

## My Experience in South Africa after Apartheid, 2001\*

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### ABSTRACT

“Apartheid is a unique “Africaaner” word that means “separation”; describes the systematic and control of a racial group as part of government policy. The system “apartheid” was established by the Dutch, since 1623, on the Cape region in South Africa. The National Conservative Party of the Republic of South Africa, formed by whites (English and Dutch) in 1982, coined the term apartheid”. Segregation had been a fact of South Africa’s life before blacks took power in 1994, when Nelson Mandela became President of the nation.

Three Post-Graduate US students and I, as participants of the *Alliance of International Research Program* (Brown University), sponsored by the Ford Foundation, attended a special two-week seminar and training on the African region, at the University of London, School for African and Oriental Studies (SOAS), in Great Britain in 2001. Afterwards, we arrived at the University of the Western Cape in South Africa to pursue a two-month research on the development of a migrant labor museum in the township of Lwandle in Cape Town. The townships were created by apartheid on the margins of its cities, and today are perceived by the government as key areas in which to bring black South Africans into mainline tourism. Other interesting academic and social activities were accomplished during this time. It was a great experience.

### RESUMEN

“Apartheid” es una palabra única que significa separación de personas para el control de un grupo racial como parte de la política de gobierno. El sistema “apartheid se estableció por los holandeses desde 1623 en la región del Cabo en Sur África. El Partido Nacional Conservador de este país, formado por blancos (ingleses y holandeses), en 1982, acuñó el término “apartheid”. Segregación ha sido una realidad en Sur África desde antes de que los negros tomaran el poder en 1994, cuando Nelson Mandela vino al poder como presidente de la nación.

Tres estudiantes post-graduados de Estados Unidos y yo participamos en la *Alliance of International Research Program* de Brown University, auspiciado por la Fundación Ford, en un seminario y entrenamiento especial sobre la región de África por dos semanas (University of London, School for African and Oriental Studies (SOAS), en Gran Bretaña. Después fuimos a la Sur África (University of the Western Cape) a llevar a cabo

una investigación por dos meses sobre el desarrollo de un museo de inmigrantes trabajadores en el barrio pobre de Lwandle en la ciudad de Cape Town. Estos barrios fueron creados por el gobierno y las industrias privadas en los márgenes de las ciudades, y se perciben en el presente como lugares claves para que los negros de estos lugares puedan participar del turismo del país. También el grupo llevó a cabo otras actividades académicas y sociales durante la estadía en el país. Fue una gran experiencia.

Key Words:

South Africa, University of the Western Cape, “apartheid”, townships, Lwandle

Palabras clave:

Sur África, University of the Western Cape, “apartheid”, barrios pobres, Lwandle

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### **Introduction**

Apartheid is a unique “Africaaner” word that means “separation” that describes the systematic separation and control of a racial or ethnic group as part of government policy. The National Conservative Party of the Republic of South Africa, formed by right wing whites (English and Dutch) in 1982, coined the term apartheid. Segregation had been a fact of South African life long before blacks took power in the 1990’s. The system, apartheid, was in place in the country in 1948, but was actually a copy of what the Dutch established at the Cape in 1623 and what the British did to the inhabitants of the Cape Colony at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century during the Boer War (1899-1902) between the British elite and the Afrikaners to re-establish and secure British pre-eminence in the region (Ross, 1999). From then on, “apartheid” governed every aspect of national life. It was one of the most organized systems of discrimination against blacks the world has ever seen. It produced and maintained inequalities in human development, education, health, mortality, life expectancy, work, wages, and other aspects of life. Apartheid functioned for the benefit of the white employers of unskilled, undifferentiated labor. But, in the long term, the strategies for the maintenance of white rule through apartheid could not match the strategies for survival among its victims the blacks (Worden, 1994).

