1 Tracing the Paths of Culture between Switzerland and South Africa

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The earliest documented instance of cultural exchange between Switzerland and South Africa – the earliest, at least, that our investigations have unearthed – was musical. It is mentioned in the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* (*NZZ*) of 29 May 1839, in a single sentence tagged onto the end of an untitled article about opera performances in Lausanne. It runs: "Travellers in South Africa have heard people singing and playing 'Freut euch des Lebens' by our Martin Usteri".[1]

"Freut euch des Lebens" is probably the most famous Swiss song, long sung in schools and heard across the German-speaking world as a melodious *carpe diem* at the close of societal gatherings of all kinds. Most are unaware that it is actually Swiss at all, though its text – as the *NZZ* rightly states – was by the minor Swiss poet Martin Usteri (1763–1827) and its music reputedly by Hans Georg Nägeli (1773–1836), a composer and publisher based in Zurich (it is still debated whether Nägeli actually composed the tune or adapted it from elsewhere).

This first example of intercontinental cultural dialogue was also the last for a long time. On those few other occasions in the mid-19th century when the newspaper-reading population of Switzerland learnt anything of southern Africa, it was generally about how the good peoples of the North were bringing the Good Word to the "wild peoples" of the South, disseminating hymns and tracts to boost the Protestant cause.[2] As the decades passed, the odd travel report on southern Africa and its fauna and flora was published, advertised or reviewed,[3] and the various wars and skirmishes between colonials and the indigenous also received occasional mention. From 1870 onwards the discovery of diamonds in Southern

1 In *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 64, 29 May 1839. All translations here by the present writer unless otherwise stated.

2 See, for example, anon., "Einige Züge aus dem Leben eines Missionars unter den wilden Völkern", in *Christlicher Volksbote aus Basel*, 9, 27 February 1834.

3 For example, Andrew Cole's book in German translation by J. Hasskarl entitled *Das Kap und die Kaffern: oder Mittheilungen über meinen fünfjährigen Aufenthalt in Süd-Afrika*. Leipzig: Arnoldische Buchhandlung, 1858, advertised for sale by the Schulthess bookshop in Zurich in *Eidgenössische Zeitung*, 14(204), 25 July 1858.

Africa caused a spike in enthusiasm.[4] Otherwise, the main Swiss interest in the Far South seems to have remained confined to missionary matters, often with a hint of White Saviourism and occasionally even with a competitive edge, as if the rising numbers of "Hottentot" (sic) Christians at the Cape were a commodity one might measure as one would wheat or gold ("there are now 40,000 Christians in South Africa ... 30,000 in Sierra Leone ... 80,000 in New Zealand" enthused the *Intelligenzblatt für die Stadt Bern* on 7 August 1847).[5] Every now and then, a Swiss missionary would return to his home country to drum up (financial) support in order to boost his conversion figures. After the export of "Freut euch des Lebens", the only notable Swiss cultural contribution to Southern Africa in the 19th century seems to have been the Lesotho national anthem. It has a text in Sotho, written by the French missionary François Coillard (1834–1904), that he himself set to an existing melody by the Basel composer Ferdinand Laur.[6] But the declamation of Coillard's Sotho hymn does not actually fit the Swiss melody, instead imposing incorrect, European emphases on the African text.[7] It would be overly simplistic to interpret this case as an unwitting blueprint for similarly skewed Swiss/African cultural encounters over the ensuing one-and-a-half centuries (historians of South Africa have long been fond of blunt metaphors, however inappropriate); but from a historical perspective, there is no doubt that it reflects the dominant hegemonic paradigms all the same.

A cursory perusal of the daily press in Central Europe in the 19th century suggests a certain transnational uniformity in attitudes towards southern Africa. People were interested in its fauna, its diamonds, its wars and its missionaries (though in Catholic regions such as Austria,[8] the last of these does not seem to have appealed as much as it did in largely Protestant Switzerland). There was some emigration from Europe to the South; young South Africans began visiting Europe for their tertiary education; and the Second Anglo-Boer War of 1899 to 1902 prompted outpourings of sympathy for the Boers across Central Europe.

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4 See, for example, anon., "Die Gold- und Diamantenfelder Südafrika's", in *Der Bund*, 22(2), 3 January 1871.

5 Anon., "Bibel- und Missionsfest in Bern, den 5. August 1847 (Schluss)", in *Intelligenzblatt für die Stadt Bern,* 14(188), 7 August 1847.

6 See Andreas Baumgartner and Matthias Schmidt, eds., *"Unser Land"?: Lesothos schweizerische Nationalhymne = "Our Land"?: Lesotho's Swiss national* anthem. [Basel]: Christoph Merian Verlag, 2018.

7 See Musa Nkuna, "(Un)forced errors? The Relationship between Words and Music in the National Anthem of Lesotho", in Baumgartner and Schmidt, eds., *"Unser Land"?*, 173–77.

8 See *ANNO Historische Zeitungen und Zeitschriften*, the Austrian national Library's online database of newspapers and journals at https://anno.onb.ac.at/. A full-text search for "Südafrika" in the 19th century turns up hits in three figures in the Austrian press, a perusal of which – while by no means able to claim any incontestable scholarly accuracy – does seem to confirm that the interests of the Swiss and Austrian press were not worlds apart (accessed December 2024).

Monies were gathered for the Boer cause from all over Switzerland, and an "Action Committee" of Zurich even decided to send a Swiss doctor and a Swiss nurse to help the Boer wounded.[9] It was also to Clarens in Switzerland that Paul Kruger retired after the defeat of the Transvaal and its Orange Free State ally (he died there in 1904).

Switzerland itself seems to have attracted little attention among South Africans at this time. Students wishing to travel to Europe to complete their studies seem to have chosen Swiss universities but rarely[10] – though that is hardly surprising, given that the most prestigious tertiary institutions were located elsewhere. English-speakers tended to choose the United Kingdom for their studies, while Afrikaners often went to Germany or Holland. As has been well documented, several leading lights of the later National Party attended universities in Germany in the interwar years, such as Nico Diederichs, Max Eiselen and Hendrik Verwoerd. The last of these studied variously in Berlin and Leipzig in the mid-1920s, even marrying his wife Betsie Schoombie in Hamburg in 1927.

Figure 1.1. The "Switzerland" at the Aswan Dam on its journey south across the African Continent. Photograph by Arnold Heim, December 1926. ETH Library Zurich, Image Archive / Dia_006-057. Creative Commons.

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9 See the brief untitled report on page three of *Der Bund*, 52(189), 10 July 1901, second issue of the day. Numerous newspapers reported on the progress of donations for the welfare of the Boers, see for example anon., "Sammlung für die Buren", in *Zuger Nachrichten*, 13(149), 30 December 1899. Sending two medics to help in a war whose dead and injured reached well into six figures seems overly cautious of the Swiss, though I suppose it's the thought that counts.

10 For example, the matriculation lists of the University of Zurich, which have been digitised up to 1924, list just five South African students up to that date.

South Africa got a burst of Swiss publicity in the late 1920s through the derring-do of the Swiss aviator-cum-photographer Werner Mittelholzer (1894–1937), who had come to prominence with flights first over the Alps and then to more distant destinations including Iran – each time publishing a book about his endeavours full of extraordinary aerial photographs.[11] In 1926 he set out on his longest journey yet: an expedition to cross the whole of the African continent in a seaplane (named, of course, "Switzerland") together with three fellow Swiss: the geologist and photographer Arnold Heim, the writer René Gouzy, and the co-pilot and engineer Hans Hartmann. They flew via Naples, Athens, Alexandria and Luxor (photographing Vesuvius, the Acropolis and the pyramids along the way) and then via Lake Victoria to Mozambique and South Africa, landing in Cape Town on 20 February 1927 after a journey of two-and-a-half months. Mittelholzer's fame meant he was able to publicise his trip well in advance to gain maximum publicity (a long report detailing his preparations – covering no less than two-thirds of a full page of the *NZZ* in October 1926 – was preceded by a proud note from the newspaper's editors that they alone had the sole rights to Mittelholzer's words).[12] In Mombasa, Heim and Gouzy left the plane and took the sea route, joining up with Mittelholzer and Hartmann in South Africa. Heim, the expedition's official geologist, also made trips to the gold, diamond and platinum mines of the then Transvaal and Orange Free State (including, of course, the Big Hole of Kimberley).

