Steve Biko Center in Ginsberg, King Williamstown on Sunday Night. Ginsberg is Biko's hometown, the black township, literally on the other side of the tracks from the middle-class neighborhood in King Williamstown. We stayed at a Hemingway's Guest House (pictures of Hemingway and his house in Cuba in the dining room, but no evidence that he came through the area—I'll have to look that up, as it would be interesting to place Hemingway in South Africa). The center is the home of the Steve Biko Foundation, which was established in 1998, the year after the 20th anniversary of his death while in detention in Johannesburg. The center itself opened only 18 months ago, with conference rooms, an adult and children's library, a theater, amphitheater, bookstore, cafe/bar and museum (mission: "memory, discovery, action").

This morning (Tuesday), some others and I walk from Hemingway's to the SBC early, so we could make a quick visit through the museum. As with every stop on the trip, time was short, but I was able to skim through it. The museum traces not only Biko's life but the development of his thought in the context of a longer history of diasporic black political thought.

One interesting detail was that Biko kept a copy of Stokely Carmichael and Charles Hamilton's *Black Power* next to his bed. The relation here is a fascinating one, and it becomes even more so in the context of Xolela Mangcu's talk later that morning, which mapped the intellectual history of black political thought in South Africa since the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

One of the most emotionally affecting parts of Mangcu's talk had to do with the current landscape



of the university in South Africa. For example, the racial demographics of the University of Cape Town University are striking. UCT is the most internationally renowned university in the country, and yet in a country that is about 80% black it remains majority white in terms of students and faculty. Mangcu, in the sociology department, made the point that the curriculum is similarly constituted, and he has been working to reframe a history of the discipline to illustrate (at the very least include) the tradition of black intellectual and sociological thought in South Africa.

The curriculum seems to reflect the state of investment in arts, culture, and education on the part of the current South African government. (The Biko center was funded almost entirely by private capital. This point is not a small one.) The situation makes a forceful case for Black Studies in South Africa. Not simply a study of black people, but a discipline in the tradition of 1960s Black Studies: always political, always anti-racist, always interested in the consequences of scholarship beyond the academy. (Of course the particular strategies of working toward that mission must be rethought and redesigned for the present. We stay blind to changing conditions and the need to adapt at our

own peril. And to transport a discipline wholesale from one place to another is naive, impossible. But it is an interesting question to think about how Black Studies might function in a majority black country. What work could it do? For whom? How? Whatever the answers might be and whatever the shape of a South African or global Black Studies might be, the need for an explicitly anti-racist, future-oriented discipline, grounded in the long tradition of Black intellectual history, is clear.

... & ...

Knysna for the night  
brazil v germany: total destruction

#### DAY 11

Morning walk in Knysna to heavily policed waterfront suburb, that looked like any grey, waterfront town-houses in the world. One road in one road out: black people walked or came on buses in; white people drove new cars out. Locked gates and bridges to reach residences. Surrounded by fantastic yachts, upscale bars and restaurants, real estate shops, boutiques, boating and water sport shops.

... & ...

from Knysna to swellendam (dutch architecture) for lunch; from swellendam to cape town  
to fruit district, then wine district  
farm lands, mountains, settler areas—the cowboy, the rancher, etc.  
from brown, poor soil in the east to green and productive here in the west  
the landscape of development, etc.



#### DAY 12

walk from hotel Inn at the Square up government ave, through park past parliament to hiddingh campus, UCT

Final open discussion: relation between the personal and the structural as a dominant thread of thought...  
A mandate, a move forward, a manifesto as a culmination of the workshop: possible? what would it look like?

lunch at miriam's kitchen

... & ...

black popular culture  
Gina Dent plays/thinks through gregory porter “there will be no love dying here”  
Neo Muyanga traces the history of “revolting music”  
black popular culture as a way to link the personal and the structural  
black studies (global) as a site/sight from which to engage these concerns



black studies as interdisciplinary, as political, as antiracist

quick walk down to Centre for the Book  
Angela Davis  
sitting on stage as the choir, the parliament, the hype women and men  
the command, the humility, the optimism, the joy, the clarity of thought  
from maracana, trayvon, israel/palestine apartheid, the kissing case, so many connections  
the shock of racism  
the exception and the quotidian

dinner at the turkish restaurant... a lot of love and thanks going around

#### DAY 13

Elliot played this for us:  
When the lights shut off  
And it's my turn to settle down  
My main concern  
Promise that you will sing about me  
Promise that you will sing about me



I said when the lights shut off  
And it's my turn to settle down  
My main concern  
Promise that you will sing about me  
Promise that you will sing about me  
- Kendrick Lamar, "Sing about Me, I'm Dying of Thirst"  
(2012)

... & ...

on the bus from kalk bay back to cape town:  
given the choice to go back to district six either through  
white left suburbs or through edge of townships, think-  
ing about either privilege or punishment, respectively.  
isn't this choice in itself a problem as if privilege and  
punishment don't exist everywhere. what is ghetto  
porn in the archive?

rare for cross-class interactions, for folks who don't live  
in townships to go there: sometimes family of new mid-  
dle class arrivals remain; social services or academics  
who work, study in townships, etc.

electricity for sale in shops—the meter in the house,  
voucher provides a number that you enter into the me-  
ter for more juice

what can we learn from the hood/slum? how? why?

i fell asleep during the hood tour, and wasn't the only  
one—significance?

lack of trees in these spaces, the electric wires as um-  
brellas or christmas trees radiating from posts

...&...

district six museum, in a church, stained glass win-  
dows—a secular, holy black space.

maps, poems, banners of sewn fabrics.

thinking about land reclamation as more than land but  
as memory—what is the role of a museum?

#### DAY 14

going home

shuttle driver talking about craziness of the minibus  
drivers

i asked about laws for car seats and children, he told a  
story about a woman who was breastfeeding and driv-  
ing, got into an accident and killed both herself and  
child.

driving past townships and shacks, i asked about the  
new apartments with solar water heaters on the roof  
next to a neighborhood of shacks. shuttle driver (not a

white man) said: "i don't like those people. they have  
money but don't want to pay rent. they have every-  
thing. they steal electricity, satellite tv. they don't want  
to do anything. i don't understand them."

... & ...

at airport, ruha, angela and gina all on my flight from  
cape town to joburg on mango air. we collected our  
bags together and navigated back to the international  
check in gates, where we exchanged hugs, well wishes,  
and said goodbye. the ordinariness of this errand, this  
collective move through the airport was very meaning-  
ful for me. i found those moments of basically casual  
interaction, the mundane act of gathering suitcases, or  
moving from one lecture to another, or simply standing  
at the sliding stone as mandela once did to be a very  
powerful part of the trip for me. the solidarity of our  
task, the two week intersection of our paths in life and  
on that task—my ability to observe, listen, and learn—  
provides me with inspiration and energy, provides me  
with confidence. interesting thinking about ruha and  
gina, who listened, didn't speak much in our whole  
group discussions. this speaks to me as a scholar. the  
power of our critique depends on our ability to listen  
and listen closely. as we waited for our luggage, i told  
the three of them that i appreciated having the oppor-  
tunity to learn from them, and that it meant a lot to  
me. ruha thanked me for the poem i wrote, that form  
of sharing. "we all have our gifts to give, i guess" was  
my reply. this was a fortunate sendoff for me—a closure  
that was clearer in terms of the work i hope to do, the  
minds and approaches i hope to model myself after, to  
contribute what I can. clearer than the closing discus-  
sion, the last day of the workshop, the idea of a man-  
date or manifesto, than the party even.



... & ...

i'll miss the argentina-germany world cup final: i'll be  
in the air. thinking...