South Africa is a country with a dual identity. With the last vestiges of apartheid finally abolished in 1991, South Africa was heading to a multiracial democracy and racial integration. Nelson Mandela, a lawyer, was released from prison at Robben Island in 1990 by the President of South Africa F.W. De Klerk, after twenty seven years. Mandela was elected President in South Africa’s first all races election in 1994 as head of a nation in which the scars of the past were temporarily hidden (Mandela, 1994). South Africa’s new status of democracy after apartheid has not being perfect, considering that an institutional injustice like that is not easy to overcome. Since 1994 up to the present, South Africa has had four black presidents, Nelson Mandela (1993 Nobel Peace

Laureate), Tabo Mbeki, Kgalema Motlanthe, and Jacob Zuma. Still, many blacks resent whites' continued privileges, some whites feel the sting of lost power. Black Africans number 79% of 50 million people in the country, 9% are white (the majority English and Dutch), 9% are mulattos or "colored" and Hindus, 3% are Asians and Muslims. The nation has 11 official languages, including Zulu, Xhosa, English, and Afrikaans. The speakers of the Dutch Creole known as Afrikaans, make up 5% of the population. English is used for business, education, and government (Worden, 1994).

The legacy of apartheid in South Africa was harsh, and its effects were becoming noticeable with the soaring criminality and with the highest rate of HIV virus in the world. Unemployment has been growing, with the resultant poverty and the state of the economy, and government's lack of delivery on policies and promises. The divisions and malformations of apartheid, the racism of some whites, the sexism of males, were all too obvious and present, and came out of the past. It is a country with a violent political past. To this time, material wealth continues in a few hands. Three fourths of the South African people live in limits of a third world country and the rest of it in first world country conditions. Nevertheless, the economy is growing. But it will be a long time before the inequalities of the past are removed. The benefits of the new order are slowly reaching those who need them, and this slowness causes considerable frustration, predominantly in townships (Stutchiffe, 1992; Mandani, 1992). But things are turning around. Not long ago I read, in the *Mail & Guardian* on line newspaper of Cape Town ([www.mg.co.za](http://www.mg.co.za)) that a white South African had asked for asylum in Canada because of racial discrimination in his country.

"Despite remarkable progress since the end of apartheid, South African history is badly wracked by AIDS, criminality, and severe wealth inequalities, with a leadership still fixated on racial struggle", expressed the North American scholar Jeffrey Herbst (Herbst, 2000). On the other hand, the South African economist Anthony Ginsberg, who after studying in the United States returned to Cape Town to work, stated, "South Africa has within the ability to transform both its image and its role. With resources beyond its needs, South Africa could become to Africa the dynamo that energizes and drives their countries ..." (Ginsberg, 1998).

### **The Alliance of International Research Program**

The participants (five U.S. researchers and fifteen U.S. students) of *The Alliance of International Research Program*, sponsored by the Ford Foundation, at Brown University, attended the prestigious University of London (UK), and the School for African and Oriental Studies (SOAS), which is the only higher education institution in Europe that specializes in the study of Africa, Asia and the Middle East. There we attended a special seminar and training on the African region for two weeks, to provide the group with an overview of the countries (Namibia, Tanzania, Ghana, Zimbabwe, and South Africa), and a better understanding of the one we were going to visit.

The focus of the seminar was the history, language, health issues, arts, and culture of these African countries through lectures, pictures, films, videos, and maps; including the visits of museums, archives, libraries, historic sites, and a walking tour of “black” London. SOAS has the privilege of being located nearby the British Museum, one of the best in the world, and the British Library. We visited the African Collections of the British Museum, Tate Museum, The National Gallery, and Dalí Museum. Evenings and weekends consisted of cultural and social activities related to Africa, arranged to allow participants with ample opportunity to become acquainted with each other, and with the lecturers. Most of the spare time during weekends was spent in visiting African immigrants’ neighborhoods and restaurants, other museums and the theater for which London is famous.

### **Research on the Township of Lwandle, Cape Town, South Africa**

As expressed by *The Alliance of International Research Program*: “This research is a continuation and a more focused theme that was initiated in 2000 on the development of a migrant labor museum in the township of Lwandle. The townships were created by apartheid on the margins of its cities, and are perceived by the government as a key area in which to bring black South Africans into mainline tourism.”