After enjoying the hospitality in Cape Town of the Swiss Club and the Governor General, Lord Athlone, the seaplane was dismantled and returned to Europe by boat, along with its crew. And as soon as their journey was complete, Mittelholzer and Co. produced a book with over 200 magnificent photos from the air and on the ground: *Afrikaflug*.[13] It was reprinted several times and remains a fascinating document, full of detail about their route, the geographical and geological peculiarities of the lands they traversed, the animals they saw, and the logistical problems that they faced and solved. But it also remains very much of its time in its tendency to portray the indigenous people they met along the way as little more than noble savages. Two plates depict Black people gathered to gawk in supposed "astonishment" at the technological achievements of white society (namely the railways and the seaplane). There are six photos of happy natives dancing and drumming "in honour of their guests"[14] (i.e. Mittelholzer & Co.) and there are numerous close-ups of bare-breasted

[11] Werner Mittelholzer, *Die Schweiz aus der Vogelschau*. Erlenbach-Zurich: Eugen Rentsch, 1926; and Mittelholzer, *Persienflug*. Zurich: Orell Füssli Verlag, 1926.

[12] See Werner Mittelholzer, "Die Vorbereitungen zum Schweizer Afrikaflug", in *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* 147(1593), evening edition (4 October 1926).

[13] Werner Mittelholzer, René Gouzy and Arnold Heim: *Afrikaflug*. Zurich: Orell Füssli Verlag, 1927.

[14] See plates 79 to 84 of Mittelholzer et al., *Afrikaflug* (the plates are numbered throughout but are printed on unnumbered pages).

Figure 1.2. The Big Hole of Kimberley. Photograph by Arnold Heim, 26 February 1927. ETH Library Zurich, Image Archive / Dia_007-048. Creative Commons.

young Black women (on more than one occasion, the subjects of these images are expressly described as "Schönheit[en]"[15] – "Beauties", which leaves little doubt as to what has attracted the attention of the white male gaze). In one particularly crass example, the feeding habits of the "civilised" and the colonised are contrasted on the same page. In the top half of one page, Heim and Mittelholzer are shown sitting at a makeshift table in the bush, drinking from China cups, presumably at breakfast, with three American explorers posing behind them; everyone is dressed smartly. The lower half of the page features a photo of a topless Black woman, also in the bush, standing while breastfeeding a baby; beside her stands another topless Black woman, also holding a child, with four more small children in front of them.[16] For all their admirable scholarly endeavours, the default position of Mittelholzer & Co. was to infantilise and sexualise when depicting colonised peoples of colour. When his plane finally landed in Durban after many near-mishaps as they crossed the African interior, Mittelholzer breathed a veritable sigh of relief: "Durban ... looks thoroughly European ... We had the feeling that we had completely returned to civilisation".[17]

After surviving the Second World War largely untouched on account of its neutrality and its astute political and economic manoeuvrings with the surrounding Axis powers, Switzerland enjoyed a post-war boom that lasted until the oil crisis of the 1970s. The increasing wealth of the Swiss middle classes and the post-War popularity of air transport now opened up new, potential avenues for tourism. Within two decades of Mittelholzer's flight, ordinary Swiss were able to contemplate following in his aerial footsteps (if they had enough money). As we have already noted, a major focus of interest in South Africa from the 19th century onwards was its "exotic" animals and peoples. So when Swissair began expanding its opportunities for travelling to the tip of Africa in the years after the Second World War, it is hardly surprising that its designers should have seized on this aspect for their posters. In 1952, the artist Viktor Hasslauer designed a Swissair poster to advertise flights from Geneva to Johannesburg (printed by Jacques Bollmann AG of Zurich). We refrain from reproducing it here because it would be inappropriate in our context to disseminate its racist tropes.[18] It offers many of the most obvious clichés: a smiling, half-naked Black "native" is gazing up admiringly at Swiss technology in the form of a four-engine airliner flying overhead; he is playing a drum, presumably signifying the primordial passions of the Dark Continent; and in the background are indistinct figures similar to those in San rock art (which was already

15 Mittelholzer et al., *Afrikaflug*, plates 125 & 160.
16 See *Afrikaflug*, plates 134 and 135.
17 *Afrikaflug*, 191.
18 The interested reader can view it online in the Swiss Federal collections at www.posters.nb.admin.ch/discovery/delivery/41SNL_53_INST:posters/1235845080003978?lang=fr (accessed November 2024).

Figure 1.3. Cape Town: The Lion's Head as seen from Table Mountain. Photograph by Arnold Heim, 1 March 1927. ETH Library Zurich, Image Archive / Hs_0494b-0062-117-AL. Creative Commons.

known in the West), apparently dancing in front of straw huts (shades of Rousseau's "noble savage" again, of course).

We naturally find these racist clichés offensive today, though we owe it to Hasslauer to consider him in the context of his own time. He was actually situated on the left-wing of Swiss politics and had contributed to a charitable campaign to help the survivors and victims of the Second World War in Europe alongside other left-wing and centrist Swiss artists such as Gregor Rabinovitch and Hanny Fries.[19] Hasslauer had also designed posters in 1947 and 1948 for the Swiss winter aid charity[20] and in 1950 for the Swiss Socialist Party.[21] I have been unable to find out for sure, but it seems likely that Hasslauer had never been to South Africa, had probably never met an African person, and probably only knew of Africa from Mittelholzer's *Afrikaflug*, the Tarzan films, and the racist stereotypes found in animated films of the era from the USA.

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[19] Anon., "Die Schweizer Spende an die Kriegsgeschädigten = Le don suisse aux victimes de la guerre", in *Die Schweiz = Suisse = Svizzera = Switzerland: offizielle Reisezeitschrift der Schweiz. Verkehrszentrale, der Schweizerischen Bundesbahnen, Privatbahnen* ... [et al.], 1945, No. 3, 18–19, here 19.

[20] See www.posters.nb.admin.ch/discovery/delivery/41SNL_53_INST:posters/1235013840003978?lang=fr and www.posters.nb.admin.ch/discovery/delivery/41SNL_53_INST:posters/1235341140003978?lang=fr (both accessed November 2024).

[21] See www.posters.nb.admin.ch/discovery/delivery/41SNL_53_INST:posters/1237996720003978?lang=fr (accessed November 2024).

Hasslauer's view of South Africa as a place of exotic, natural beauty and of happy, dancing, drumming, simple hut-dwelling Black people in awe of Western superiority was also the view of the place that the white South African authorities of the time endeavoured to maintain. The National Party had assumed power in the South African elections of 1948 and thereupon embarked on an immense expansion of segregation, introducing laws over the ensuing years that regulated all interactions between the different population groups: where they could live, what education they could get, what beaches, park benches and shop doorways they were allowed to use, and with whom they were allowed to have sex. The South African government also initiated a major immigration programme to attract whites from outside the country in order to bolster their numbers in the face of an ever-increasing Black population.[22] As is documented amply elsewhere, opposition to apartheid in the West – running in part in parallel to anti-segregation movements in the West itself – resulted in calls to boycott South Africa: economically, culturally and in sports. The murder of unarmed Black protestors at Sharpeville in March 1960 triggered demands for broader anti-apartheid measures in the West. South Africa left the Commonwealth in early 1961 when it declared itself a republic, independent of the United Kingdom. The United Nations called for economic sanctions against South Africa in its Resolution 1761 of 1962,[23] and South Africa was suspended from the Olympic Games in 1964 and banned from them in 1970. Economic divestment from South Africa increased in the 1970s, and the UN instituted an arms embargo in 1977 with its Resolution 418.[24] Calls for a cultural boycott started early. The British Musicians' Union urged its members to boycott the country from 1961 onwards, university academics began signing pledges to boycott South Africa that same decade, the UN officially called for a cultural boycott in 1980 and in 1983 its Special Committee Against Apartheid instituted a register of artists who performed in South Africa in defiance of calls for that boycott.[25] Politics in South Africa gradually became more polarised. State brutality and violent resistance to it intensified after the Soweto Uprising of 1976, when Black schoolchildren were killed at a protest against the introduction of Afrikaans as a compulsory medium of instruction.

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22 See, for example, the report in *Time* magazine about the enticement policy for foreign whites that was organised by the apartheid government. Anon., "South Africa: Go South, Young (White) Man", in *Time*, 24 January 1964.

23 See the relevant documents on the website of the United Nations: https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/204274?ln=en&v=pdf (accessed November 2024).

24 See https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/66633?ln=en&v=pdf (accessed November 2024).

25 See Detlef Siegfried, "Aporien des Kulturboykotts. Anti-Apartheid-Bewegung, ANC und der Konflikt um Paul Simons Album 'Graceland' (1985–1988)", in *Zeithistorische Forschungen/Studies in Contemporary History*, 13 (2016), 254–79.