Our group, three students and I, after a twelve-hour direct flight from London to Cape Town, arrived at the University of the Western Cape (UWC) in the region of the Cape in South Africa in the summer of 2001. The University of the Western Cape,

considered one of the most important public universities in the country, was established in 1959 under the direction of Desmond Tutu, first-negro Archbishop of the South African Anglican Church, and Peace Nobel Prize in 1984. It had 15,000 students, the majority black, 7 faculties, and 38 departments. The Department of History had 12 permanent professors at the time, most were white. The physical facilities that the University offered to the students and faculty were excellent and unexpected to the foreign visitor. The numerous buildings in the campus were impressive brick structures with everything you can expect of any first class university in Europe or the United States. It caught my attention the music you hear all the time from the first floor of the huge inviting Students' Center, since the place was equipped with musical instruments for the students to play as entertainment. On the second floor there was the cafeteria and lounges for students, and the medical facilities; on the third floor there was the restaurant and lounges for professors and other employees with a splendid view; a theater, conference rooms, and a travel agency. The striking library was so appealing with three ways to reach its four floors: elevators, stairs, and a walking ramp, that reminds me the Guggenheim Museum in New York City. All the recent publications were on exhibit, and you could browse them without restrictions. There was also a bookstore at the library. Our residence, in the campus of the University, for the three students and me, was a beautiful modern one-floor house with three bedrooms, equipped with all the comfort and things you needed. The cleaning and maintenance of the property was in charge by the Administration and Maintenance Office of the University.

My participation on the research of the township of Lwandle, was principally supervising the students who worked in the research program. They were three U.S. Post Graduate students from different universities, and three Post-Graduate students from the University of the Western Cape (UWC) and the University of Cape Town. Other partners taking part in the research were the curator of The Lwandle Migrant and Labour Museum, two professors of the History Faculty of the University of the Western Cape (UWC), and one professor of the Architecture Faculty of the University of Cape Town (UCT), which is a first class private institution.

The title of the research project was *New Developments in the Heritage Sector in South Africa: Township Programs, Community Museums and the South African Heritage Resource Agency* (Nettleton, 1990). Moreover, the research group was going to work on the concentration for social, economic and political transformation, which included working with the residents of the township. The research lasted two-months, and was pursued at government and private institutions in Cape Town as: Lwandle Migrant and Labour Museum and Archives at the township of Lwandle; Somerset West Council Municipality; UWC Mayibuye Centre; UWC Main Library; South African Library; and the University of Cape Town Main Library. Others were: Liebenberg and Stander Engineering Office; Government Planning Office; Strand Municipal Council and Strand Police Station; and the District Mail Newspaper Office.

The research group attended the initial meeting for the discussion of the research to be accomplished by the group, and participated in the Research Proposal Workshop offered by the University of the Western Cape at the Lwandle Migrant and Labour Museum. We also visited the most important museums in Cape Town: South African National Library; South African Museum; The Castle (The East India Company Quarters); The Slave Lodge of the South African Cultural Museum; District Six Museum; South African National Gallery; and the South African National Archives. In like manner, the research group visited The Robben Island Museum, Nelson Mandela's cell, and Cape Point, as part of the activities programmed for the research. Besides, we discussed at the Department of Architecture of the University of Cape Town the setting of the research exhibition which was going to take place at the Lwandle Migrant and Labour Museum in the township of Lwandle at the end of the research.

### **Purpose of the Research**

The purpose of the research of the township of Lwandle was to find out the history of this community which was established for males in 1958 when hostels were instituted by private industries and the government as instruments for the control of migrant black workers who arrived in the Cape area. Lwandle was established for these workers in the nearby fruit and canning industry, occupying a small confined space, with an entire block

sharing rudimentary ablution facilities. Facilities were not provided to sustain the increased population. The research was focused on the three main sites which constituted this community: The Hostel, The Beer Hall, and The White House (“Wit Huis”) or the Police Station. The government wanted to eliminate what they called “black spots” located in the “white sectors” of the country, and the local industries wanted the workers to live in the townships. Lwandle was part of the urban planning when apartheid was implemented, when townships were created by apartheid on the margins of the cities. Lwandle was named a “native location”. “Native locations” for single males were seen as a way of satisfying the needs of both industry and the government. These locations were buffer zones, of surveillance and controlled access, and isolated the “native location” from the “white towns”. Lwandle is 30 miles or 40 km. from Cape Town, and to walk to downtown is far, even though you see people walking from the township to downtown, mainly to work.

The history of the mapping of Lwandle covers the period of more than 150 years from the time when it was part of a farm to more recent times when hostels were transformed into houses. Many of these maps were instruments for the control of migrant workers who arrived in the Basin of Cape Town in the late 1950s and early 1960s. This research and its final exhibition utilized these maps, diagrams and architectural plans housed at the Government Planning Office in Cape Town to explore the effects of this form of representation in Lwandle’s history. The three sites (the Hostel, the Beer Hall, and the Police Station) were identified on these maps. The purpose of the research of these sites was to find out their importance and meaning based on the information, stories, and images of the residents of Lwandle. This information deranged the validity of official maps where people were merely placed in locations which were crucial in the changing life and landscape of Lwandle. One of the aims of the research and exhibits at the Lwandle Migrant Labour Museum was to encourage the residents of Lwandle and the local government of Cape Town the continual process of reliving and re-mapping Lwandle in the near future.

Beyond that, the hostel system was introduced in South Africa by the private industries and the government as a strategy of urban control and as a means of lowering



the costs associated with African labor of black migrant workers. Life in the hostel became a struggle for the residents because of the overcrowding, lack of privacy, poor sanitation, need for recreation, isolation, and deficient infrastructure. While these conditions constrained social life, they also laid the foundations for political mobilization, culture of unity, resistance and creativity. Despite the terrible circumstances which people lived, they developed new and strong holds and fellowships, and were crucial for finally procuring the end of apartheid. With the onset of democracy in South Africa, the ANC (African National Congress), the majority party in the South African Government, led government turned the hostels into family type accommodations. After apartheid, the hostels in Lwandle were transformed into homes for their residents.

The White House or “Wits Huis” at Lwandle was a section of the urban planning that was part and parcel of the way in which apartheid was implemented. It was the official office or station of the local police in Lwandle with the main purpose to keep order at the township, to control or regulate the lives of its residents through the identity document – the infamous pass book; to guard and avoid disputes among the people created by unapproved behavior established by regulations of the municipality. Its location at the only entrance and exit of the township with a control access, was intended with the purpose of checking, viewing and knowing all the movements of the residents. The residents were always viewed. There was only one way to enter and leave the location. In the hostels about six residents shared a room without a view but they were always viewed by the policemen of the White House. This made it possible for the police to have a constant knowledge of the daily life of its people, and made it easier for them to seal off the area at the discretion of the police and army.

The beer arrived in Lwandle in 1966 as a means of “entertainment” and making people “happy” in their solitude and poverty. Beer in big receptacles was brought in trucks to the township on a weekly basis by a lorry from the nearby municipality of Stellenbosch (South Africa). All the hostel dwellers were called to fetch the beer with their cans. The residents were permitted to get free beer as much as they wanted or until the big receptacle from the truck would finish. After sometime, a Beerhall was constructed in the township, but the beer was no longer free, it had to be purchased by the

dwellers from the person in charge of the place. This person was hired by the company established in Lwandle; there were also watchmen working at The Beerhall to guard the place.

The photographs selected for the “National Photographs” topic for the research and exhibition were obtained at the Mayibuye Center in the University of the Western Cape. Photographs as a means of representation have the virtue to connect us with history, and help to connect the past with the present. The photographs included in the research intended to compare a national history of migration and a local history of Lwandle; likewise, photographs were taken by the government authorities during apartheid with the intention of classifying people by race, as documented in the interesting book *The Colonizing Camera* (Hartmann, et al, 1999). In like manner, in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century photographs also functioned as a way of “capturing vanishing cultures” in many countries. Recently, photographs about resistance and everyday life have become important means as evidence for presenting new stories. Also, photographs are a rich source for interpreting and creating new histories. The photographs preferred and included in the research intended to compare a national history of Lwandle.

The researched information and documents on the history of the township of Lwandle were selected for the presentation at the exhibition. Further, the group took the measurements of the Lwandle Museum, made drawings of its layout, and re-organized its archives. Besides, the gathering of precise documentation about the Museum building, the group identified the material possible for exhibition and made the design of the actual displays. All the material was arranged and assorted by chronology. The documents for the three types of sites were listed and named, and the photographs selected were sourced properly and classified. The design of the Museum considered the following specifications: to be flexible in terms of accommodation of exhibitions and activities; to be able to accommodate lectures and conferences. The final exhibition preparation consisted on the subject matters; the number of wood panels to be presented; the layout design of the panels and its collocation; the writing of the texts, selection of the images and titles for the panels.