Switzerland's neutrality had made it a natural home for many of the world's major international institutions from the late 19th century onwards, from the Universal Postal Union based in Bern to the International Olympic Committee (IOC) in Lausanne and the League of Nations, the World Health Organization and the United Nations, all in Geneva. However, Switzerland's own view of its neutrality forbade it from actually participating in some of these organisations, while also empowering it to ignore directives issued by others. South Africa might have been expelled from the Olympics by the Swiss-based IOC, but the Swiss Foreign Office itself was still declaring sports to be a "private matter" as late as the mid-1980s and accordingly refused to censure Swiss sportsmen who took part in South African competitions.[26] Being "neutral" also meant that the Swiss government – which from 1959 to the present day has been run by a stable coalition of the biggest parties across the political spectrum (known popularly as the "Zauberformel" or "magic formula") – did not feel bound by any of the resolutions passed by the United Nations (which it in any case did not join until 2002). From the 1960s onwards, as other trading partners slowly began to shun South Africa, Switzerland assumed ever greater importance. The South African diamond company De Beers – the world's biggest, dominating some 80% of the uncut diamond trade – set up a branch in Lucerne in 1975 and moved its headquarters there in 1988. In the late 1950s, South Africa had also become the world's biggest producer of gold, and by the early 1970s, three quarters of its production was being imported by Swiss banks.[27] By the end of apartheid, Swiss banks ranked fifth in the list of South Africa's overall creditors – an astonishing fact, given the relative size of the Swiss economy compared to South Africa's other major trading partners.[28] Switzerland saw no legal reason to refuse to engage with South Africa; and on a political level, the latter's commitment to the Western, anti-communist cause during the Cold War provided a further mitigating reason for Switzerland's support (as it was a reason for the hesitance of the USA, the United Kingdom and other Western countries to sever their close ties to South Africa).

Educational links also continued unabated throughout the apartheid period. In 1973, Switzerland set up a postgraduate scholarship programme, awarding two scholarships per country to a host of nations across the world, including South Africa and the communist countries of the Eastern Bloc. From the start, at least one of the two annual scholarships allocated to South Africa was supposed to go to someone who was not white. But since it seems that no one made any concerted effort to inform Black students of this opportunity, and since it was in any case the policy of the apartheid government to ensure that only whites

[26] See Georg Kreis, *Switzerland and South Africa 1948–1994*. Bern etc.: Peter Lang, 2007, 481–82.
[27] Kreis, *Switzerland and South Africa*, 318–19.
[28] Kreis, *Switzerland and South Africa*, 317.

had access to adequate tertiary education, it is logical that no suitable Black candidates presented themselves. So the scholarships continued to be allocated to white South Africans.[29] It was suggested in the late 1970s that such scholarships should be awarded specifically to Blacks, but this was rejected by the then Swiss ambassador Eduard Brunner on account of being "discriminatory".[30] The sophistry this demonstrates rather takes one's breath away, but such attitudes were hardly untypical of the time.

There is, however, a notable instance of official dialogue in cultural matters that was initiated between the white Afrikaner establishment and Switzerland that ultimately proved of lasting benefit to South Africans beyond the racial divide. In 1961, Gideon Roos (1909–1999), Director-General of the South African Broadcasting Corporation since 1948, was forced out of his job for being inadequately committed to the policies of the governing National Party.[31] He was from a prominent Afrikaner family – his father, Paul Roos, had been a famous Springbok captain, and the school named after him in Stellenbosch continues to bear his name today – but whereas numerous prominent National Party politicians had studied in Germany in the 1920s and 1930s, Gideon Roos had followed his undergraduate studies at Stellenbosch with a BLitt in international law as a Rhodes Scholar in Oxford (where he was also a rugby Blue). After leaving the SABC, Roos set up an independent, South African pendant to the United Kingdom's Performing Rights Society that had up to this point also been responsible for administering such rights in South Africa. This new society was initially named the South African Society of Composers, Authors and Music Publishers, though when its chosen acronym, "SAFCA", was found to be in use elsewhere, it was renamed SAMRO in 1966, the "South African Music Rights Organisation" (its first word later being changed to "Southern" when SAMRO expanded its activities).[32] Roos soon affiliated SAMRO with the Confédération Internationale des Sociétés d'Auteurs et Compositeurs (CISAC). Before the decade was out, he had also set up a sister organisation to cater for dramatic rights, namely DALRO (Dramatic, Artistic and Literary Rights Organisation).[33]

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29 The present writer was one of the two recipients of such a *Bundesstipendium* from the United Kingdom in 1986. I remember meeting fellow South African scholars at the time, since we all came together regularly for social activities; none of them was Black. These scholarships still exist, though now under the name "Bundes-Exzellenz-Stipendien". See www.sbfi.admin.ch/sbfi/de/home/bildung/stipendien/bundes-exzellenz-stipendien.html (accessed November 2024).

30 Kreis, *Switzerland and South Africa*, 504.

31 See, for example, the brief report on his resignation in anon., "Gideon Roos", in *Rand Daily Mail*, 13 April 1961.

32 The reasons are mentioned by Gideon Roos in a letter to SUISA of 29 November 1966. This and all the other correspondence mentioned here between SAMRO and SUISA is held today by SUISA, who kindly granted us permission to consult their archives. Our thanks in particular go to Andreas Wegelin and Noah Martin.

33 For general biographical information, see, for example, Southern African Music Rights Organ-

SAMRO was for many years essentially a family business, for Roos also employed his sons Gideon Junior and Paul at SAMRO. The former looked after the technological side of SAMRO's business, dealing with IBM and others in early efforts at computerisation, while the latter in time assumed his father's position as CEO. What at first glance looks like a typical instance of apartheid-era, Afrikaner musical nepotism[34] would in fact appear to have been promotion based on merit, for SAMRO proved a spectacular success under the auspices of Roos Senior and Juniors – so much so that over the years it was able to channel millions of rand into competitions and scholarships that became a prime means for young South African musicians and composers to study abroad.[35] Nor was membership of SAMRO confined to whites. Strike Vilakazi, for example, the composer of the famous protest song "Meadowlands", joined SAMRO not long after it was founded. Royalties were calculated by SAMRO according to the same formula, regardless of the skin colour of the artists in question. Over the years, SAMRO has provided a major source of income for Black South African musicians.

The Swiss equivalent of SAMRO is SUISA, whose history began in 1924 under the name "GEFA", an association that was made a cooperative society under its present name in 1941. Roos made contact with SUISA and its director Ulrich Uchtenhagen in early 1963 because he desired information on SUISA's tariff system while setting up his own in South Africa. It seems that the two men met at some point over the next three years (presumably at an international meeting, since both organisations were members of CISAC), though the correspondence between them (mostly in English, occasionally in German) remained sporadic until April 1967, when Roos wrote to inform Uchtenhagen that he would be passing through Switzerland in May of that year (accompanied by Gideon Junior) and would like to visit SUISA's premises to become better acquainted with its operations. The meeting went ahead, friendships were established, and a long correspondence ensued that moved on to first-name terms within the next couple of years. In order to differentiate Gideon Senior

isation: "Obituary Gideon Daniel Roos. 28.9.1999 – 9.3.1999", in *Ars Nova*, 31(1), January 1999, 56–57.

[34] Space here is insufficient to deal with this topic in depth, but a close look – for example – at the staff lists of South African university music departments from, say, 1970 to 2000, would reveal a network of familial and sexual relationships. The major music compositions in South Africa in the late apartheid era also occasionally featured family connections between winners and jury members. The cases known to the present writer must remain undisclosed here, not least for legal reasons.

[35] To the best of my knowledge, the first notable instance of corruption at SAMRO only occurred many years after the last Roos had departed. See anon., "Samro's Dubai scandal deepens" about the disappearance of nearly ZAR 40 million in ca 2017 when SAMRO became involved in a scheme to set up a performing rights organisation in the United Arab Emirates. See www.news24.com/business/samros-dubai-scandal-deepens-20180902-2 (accessed June 2025).

from Junior (for the latter figured large in the dealings between the two societies), the son was soon generally referred to as "Röösli", a Swiss diminutive of his Afrikaans surname (the Afrikaans word "roos" meaning "rose", and "Rösli" being Swiss-German for "little rose"; the surname "Röösli" with a double vowel is still common in Switzerland today. Gideon Junior even began signing himself thus in his own letters to SUISA).

Further meetings took place, also at international gatherings, while mid-level staff members with specific expertise were sent on exchange visits to each other's offices. Gifts of South African wine were gratefully received (and also shared with colleagues in the SUISA offices), Uchtenhagen arranged for a Swiss watch of Roos's to be repaired, and a warm relationship was clearly established. Roos even asked advice on the possibility of setting up an annual South African singing competition similar to one he had experienced in Montreux (though it seems nothing came about).[36] Despite the gifts, the mutual hospitality and the almost brotherly concern that emerges from their letters, the prime topic of their highly detailed correspondence nevertheless remained their work. SUISA had been tasked by CISAC with drawing up a list of all composers, lyricists and music publishers affiliated to its various societies (the "CAE" list), and the correspondence between Uchtenhagen and Roos makes it clear that the former provided the latter with regular updated copies of the list. Nor does the correspondence between the two men shy away from nitty-gritty cataloguing issues that were potentially divergent in their respective countries (one minor example is found in a letter from Roos Senior of 16 August 1968, for example, where he asks whether SUISA would place the surname "De Villiers" under "D" or "V"). Agreements were also drawn up between the two societies regarding the collection and distribution of royalties for performances by artists registered in the other's jurisdiction. And SUISA's experience proved vital in computerising SAMRO's operations. It is also notable that Roos's South African citizenship did not prevent him from travelling behind the Iron Curtain – in a letter to Uchtenhagen of 26 April 1969, he mentions an imminent trip to an INTERGU conference in Yugoslavia (i.e. the copyright organisation "Internationale Gesellschaft für Urheberrecht") and hopes to see him there. The Roos family connection to SAMRO only ceased in 1999, when Paul Roos stepped down as CEO.

Whereas SAMRO offers an instance of Swiss expertise that was beneficial to South Africans both Black and white, the South African state was throughout these years otherwise focused on whiteness in its dealings with its foreign business partners. From the 1960s onwards, South Africa began inviting international personalities on carefully designed propaganda tours of the country in hopes that they might afterwards influence public opinion

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36 See the correspondence between the two men of 1968.

back home. A detailed study of such visits by Swiss personalities was published in 2003 by Roger Pfister (he counted 44 of them in the nine-year period alone from 1967 to 1976).[37] It seems that every such visit included a trip to the Kruger Park to see the local wildlife. On several occasions, the visitors' itinerary also included dancing shows by Blacks at mining camps – all in order to promote a fiction of happy, dancing natives amidst exotic fauna similar to what Hasslauer had imagined for his Swissair poster several years earlier. These visits proved a remarkably good investment. Those invited included Peter Dürrenmatt, the cousin of the writer Friedrich, an important Swiss parliamentarian and editor-in-chief of the daily newspaper *Basler Nachrichten*. He returned from a visit in 1968 utterly convinced that the apartheid government was on the right track.[38] Peter Vogelsanger, the Chairman of the Swiss Protestant Churches and vicar of the Fraumünster in Zurich, was invited to visit South Africa in 1976 and afterwards wrote a long article for the *NZZ* that mixed gentle criticism with copious praise for how the South African church and state authorities were endeavouring to master the many problems they faced. Vogelsanger was especially impressed that whereas the Swiss media had a brief, weekly religious programme ("Das Wort zum Sonntag"), South African TV ended every day with a full religious broadcast. Vogelsanger also assured his readership that "so-called 'petty apartheid', that offensive segregation between black and white, even down to park benches and pissoirs, is swiftly disappearing".[39] It wasn't, and it didn't, not for several years. But Vogelsanger clearly felt no reason to doubt the veracity of the propaganda he was fed.

South Africa had for many decades been on the itinerary of European musicians, often as a stopping-off point for extra concerts on their way to perform in Australia (Percy Grainger had visited in 1903, where his exploits included walking from Pietermaritzburg to Durban in 18 hours and jogging with a troupe of "Zulu warriors").[40] One of the first recorded visits by a Swiss musician to South Africa was by the harpsichordist Isabelle Nef in 1956 (see the chapter by Annemie Stimie Behr below). But such visits only assumed real political significance in the 1960s, when South Africa began to be excluded from international organisations and as the boycott movement gathered momentum. In fact, many of the world's most prominent musicians, both Swiss and others, began visiting South Africa in these years. The catalyst for this was almost certainly Igor Stravinsky. He was invited to

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[37] Roger Pfister, "Pretoria's endeavours to improve its apartheid image in Switzerland", in *Schweizerische Zeitschrift* für *Geschichte = Revue Suisse d'histoire = Rivista storica Svizzera*, 53(1), 2003, 94–105.

[38] Pfister, "Pretoria's endeavours", 102.

[39] Peter Vogelsanger, "Die Kirchen und die politische Entwicklung in Südafrika", in *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 197(115), 18 May 1976.

[40] John Bird, *Percy Grainger*. London: Faber & Faber, 1982, 88.

visit the country in 1962 by Anton Hartman – conductor, leading member of the Afrikaner Broederbond, and Head of Music at the South African Broadcasting Corporation. Stravinsky's visit in the May of that year included conducting his music (with rehearsals prepared for him by Robert Craft, who accompanied him everywhere), meeting the press (though cameras were banned) and also – of course – attending dances at a mining camp and a trip to the Kruger Park. Stravinsky also conducted a free concert for the local Black population in the Kwa-Thema township outside Springs. This was the result of a good deal of haggling between Hartman and the composer's representatives because performing for free was not something to which Stravinsky generally agreed.

Stravinsky and Craft were fully aware of the political import of this tour and had already been urged (in vain) not to conduct segregated concerts. Craft's published diary of the visit is a superbly liberal, superficially objective account that places Stravinsky in a positive light. But it also confirms indirectly that the authorities' ruse of including a trip to the Kruger Park had been eminently successful. Of his 12 pages devoted to South Africa, over five describe the fauna and flora of the Park in detail.[41] As in the accounts of visiting writers in the 19th century, exotic animals in South Africa continued to trump just about everything else. For foreign dignitaries, it seems that almost any instance of human inequity or racism could be expunged by the graceful sight of giraffes, lions and wildebeest.

This visit of Stravinsky to South Africa has prompted considerable interest in recent years, with scholars focussing on the seemingly subversive aspect of his having conducted in a Black township. The concert was long remembered fondly by local Black musicians as having been a unique opportunity to experience modern music, as they themselves reported in interviews given to Michael Dingaan for a BBC radio programme in 2017 (the BBC website's blurb for the documentary still calls it "the story of Igor Stravinsky's ground-breaking concert for a black audience in apartheid South Africa").[42] This is one of the many occasions when black and white merge into grey. For the enthusiastic locals, Stravinsky's concert was clearly a "ground-breaking" experience. But it was also exactly what the apartheid authorities wanted. They were always happy for international visitors to perform for a Black audience (or coloured, or Indian, or whatever). All that mattered was that the audience was segregated. Every performance or lecture before a segregated audience was confirmation of the rightness of apartheid. Getting Stravinsky to visit – the most famous composer of the era – was Hartman's most spectacular coup, and there is little doubt that it opened the doors for

41 Robert Craft, *Stravinsky. Chronicle of a friendship. 1948–1971*. London: Victor Gollancz Ltd, 1972, 155–66.

42 Michael Dingaan, "Stravinsky in South Africa", at www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p058zhsn, broadcast in 2017 (accessed November 2024). For a more critical view of Stravinsky's visit, see John Hinch, "Stravinsky in Africa", in *Muziki*, 1(1), 2004, 71–86.

many others to assume that visiting South Africa was a natural thing to do. Over the coming years, a whole host of international names visited South Africa, invited either by Hartman, by his friend Hans Adler, the Secretary of the Johannesburg Concert Society, or by both of them – from Pierre Boulez to Karlheinz Stockhausen. We cannot prove it, but it seems likely that Adler's status as a former Jewish refugee from Nazi Germany – thus a former victim of racism himself – might have helped to convince his European visitors that he could not possibly be acting in the interests of a similarly fascist, racist regime (though in fact he was).

What none of the artists knew was that they were almost certainly being bugged during their tours. During the present writer's tenure as chair of music at the University of Pretoria (2001–2005), old bugging equipment was discovered by workers removing partition walls in the artists' dressing rooms of the Musaion, the Music Department's concert hall and a standard venue for foreign artists from the 1960s onwards (Stockhausen had lectured there in March 1971, for example).[43] Regrettably, any recordings made were probably destroyed during the transitional period in the mid-1990s, just before the ANC came to power. Just what the authorities might have hoped to gain from dressing-room chatter remains obscure.[44]

The first prominent Swiss visitor in the "post-Stravinsky" period was the composer Heinrich Sutermeister, who arrived in 1964 for a performance in Afrikaans translation of his opera *Die schwarze Spinne* ("The Black Spider", now *Die swart spinnekop*). Sutermeister was a prominent composer at the time. His early operas had been given their first performances

[43] I was informed later that day by the member of staff directly involved in the renovation of the space in question, though the university authorities regrettably spirited all the evidence away before I had a chance to inspect it. He recently confirmed the story again to me.