The intention of the display of the results of the research of the township at the Lwandle Migrant and Labour Museum (Lwandle Museum) was, in like manner, to demonstrate the importance of the townships in this region as communities of families which comprise a large amount of workers in South Africa. This kind of community museum is developing as the new genre of museums in South Africa. The research accomplished for the exhibition is a representation of the work that can be developed on both urban and rural townships for the benefit of its residents and the country. This kind of research looks at the different forms of community museums which can be established in areas in South Africa and the various models that are being experimented with. It, also, looks at how monuments were proclaimed and designated in the past and how The South African Heritage Resource Agency is going about identifying and protecting new heritage sites. This Agency, furthermore, is looking at the townships as visiting places for the tourists which can be included in the tourism programs of all the major cities of South Africa. The township of Lwandle is the only one that has been assigned as a tourist site in Cape Town, and is the only township in South Africa which has a museum. The Museum reminds residents and visitors of the horrific living conditions that the migrant labor system imposed during apartheid; the history of division, migrations and forced work. According to William Khanuka, one of Lwandle's oldest residents, the Museum is for the people now as well as for the coming generations.

The scope of the research was to set up an exhibition at the Lwandle Migrant and Labour Museum to coincide with a conference on museums to be held at the South African Museum in Cape Town, and to continue afterwards at the Lwandle Museum.

### **Conference on Museums**

The opening of the *Conference on Museums*, sponsored by the Rockefeller Foundation, began with a workshop: "Museums, Local Knowledge and Performance in an Age of Globalization", that took place at the South African Museum in Cape Town, with the participation of distinguished lecturers from different institutions of the United States, South Africa, Angola, and Argentina. The sessions presented were: "Legacy of Ethnography; and Trauma, Memory and Performance". The second day activity was held

at the Lwandle Labour and Migrant Museum with two sessions: “Local Knowledges, Living Heritage and Cultural Landscapes; and Consumerism and Heritage”.

The exhibition of the fifteen wood panels (3x2 feet), representing the history on documents and written information, and the establishment of the township of Lwandle by the apartheid government, were installed on the walls around the Lwandle Migrant Labour Museum, and was celebrated the third day of the *Conference*. At the same time, we presented at the Museum an exhibit of photographs, showing the changes that took place in the 1990’s when the hostels were turned into family houses, and how the museum emerged; personal documents, artifacts, as hanging sheets, that were used by hostel residents to secure privacy; crafts, artworks, and memorabilia of the people of the township. All these things tell the stories about the lives of the people and how they made their homes in the township of Lwandle, and of others that only considered it as a place of work. The photographs, also, reflect the poverty in its rural areas, and contemporary scenes of Lwandle. The Museum contains the testimonies of the people against the conditions of apartheid, for which they still, ironically, are fighting because they say it is alive. A hostel was preserved to sustain the memory of how the system of apartheid had operated; a beerhall and a police station were rebuilt.

The apartheid dream required the geographical separation of the people, when millions of blacks were forced to live away from their homes and families. This caused the disruption of families, delinquency in children, alcoholism, and drug addiction. The Museum’s exhibits commemorate the trials, tribulations and triumphs of migrant workers and hostel life in South Africa. Many of the things presented at the Museum have been incorporated into its permanent exhibition. The display and the panels were an interesting and effective method of showing to the visitors and to the residents of Lwandle the personal, social, economic and political history of the township since its foundation. Certainly, it was a successful first step towards “re-mapping” the history of Lwandle. Otherwise, it has encouraged tourism as an economic activity, and residents’ interest in working at the Museum, as in setting exhibitions, and as tour guides. Friday and Saturday evenings at the Museum have been reserved to upcoming young artists from the community to practice their skills in art, music, and poetry.

The final event of the *Conference on Museums* was the presentation of a *Drama, Art and Music Workshop Production* at the District Six Museum of Cape Town, established in 1994, by the Khulumani Support Group as reminiscence of the removal of blacks to townships, when this commercial district was declared a place for “whites only” in 1966. It culminated with the presentation of the play “Khimbulani” (Remembrance) with the participation of the public. Afterwards, there was an ample and engaging group discussion of the play.

The research group believed that subsequent exhibitions at the Lwandle Migrant and Labour Museum can be enhanced by implementing the following suggestions:

#### 1. Community Participation

More community participation during the process of preparing future exhibitions is recommended. Residents who volunteer their time would bring special skills to the process of preparation while developing and constructing new skills. In addition, including more of the voices of Lwandle’s residents, aided by oral history and objects and memorabilia, would buttress the integrity of the exhibition and increase the sense of connection to and ownership of the museums by the community.