[44] In her memoirs, Stockhausen's sometime partner Mary Bauermeister – who accompanied him to South Africa in 1971 – mentions his having indulged in a sexual fling (she uses the German noun "Flirt") when in South Africa. So perhaps the authorities hoped for some kind of *kompromat* against visiting artists, though it remains a mystery as to how they imagined they might use it. Bauermeister also mentions the inevitable visit to happy mining dances and a safari. She furthermore writes that she and Stockhausen were shown by Steve Biko and his colleagues around Soweto. This tale has been retold many times in glowing terms along the lines of "Black revolutionary" and "musical revolutionary" coming together in a metaphorical act of brotherhood. However, Bauermeister writes of having been invited to Soweto by white students of the National Union of South African Students, who in turn supposedly organised Biko as their guide. NUSAS was in fact the primarily white organisation from which Biko had seceded in 1970 to set up the (Black) South African Students' Organisation. An extensive investigation has turned up no proof that Biko was in Johannesburg at this time, let alone that he did guided tours of Soweto for NUSAS, or even met Stockhausen at all. Bauermeister's account of their visit to South Africa smacks embarrassingly of White Saviourism. See Bauermeister, *Ich hänge im Triolengitter. Mein Leben mit Karlheinz Stockhausen*. Munich: Edition Elke Heidenreich bei C. Bertelsmann, 2011, 264–271. See also anon., *BikoHausen: Steve Bantu Biko and Karlheinz Stockhausen in Johannesburg, 1971*, at https://contemporaryand.com/exhibition/bikohausen-steve-bantu-biko-and-karlheinz-stockhausen-in-johannesburg-1971/ (accessed 12 June 2025).

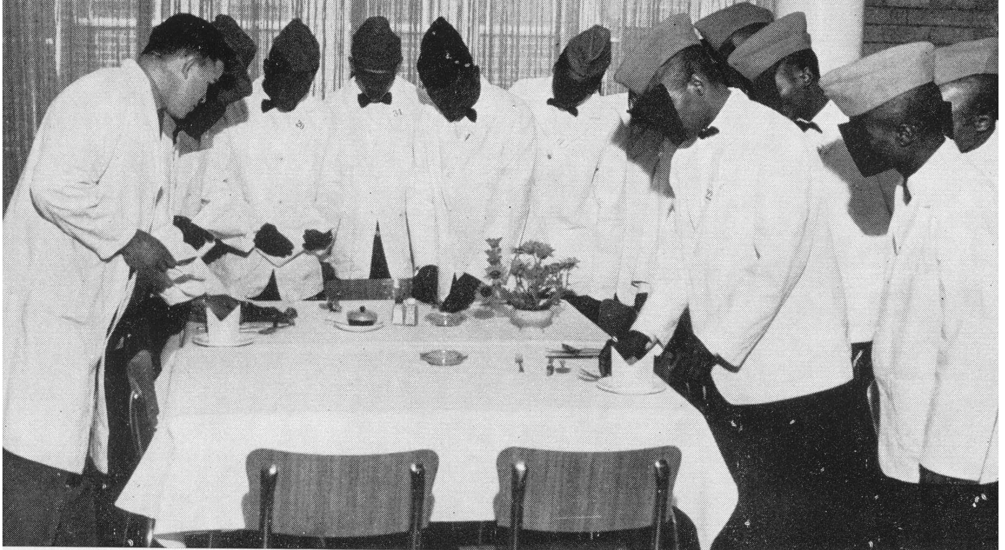

Figure 1.4. The catering corps of Leeuwkop Prison in Johannesburg, the "model prison" to be shown to prominent foreign visitors. Private collection.

under Karl Böhm in Dresden, and in 1953 the world première of his Requiem had been conducted in Rome by Herbert von Karajan, no less, with Elisabeth Schwarzkopf as the soprano soloist. The cost of Sutermeister's visit to South Africa was funded partly by his South African hosts, partly by Pro Helvetia, the Swiss Arts Council. He gave various lectures to segregated student audiences and was taken on the inevitable trip to the Kruger Park. The political import of his visit was underlined by an hour-long audience with the then Prime Minister, Hendrik Verwoerd, facilitated by the Swiss writer Hans Jenny (a former member of the Swiss fascist organisation *Nationale Front* in the 1930s, the author of white supremacist books such as *Afrika ist nicht nur schwarz* ("Africa isn't just Black"), and at this time a prominent member of the Swiss-South African Association). Verwoerd seems to have charmed Sutermeister, assuring him among other things that "the Negroes [sic, "Neger"] do not find segregated park benches and lifts offensive"[45] (the same petty apartheid that according to Peter Vogelsanger, quoted above, was "swiftly disappearing" 12 years later). Sutermeister was also taken on a visit to the Black prison Leeuwkop in Johannesburg, though clearly without being informed that it was a kind of Potemkin village that was put on the itinerary of those whom the state wanted to convince of its kindly, humanitarian approach to public justice.[46]

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[45] Typewritten report from Sutermeister to Luc Boissonnas, the head of Pro Helvetia, dated 26 April 1964. Held in Sutermeister's archives in the Zentralbibliothek Zürich.

[46] Conversation between the present writer and a lawyer who trained in Johannesburg and visited

Sutermeister understood no Afrikaans, so was presumably unaware that the Afrikaans translation of his opera had occasioned an ideological shift in which Gotthelf's folk horror tale became a pro-apartheid work warning of the supposed theological and biological dangers of interracial sex. The Alpine farmers now become "boere", which in a South African context denotes white Afrikaners; the devil's sexual contact with the "boer" girl Christine leaves a dark mark on her, ultimately turning her into the black spider that spreads a black plague across the land. Metaphor in the original German acquires a literal connotation in Afrikaans. At this time, leading apartheid theorists such as Geoffrey Cronjé believed in all seriousness that "blackness" was a kind of disease spread through sexual intercourse, hence the imperative to prevent relationships across the colour bar.[47]

Sutermeister's visit prompted a protest from Abdul S. Minty from the anti-apartheid movement in London. There was a brief flurry of articles in the Swiss press, at which Pro Helvetia wrote to Sutermeister, disingenuously asking "Whether you perhaps had the impression that people of other races were from the outset excluded from your lectures at the universities of Pretoria, Johannesburg, Cape Town and Stellenbosch ...?", at which Sutermeister wrote them a long report about how he had spoken openly before different (i.e. segregated) audiences. This seems to have satisfied them.[48]

One year later, in 1965, the Lucerne Festival Strings under Rudolf Baumgartner embarked on a long-planned tour of South Africa, organised largely by Hans Adler[49] and supported once more by Pro Helvetia. Since the problems with Sutermeister, the latter had become more cautious. So for the Festival Strings, Pro Helvetia stipulated that "an appropriate ["angemessen"] number of concerts should be given not solely for white audiences but also for Black music-lovers".[50] The Strings accordingly gave eleven concerts for whites and one, much shorter concert for a Black audience at Dorkay House in Johannesburg. Apart from the absurdity that a ratio of eleven to one could ever be considered "appropriate", it is clear that Pro Helvetia was still oblivious to the fact that playing for a segregated Black audience

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Leeuwkop in the 1960s.

47 See, for example, Geoffrey Cronjé, William Nicol and Evert P. Groenewald (eds.), *Regverdige rasse-apartheid*. Stellenbosch: Christen-Studentevereniging-Maatskappy van Suid-Afrika, 1947, here 83–88. Cronjé also exercised a considerable influence on cultural life in South Africa, both as a senior academic and as a member of various boards, including that of the Performing Arts Council of the Transvaal.

48 See Chris Walton, "Farbe bekennen: Schweizer Künstler und der Apartheid-Staat", in: Thomas Gartmann (ed.), *'Als Schweizer bin ich neutral'. Schoecks Oper 'Das Schloss Dürande' und ihr Umfeld*. Schliengen: Argus, 2018, 286–311.

49 For more information on Adler, see Annemie Stimie Behr's chapter in this book.

50 Letter from Pro Helvetia to Rudolf Baumgartner of 26 February 1965. Held by the Swiss Federal Archives in Bern.

was the problem, not a solution.[51] Unlike Stravinsky or Sutermeister, the Festival Strings were not taken to the Kruger Park on their tour, probably because taking a chamber orchestra would have been inordinately expensive, though they did attend the usual happy mining dances. Their experience of South African fauna was largely confined to watching the apes they saw on a bus tour around the Cape Town area.