#### 2. National History

Although we feel whole-heartedly that the emphasis of the current exhibition on Lwandle’s local history is its primary strong point, we also believe that more inclusion of the national history of labor migration (e.g. national laws affecting migrant laborers) would help to provide a necessary context to Lwandle’s history.

#### **Other research work**

This section refers to my research work accomplished as requested by the Director of the Research Program in the University of the Western Cape, as part of the research program for the History Department of the same institution. It was presented at the South African and Contemporary History Seminar of the Department of History and Institute for Historical Research of the University of the Western Cape. The research was produced with secondary sources from the Main Library of the University of the Western Cape and sources (printed material, as books, etc.) brought by me from Puerto Rico. I had

knowledge on slavery in Puerto Rico and the U.S., since I had researched on this topic at the Puerto Rico National Archives and at national and state archives in the United States.

The object of this research was to write a paper and participate as discussant of the research paper presented by Professor Bheki Richard Mngomezulu of the History Department, University of the Western Cape. He, as a fellow from Rice University, U.S. (Houston, Texas), had returned to the History Faculty of the UWC, and was going to present it at the History Seminar, UWC. The title of the paper of Professor Mngomezulu was: *Africa and the Africans Through the Eyes of the Ex-Slaves: An Investigation of the Ex-Slaves Narratives in the United States Conducted Between 1936 and 1938*. The title of the paper I presented was: *Why Ex-Slaves from the United States and Puerto Rico Did Not Want to Go Back to Africa after Abolition*. (See: Bibliography on Slavery in Puerto Rico and the United States, 16<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> Century).

Precisely, oral and written works based on research, periodically offered by visiting scholars at the History Seminar of the Department of History and Institute for Historical Research of the UWC, on topics of the interest of the faculty and the graduate students, have been beneficial in bringing up discussions which will enrich the knowledge of all the participants.

### **Other research activities**

This segment refers to my research on slavery of the area of Cape Town, South Africa, from the 16<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> Century (See: Bibliography on 16<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> Century Slavery in South Africa). It was also requested by the Director of the Research Program at the University of the Western Cape, as a part of the research program. The research was principally conducted at the Main Library and the History Research Center of the UWC.

The purpose of the research was to be able to do in the future a comparative work on slavery in South Africa and Puerto Rico. Because of the lack of time at the University of the Western Cape only a preliminary research paper could be accomplished. In the near future I intend to continue this research.

### **Supplementary activities**

Other supplementary activities related to art and pursued during my spare time: I visited private galleries, the Association of Visual Artists of Cape Town and Gallery, and the library of the South African Museum in Cape Town. Furthermore, I attended art exhibition openings at private galleries; visited various craft markets, craft institutions, and flea markets which are an important element in the African culture; shared with artists, craftsmen and owners of galleries to know their art inquietudes, since art today is not an important constituent of life for the South African people. African art (painting and sculpture) encounters a critical moment in this nation, and it is most crucial for the black artist. Art is mostly acquired by whites and it is mainly done by African or European white artists. In addition, I had the unique opportunity to visit Willie Bester, who is one of the best artists of South Africa, at his home and studio; and to acquire one of his art pieces, a painting on metal. Most of his house furniture was made by him from discarded things. It is a unique house. Bester is not an accessible artist to get in touch with. All these activities took place in the cities of Cape Town, Stellenbosch, Johannesburg, Durban and Pretoria (capital city of South Africa).

Moreover, I had the opportunity to talk to people about Puerto Rico and the University of Puerto Rico, as professors, students, artists, etc.; showed them significant things as art books, brochures, art material (photos, information on document preservation) from the Museum of History and Anthropology of the University of Puerto Rico; History Research Center of the University of Puerto Rico; “Museo de las Américas” (San Juan, Puerto Rico); Museum of Contemporary Art of Puerto Rico; Ponce History Museum, and the Ponce Art Museum. The artist and specialist on art preservation Luis Larrazábal from San Juan provided slides and a video on art restoration which were presented at the Art Department of the University of the Western Cape.

Otherwise, the visit and stay during two weekends with two middle class South African families in Cape Town was a most gratifying experience. With them I shared their everyday life and their kindness, the similarity with our way of family life is noteworthy. They gave me as presents three ostrich eggs, which are very big in size and one is carved, and a beautiful hand made rag doll.

Another important activity I attended after the research program had ended was the *United Nations World Conference against Racism* held in Durban, South Africa, at the Convention Complex. The experience provided me to get acquainted with the claims of the many and different groups of people of the world, as Muslims, Jews, Gypsies, Negroes, who were advocating for the injustices based on racism committed against them in their countries. Nelson Mandela and Fidel Castro were present at the closing ceremony.

From Durban I adventured in an eight-hour flight to another interesting place for five days, the Arab Emirates in the Middle East (Dubai, Abu Dhabi, and Sharjah) with the purpose of getting more knowledgeable of their culture, history, politics, and the incredible economic and tourist development, especially in Dubai.. It was a great experience.

### **Additional experiences**

While I was at the University of the Western Cape in 2001, I had the unique opportunity to live, work, and share with so many different persons; to find out how life really is after apartheid in South Africa. It is hard to live in this country seeing all classes constantly discriminating each other. Like, when I asked a Hindu scholar, in charge of one of the computer rooms at the University of the Western Cape, if he was South African, and his unexpected answer was: “Yes, but I am not one of those”, referring to the blacks that were present. The experience of researching, being with people of all backgrounds, living at the University with the students, sharing all aspects of my life, common and academic, with black and white Africans (mostly European descendants), Indians, Muslims, Asians, and other foreigners was very instructive and enduring. The visits to museums and private art galleries; craft institutions and markets, were very interesting and enjoyable. Might as well, to share with Willie Bester, who grew up in a township in Cape Town, and regarded as the most important resistance artist against the injustices of apartheid and post-apartheid in townships. As stated before, African art (painting and sculpture) encounters a critical moment in this nation, and it is most crucial for the black artists since it is controlled by whites and white artists are preferred. I was



surprised when I asked an employee of a luxury art gallery in Cape Town about Bester's work. The answer of the white male at the gallery was: "Do you know he is black?" I was shocked by his answer. I told him: "I don't care if he is black or yellow". His work was not present in art galleries in Cape Town, for sale or for commercial purposes, except in one gallery in Johannesburg, because of his color. It is clear that racial discrimination against blacks and colored people by white minorities is still present. Certainly, some people's inhumanity impacted me forever, but also others' humanity. These experiences have compelled me to be more sensitive to the outside world and to a diversity of peoples and cultures.

### **Other interesting activities**

My visit as a scholar in South Africa took me to unexpected cities and places for over three months. First, to the beautiful city of Cape Town, the first commercial, tourist and port zone of the country, and the Western Cape area. It impressed me the Victoria & Albert Waterfront complex that has everything for the visitor, as 400 stores, with a great emphasis on art and craft: art and craft galleries, and a permanent craft market where artisans work all the time. At the outside you see artistic groups acting or playing music, dancing or singing, or painting. This complex has one five-star hotel, and three four-star hotels with casinos, book stores, movies, imax theaters, stadium, aquariums, restaurants, cafes, ciber-cafes. Nearby, there is a permanent huge flea market. The Grand West Casino in the outskirts of Cape Town is impressive. It opens every day, with 2,500 game tables and machines for adults; besides, an amusement children center with everything you can imagine as a diversion; a permanent exhibit on the history of the Cape, and a hotel in the complex. It calls your attention that adults and children go through the same main entrance, and the first thing you face when you enter is the adults' game area with the people gambling all kinds of games. The mobile communication and transportation air and land system in the Cape region is excellent. The prepaid SIM card with an international cell phone is the most convenient and economical service for staying in touch while in South Africa, with no need for a contract. I was given one when I arrived at the University. South Africa has a luxury train, the Blue Train, which crosses the

country from Cape Town to Johannesburg and Pretoria. In other aspects, South Africa has the best medical centers in Africa visited by many foreigners. We must remember Dr. Christian Barnard from Cape Town, who performed the first heart to heart human transplant in the world in 1967, at a cardiology hospital in Cape Town, named after him, Dr. Christian Barnard Memorial Hospital.