Further Swiss musicians and ensembles visited South Africa in the years thereafter. Not even the United Nations' call for a cultural boycott of South Africa in 1968 had much of an impact – after all, Switzerland still wasn't a member of the UN. Hans Adler organised a tour for the oboist and composer Heinz Holliger in 1969, and in 1971 the Ensemble Vocal de Lausanne went there on tour. Pro Helvetia again provided much of the funding in the latter case, though they had begun to qualify their support by insisting on the necessity of non-segregated events. As in the case of the Festival Strings, however, all their concerts ended up segregated anyway.[52]

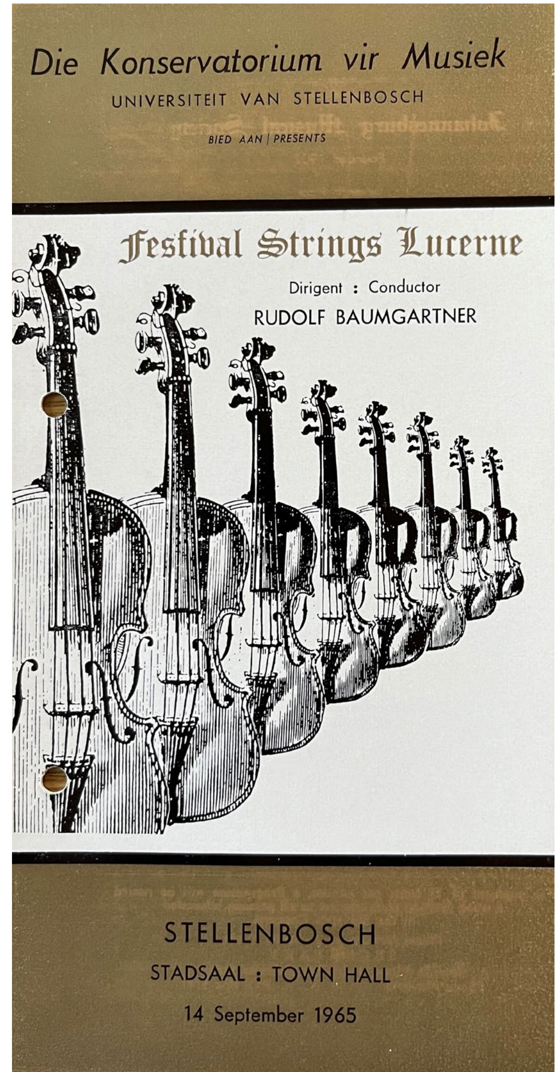

Figure 1.5. The programme for the Stellenbosch concert of the Lucerne Festival Strings in 1965. Courtesy of Esther Nyffenegger.

The only case of a Swiss ensemble turning down a visit because of apartheid seems to have been the Zurich Chamber Orchestra in 1974. A tour was agreed with Pro Helvetia and the

[51] For more information on this tour and the concert for Blacks held at Dorkay House, see Annemie Stimie Behr's chapter in this book.

[52] See Walgrave, *A Culture of Discreet Complicity: Swiss Men Mediating Culture to and from South Africa 1948–1994*. Doctoral thesis, University of Fribourg, 2024, 98–101.

South African authorities – all concerts to be segregated, of course – but then the orchestra management realised that one of its number, the violist Francisco (Franz) Ureña Rib from the Dominican Republic, would be classed as being of "mixed race", which would normally prevent him from appearing on the podium with his (officially "white") colleagues. The possibility was raised of his being issued with the papers of an "honorary white" for the duration of the trip. But quite apart from the potential embarrassment of his having to prove his "honorary whiteness" whenever asked, this solution also entailed possible risks. For if he strayed from his group for any reason and forgot his pass, he could have been arrested for being in a "white" area without permission.[53] The precise nature of the discussions between the Chamber Orchestra and the South African authorities remains unclear, but the version of the story Ureña Rib told his family was that his orchestral colleagues (and their conductor Edmond de Stoutz) had refused to allow one of their number to be treated differently, and so cancelled all plans for the tour.[54]

There were also Swiss musicians among those who followed the glossy promises of the South African government that attracted up to one thousand Swiss emigrants each year in the 1960s and '70s.[55] The present writer has spoken to three of them, and it is clear that they regarded South Africa as just another country to which one might emigrate, like Australia, New Zealand, the USA or Canada. It was a country that had a so-called "race problem", of that they were aware, but so did the USA at the time, and that never stopped anyone from visiting there. And when these young musicians arrived in South Africa, they lived a life very similar to that in Europe, except with better weather, nicer living conditions, and servants. They played in white orchestras, gave concerts for white audiences, gave instrumental lessons to white children, and so on. And the fact that internationally famous musicians visited South Africa to perform – such as Igor Stravinsky – simply confirmed that they were living in a "normal", Eurocentric country. While from our perspective today it is difficult to see how anyone could live in apartheid South Africa without being subject to serious cognitive dissonance, we must remember that racism remained entrenched in Western Europe far longer than we might be comfortable to acknowledge. It was not until 1995, for example, that Swiss law finally became compatible with the UN's International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination of 1965 when Article 261bis was accepted in a national referendum, forbidding discrimination of people on the basis of race.

53 When the coloured South African répétiteur Gordon Jephtas was offered a job in Pretoria in 1986, he was also offered a pass as an "honorary white". See Roos, Davids and Walton, eds., *"I'm Sorry. I am what I am"*, 178.

54 E-mails to the present writer from Louis de Stoutz of 19 June 2022 and Obed Ureña of 22 June 2022. See also Walgrave, *A Culture of Discreet Complicity*, 134–35.

55 Kreis, *Switzerland and South Africa 1948–1994*, 152.

The Europeans in the South African orchestras of the 1960s and '70s did enjoy certain advantages that were very different from back home. Many returned home to Europe or the USA after a few years, and some of them developed a neat scam. If one of their number was known to be leaving the country soon, he (for the foreign members were generally men) would go to a hardware shop and buy an expensive electronic item – such as a fridge – on hire purchase, putting down the minimum amount (say, ten percent). He would then sell it on to a friend in the orchestra for well under the new price, and when he left the country shortly afterwards, the shop where he'd purchased it had no idea where he'd gone and no recourse to legal action, so had to write off its losses. Theft, it seems, wasn't really theft if you were white.[56]

Some Swiss artists did not even have to visit South Africa physically to profit from it. As Paula Fourie explains in her chapter in this book, the writers Friedrich Dürrenmatt and Max Frisch were among the most-often performed modern playwrights in South Africa from the 1960s to 1980s, often in Afrikaans translation. Despite Frisch's reputation in particular for being staunchly on the left, the first proof that we have that he was at all concerned about audience segregation is a letter from his secretary to his publisher of 4 February 1978, allowing a production of *Biedermann und die Brandstifter* to go ahead at the main Cape Town Theatre as long as (in the words of his publisher) "everyone … has the possibility of buying an entrance ticket".[57] It was true that ticket sales were open to everyone; but neither Frisch nor anyone else bothered to ask whether anyone except whites could afford them. And in fact, the theatre was largely boycotted by the coloured and Black communities at the time, meaning that the production was to all intents and purposes "whites only" anyway. It took Frisch until 1986 to reject performances in South Africa.[58] Sometimes, an Afrikaans translation could bring a play perilously close to apartheid propaganda – such as in the Afrikaans translation of *Andorra* that was performed in Pretoria in 1964 not long after Sutermeister saw his own *Schwarze Spinne* at the same theatre. The "whites" and "blacks" of Frisch's play, the latter clad in the traditional colour of European fascism (like the "blackshirts" of Benito Mussolini in Italy and Oswald Mosley in England) lose their metaphors in Afrikaans.

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[56] This was told to me by a Swiss musician (name withheld) who played in a South African orchestra in the early 1970s. He assured me that he hadn't made use of the trick himself (and for the record: I've known him for over a decade as someone scrupulously honest and I believe him; nor was he referring to any of his few Swiss colleagues in his orchestra).

[57] Letter to Frisch from Helene Ritzerfeld, Suhrkamp Verlag, 31 January 1978, and the reply of Rosemarie Primault of 4 February 1978 on behalf of Frisch. Held by the Max Frisch Archive, ETH Zurich.