Furthermore, I went in South Africa to the exquisite wine-lands of the sophisticated Dutch towns of Stellenbosch and Pearl; to an impressive gold mine of the city of Kimberly which produces 2/3 of the gold of the world; to the diamond mines in Johannesburg, the fifth producer of the world, and its skyscrapers at the commercial, industrial and financial district of the city. Then, I went to the federal government capital Pretoria, site of embassies and three universities; and to the sunny beach city of Durban, as mentioned, site of water sports competitions and 2010 FIFA World Cup; afterwards, to a three-day safari at the unique Kruger National Park in the Kalahari Desert with its incredible wild animals roaming around so near from you, while you are in an open motor vehicle watching this spectacle. I stayed at Hotel Mala Mala right in the jungle. I bought two special things I really like and treasure: a huge zebra skin and a “rand” gold coin. The currency exchange for a US dollar is 6.86 South African rands, but in 2001 it was almost double.

South Africa is one of the richest countries in the world, having the largest deposits of gold and the second largest of diamonds. The diamond deposits have been owned by the De Beers Family and the Kimberly Company for a long time, both from South Africa. South Africa’s agriculture and livestock is very productive. South Africa with varied natural resources produces all essential commodities, except petroleum products. It is the only country in the world that manufactures fuel from coal, having a considerable coal production. It is the largest producer and exporter of platinum, manganese, gold and chrome in the world.

Yet, after apartheid, discrimination is still so present. Bester, as the most outstanding artist of the social condition of the country, is the voice of protest that emerged from South Africa’s era of apartheid, recognized in Europe, Scandinavia, and the United States. I recently saw his striking artworks in two museums: the metal sculpture “To

Those Left Behind” at The George Pompidou Museum in Paris, and three paintings in mixed media (“Kakebeen”, “Hamba Kahle”, and “Biko”) presenting socio-political issues of his country, at the African Art Museum of the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C. His socio-political comment dwells on the unchanged racial attitudes in South Africa, and that the processes of the Truth and Reconciliation Committee (TRC) between whites and blacks have been ineffective. As he says: “People who thought were superior before haven’t changed. I try not to be disappointed, to find an answer.” His paintings and monumental metal sculptures present the racial discrimination in South Africa, and are exhibited in art museums and galleries in the world, but in few art galleries in South Africa. It is clear that racial discrimination against blacks and colored people by white minorities is still present after thirteen years of post-apartheid democracy. Bester criticisms previously directed at racial inequality, laws that defined people by race, has not shifted to the failure of the new government to make good on their promises, to improve the social, economic, and housing situations in the townships of the Cape; the historically still privileged status of whites over blacks. He demonstrates with his art his sustained preoccupation with apartheid’s legacy and empathy and dignity with which he represents the dispossessed. Through his art, Bester has been making sense of apartheid and post-apartheid ever since. He continues to present “tough” subjects to his country and the world. For him, art is the making visible of the invisible, is permanent accusation, of all those things that we don’t know, and sometimes don’t want to see. So, it is necessary to unpack in Europe and to the world the idea of South Africa. We all have preconceived ideas of Africa and maybe Africa has the most. “In Africa, art is very close to life, and issues that South African artists are dealing with are issues of life”, says an African art critic. They are human issues, they have meaning: politics, identity, representation. Bester work is the representation of the real world through the combination of materials from the real world.

## **Conclusions**

My visit as a scholar in South Africa took me to unexpected places for three months. I was astonished to see so much wealth, but, also, to witness shocking poverty in townships like Lwandle in Cape Town and Soweto in Johannesburg. Today the townships or urban slums are where the poor black people live, out of sight, and out of mind of the outsiders. It is an experience that can't be forgotten. I remember feeling so embarrassed to take my camera out, that I couldn't take pictures of people's poverty. I spoke to the great educated, scholars, artists, medium class and humble people in my quest to understand these contradictions of poverty and richness in the hands of a few. South Africa's four and a half million whites still dominate its' economy serving fifty million citizens. They claim nearly half of all income. Yet today, they are joined by as many as nearly 29 million blacks who are also entrenched in the middle and upper classes. So rich and so poor at the same time!

The experience of all these activities in many places in London and South Africa, and the interaction with so many different persons made me a better person and scholar, with a stronger character to face difficult situations, and more sensitive to the outside world and to a variety of peoples and cultures. Truly, it was a great privilege to have this opportunity.

It has compelled me to be more sensitive to the outside world and to a diversity of peoples and cultures. It has been the experience in a foreign country that most deeply has touched my life. It left me with many mixed feelings, spiritually exhausted but immensely happy to have the privilege to live with this brave, kind and extraordinary hardworking people of all colors and races.

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NOTE

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