[58] Frisch's secretary added his remark "Bitte lieber nicht" ("Rather not, please") to a letter from his publisher of 29 October 1986 asking for permission for an Afrikaans translation to be published and performed in South Africa. Max Frisch Archive, ETH Zurich.

Andorra thus becomes a "white" country in danger of being overrun by the evil "Blacks". But as Paula Fourie has elsewhere observed, we have to be cautious before assuming that what seems from our perspective to be crass and superficial is exactly that. The people responsible for translating and directing the plays of Frisch and Dürrenmatt in South Africa were mostly of a liberal disposition (including those responsible for *Andorra* in 1964) and frequently used these plays to engage in double-speak to convey anti-apartheid sentiments in a manner that would survive the red pen of the apartheid-era censors.[59] It is possible that by focusing on superficially obvious parallels with apartheid we are ignoring subtle acts of potential subversion and are allowing ourselves to be triggered into the same reaction that the translators hoped to elicit from the apartheid censors.

Examples are hard to find of Swiss cultural representatives who travelled to South Africa during the apartheid era with the express intention of engaging with their Black contemporaries. The only notable example we have come across is the artist Theo Gerber. He was born in Thun in 1928, studied at the Basel School of Design (the Kunstgewerbeschule), but spent many of his early years travelling in Europe and across Africa (reputedly covering some 40,000 km in North and West Africa in the mid-1950s). He settled in France in 1962 but continued to travel over the next three decades. He visited Soweto in 1988, gave workshops to Black artists and organised scholarships to help the best of them to study in France (such as Avhashoni Mainganye, who has spoken warmly of Gerber's mentorship and of their common friendship with the author Zakes Mda).[60] Several of Gerber's paintings of the 1980s and '90s thematise his relationship with South Africa, and in 1989 the Kunstmuseum Olten even organised an exhibition of Gerber's Africa-related works entitled "Mayibuye iAfrika – Afrika komm zurück".[61] He died in 1997, just a month after a state visit to Switzerland by Nelson Mandela, who was presented with one of Gerber's African works while in Bern.[62]

There were a few Black South Africans who, like the abovementioned Mainganye, were able to make short-term study visits to Europe thanks to the intervention of individual Swiss (another was the musician Shalati Joseph Khosa, who is the topic of a chapter by Chatradari Devroop below). But in the field of classical music at least, most of the South Africans who came to Europe in the years under consideration here were white and already possessed

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59 See Fourie's forthcoming book, *Those Who Have Eyes Will See. Translations of Swiss Theatre in Apartheid South Africa*, which engages extensively with these complex issues. The Boydell Press, in press.

60 See Nolan Stevens, "Liberated Mind: a conversation with Avhashoni Mainganye", at Africa South Art Initiative (ASAI), https://asai.co.za/mainganye-liberated-mind/ (accessed June 2025).

61 See Anneliese Zwez, "Glut des Engagements. Theo Gerber im Kunstmuseum Olten", in *Solothurner Zeitung*, 14 September 1989.

62 See Alisa Klay's brief exhibition guide: "Kunstmuseum Thun. Theo Gerber. Science Fiction. 4. Februar – 16. April 2023". Thun: Kunstmuseum Thun, 2023.

the necessary background to help establish themselves on the European scene, such as the soprano Mimi Coertse, based in Vienna but who enjoyed her first big solo success in Basel, or the tenor Deon van der Walt who settled for several years in Zurich (both discussed in the chapter by Hilde Roos below). The exception to prove the rule was the répétiteur Gordon Jephtas (see the chapter here by F.-J. Davids), who came from the coloured community and rose to the top of his profession first in Switzerland and later in New York. Two South African youth orchestras also visited Switzerland, thanks to the offices of a rich South African expatriate who with his American wife set up an international festival of youth orchestras in Switzerland in 1969 (see my later chapter in this book).

By far the most fascinating story of South African artists in Switzerland, however, took place far removed from the official channels responsible for cultural exchange and beyond the bounds of "classical" music. From 1959 to 1968, a jazz club – the "Café Africana" – existed in the old town of Zurich, directly opposite the Zurich Central Library, in what is today the Hotel Scheuble. It became a second home to numerous exiled South African jazz musicians such as Abdullah Ibrahim (then known as Dollar Brand), Sathima Bea Benjamin, Dudu Pukwana, Johnny Gertze and Makaya Ntshoko, who played there alongside Swiss musicians such as Remo Rau. The South Africans had managed to get Swiss visas in large part thanks to Paul Meyer, a Swiss graphic artist who had lived in Hillbrow in Johannesburg in the mid-1950s, where he mixed with many local Black artists and intellectuals, and whose apartment and immense record collection were reputedly open to everyone (in his memoirs, Hugh Masekela recalls visiting Meyer in around 1955 when the latter was having an affair with Miriam Makeba).[63] Meyer had returned to Switzerland in around 1959, but thereafter maintained contact with his Black colleagues from South Africa.[64]

As is explained in the last section of this book, it was at the Café Africana that Brand and Benjamin were "discovered" by Duke Ellington when he happened to be on tour in Zurich. He procured them a recording contract, and within just a few years Ibrahim was one of the most prominent jazz pianists on the international scene. He often returned to Switzerland, his saxophonist Pukwana married a Swiss woman, and his drummer Ntshoko even settled permanently in Basel. The white South African pianist Chris McGregor also played at the Africana with his then band the Blue Notes, and in the 1970s he returned several times to

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63 See Masekela and D. Michael Cheers, *Still Grazing*. New York: Crown Publishers, 2004, 77–79. Meyer is absent from Miriam Makeba's own memoir, though she there relates how a car with three "Swiss boys" who'd seen her singing in the townships stopped to help her when she was involved in a car accident in 1955. It is unclear if Meyer was one of them, and if this was when he and Makeba became acquainted. See Miriam Makeba in conversation with Nomsa Mwamuka, *Makeba. The Miriam Makeba Story*. Johannesburg: STE Publishers, 2004, 38.

64 See the chapters below on jazz and on Lewis Nkosi, another friend of Meyer's.

Switzerland with his new band, the Brotherhood of Breath, whose impact on the local scene proved at least as consequential as that of Ibrahim & Co. a decade earlier (there was also an overlap in their line-ups; Dudu Pukwana variously played with both McGregor and Ibrahim).[65]

Figure 1.6. The Zähringer Quick café on the Mühlegasse in 1957, soon to be the Café Africana (today the Hotel Scheuble). Zurich, Baugeschichtliches Archiv. Creative Commons.

Johnny Gertze died in 1983, Chris McGregor and Dudu Pukwana in 1990. The surviving Black South Africans from the Swiss jazz scene of the 1960s and ’70s have consistently refused to be interviewed about their experiences – often with good humour, though not always (in one case, a single, polite e-mail requesting an interview resulted in a threat of legal injunction). We must, however, acknowledge that the Black exiles arriving in Zurich in the early 1960s were forced to exist in extremely precarious circumstances that are difficult for us to comprehend today. Post-Sharpeville South Africa offered no humane opportunity to pursue a career, but in Switzerland they found themselves without permanent residence or job, often forced to play for a pittance, and at the whim of authorities and employers alike. Their worries were existential; and we must respect their refusal to talk about their experiences. But they remain central to any consideration of the cultural links between South Africa and Switzerland, so

65 See, for example, the interview with John Wolf Brennan in this book.

the final section of this book is devoted to them. Two Swiss jazz musicians who were present in the Africana – Bruno Spoerri and Richard Butz – offer their reminiscences here, and in a series of interviews with relatives, friends and colleagues of the South African musicians of the Café Africana, Steff Rohrbach has succeeded in reconstructing the narrative of South African jazz in Switzerland while respecting the silence of the men at the centre of it.

The historical investigations of Georg Kreis and his colleagues into the business relationships between Switzerland and South Africa (NFP 42+) revealed a steady increase in economic ties during the 1960s and early 1970s. As we have elucidated here, these economic relations find a surprisingly direct, concurrent correlation in the cultural ties between the two nations, whether in the field of music, literature or journalism. But while certain areas of economic activity between South Africa and Switzerland continued to grow into the 1980s, the cultural situation seems to suggest that matters were already starting to take a different direction by the mid-1970s. The Soweto Uprising of 1976 made more people in Europe aware that South Africa didn't have a "race" problem; it had a white supremacy problem. With regard to Switzerland in particular, this shift in opinion can be observed (albeit in overly general terms) by reference once more to Swiss graphic design.

In 1960, the Swiss artist Raymond Dennler designed a poster advertising Outspan oranges in Switzerland. I, too, remember eating Outspan oranges in northern England when I was a child in the late 1960s, though no one there – or in Switzerland – seems to have given any thought as to their origins in the racial inequities of the South African agricultural sector. But by 1974, just two years before the Soweto Uprising, the same fruit was used by the burgeoning Swiss anti-apartheid movement for a quite different design purpose.[66] The poster child of the South African agricultural economy here becomes an instrument of political opposition (see Figs. 1.7 and 1.8 below).

It was also in the mid-70s that the plays of Athol Fugard began to be performed in Switzerland. His name was first mentioned in the *NZZ* on 8 April 1963 (albeit incorrectly spelled) when his *Blood Knot* was played in London. He got another brief mention eight years later when the South African authorities gave him back the passport they had confiscated from him,[67] and on 26 November 1971 the *Neue Berner Zeitung* brought a tiny report about police raids in South Africa, during which the police had removed a volume of Chinese poetry from Fugard's apartment.[68] But then there is a Swiss flood of Fugard beginning on 8 November 1973, when the *NZZ* wrote glowingly of a performance of the *Blood Knot* in a tiny theatre

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[66] "Non aux produits d'Afrique du sud". Delémont: Campagne ANTI-OUTSPAN, [ca 1974]. See https://permalink.snl.ch/bib/chccsa000012158 (accessed May 2025).

[67] Anon., "Ausreisebewilligung für den Dramatiker Fugard", in *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 252, 3 June 1971, 2nd edition of the day.

[68] Anon., "Kein Kommentar", in *Neue Berner Zeitung*, 52(249), 26 October 1971.

Figure 1.7. Poster for Outspan oranges by Raymond Dennler, 1960. By kind permission of Wirz Group AG and Schweizerische Nationalbibliothek.

Figure 1.8. Anti-apartheid poster from Delémont urging a boycott of Outspan oranges. Bibliothèque de Genève / ProLitteris.

in Aarau, claiming that it was his first-ever performance in any German-speaking country.[69] There follows a series of regular reviews in the paper of Fugard performances abroad, until finally, on 19 December 1976, Swiss Radio broadcast a radio play by Fugard (*Blood Knot,* here as *Mit Haut und Haar*), which was followed up by a large review article in the *NZZ* on 14 January 1977.[70] Early in 1978, a play by Fugard – *Buschmann und Lena* – was finally produced at a major Swiss theatre, the Theater am Neumarkt in Zurich. In the years thereafter, his name was rarely out of the Swiss-German press for long.[71] Quantitative research of this kind cannot provide any conclusive evidence of a trend. But this sudden, sustained interest in Fugard in what was and remains a fundamentally conservative newspaper suggests that some subterranean rupture was occurring in relations between Switzerland and South Africa, despite the fact that trade between the two countries was still booming. It is tempting to posit – despite all the necessary caveats – that the actors in the Swiss cultural field here sensed the inevitability of change several years before Swiss politicians and businessmen came to similar conclusions.

There are several final, interlinked issues that have to be raised in this overview of cultural relations between apartheid-era South Africa and Switzerland, precisely because they are almost completely omitted from the individual essays and interviews published here. In the course of the research conducted by the present writer and his colleagues for this book, four topics came up repeatedly, regardless of the skin colour or social class of the person under discussion: sex, drugs, alcohol and violence. These are still taboo for many people in South Africa. So while several of our sources were willing to be candid, they all insisted on remaining off the record (a decision that we regret, but respect).

As is to be expected with any cross-section of humanity, a certain number of the figures discussed in this book were gay when homosexuality was still illegal in South Africa, necessitating the kind of subterfuge and dissimulation that must have taken an immense psychological toll. In at least two cases discussed in these pages, both since deceased, these men married women, though only in one case have we been allowed to discuss this openly (Gordon Jephtas, who died of Aids in 1992 and was publicly outed after his death).[72] There were also Swiss who seem to have gone to South Africa specifically to use their whiteness and economic advantage to procure easy sex across the colour bar. On at least one occasion, an orchestra had to rescue a guest conductor from police custody when he was caught having sex with a woman who was not white; this was illegal under the terms of the so-called

69 H.T., "Innerstadtbühne Aarau", in *Neue Zürcher Zeitung,* 519, 8 November 1973.
70 Mw, "Dialoge aus der Apartheid", in *Neue Zürcher Zeitung,* 11, 14 January 1977.
71 See the two essays on Fugard in this book by Franziska Baumann.
72 See Roos, Davids and Walton, eds., *"I'm Sorry. I am what I am."*

Immorality Act of 1957.[73] According to the sources, even Paul Meyer, the jazz aficionado who helped Dollar Brand and others to get visas for Switzerland, used his position of power for sexual leverage with Black women.[74] This does not necessarily mean that those who from our perspective might seem to have been "victims" were themselves without agency. But there is no doubt that the power disparities inherent in apartheid South Africa naturally lent themselves to all manner of coercion, exploitation and abuse that inevitably also encompassed sex, regardless of its local legality or illegality and of the nationality of those involved. And this is but the tip of the iceberg. The only time that the present writer slept badly after an interview for this project was after being informed of a case of historical paedophilia by a (white, deceased) South African composer with whom he had been acquainted[75] – though such stories abound on the classical scene and in the corridors of university music departments in South Africa.[76] And as for violence: the case of the tenor Deon van der Walt, who was shot by his own father in a case of murder-suicide, was reported openly in the newspapers at the time. But domestic violence, apparently often fuelled by alcohol, was admitted or intimated about several musicians discussed in these pages, both Black and white.

It might seem overly inquisitive, even cruelly prurient or unscholarly, to mention these issues here, especially since we are prevented from discussing them in detail. But to leave them utterly unmentioned would mean ignoring some of the most disturbing aspects of cultural life in South Africa that inevitably also featured in that country's relationships with Switzerland. The Swiss-related instances we have encountered in the course of our research offer merely a small-scale snapshot of a much bigger issue. But none of this should surprise us. When the state itself authorises violence and coercion on a massive scale against huge swathes of its population, giving a small minority the means to subjugate the rest, it is inevitable that this power imbalance, the violence it condones and the concomitant moral degradation that both instil should seep into every field of human endeavour, especially into that field where our innermost needs and emotions find public and private expression: the arts. Were we to remain silent about this here, later scholars would rightly accuse us of blindly perpetuating taboos, protecting perpetrators and further silencing the already voiceless. We cannot right past wrongs, and we are forbidden here from even naming them. All we can do is acknowledge our impotence in this regard and hope that later generations will be able to tell unfiltered truths.

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[73] Source withheld.

[74] See Robin D.G. Kelley, *Africa Speaks, America Answers*, Cambridge (Massachusetts) and London: Harvard University Press, 2012, 137; see also the jazz chapters below. As Richard Butz recounts in his chapter, Meyer was murdered in Geneva in 1988.

[75] Source withheld.

[76] Sources withheld.

Stephanus Muller and Chris Walton (eds)

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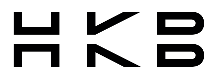

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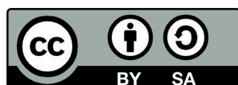

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Contents

The Authors ix

Introduction
Chris Walton & Stephanus Muller xiii

Part I: Historical Foundations and Early Encounters 1

1 Tracing the Paths of Culture between Switzerland and South Africa
Chris Walton 4

2 A Nineteenth-Century Swiss Missionary Encounter with Sesotho Orthography
Lineo Segoete 32

3 Vignettes from the Travels of Things: A Cultural Biography of Objects in the Hans Adler Collection
Annemie Stimie Behr 44

4 Compact Urbanity in Contrast: Revisiting Civic Centres Designed by the Kirchhofer Office in Apartheid-Era South Africa
Thomas Chapman 61

Part II: Music, Theatre and Performance as Cultural Exchange 77

5 Deon van der Walt (1958–2005), a South African Tenor in Zurich
Hilde Roos 80

6 South African Youth Orchestras in Switzerland
Chris Walton 88

7 Listening to South African Apartheid on Swiss Radio: Athol Fugard's *The Blood Knot* and the Translation of Passing
Franziska Burger 102

8 A Theatre Scandal in the Swiss Provinces: Fugard's *Statements* in St. Gallen
Franziska Burger 115

Part III: Literature, Exile, and Intellectual Dialogues 129

9 Peter Sulzer and the Conservative Representation of South African Literature to a German-Speaking Readership, 1948–1994
Jasper Walgrave 133

10 Swiss Literature in Afrikaans between 1948 and 1994: An Overview
Paula Fourie 153

11 Lewis Nkosi and Switzerland: Provincialising the Global North
Astrid Starck-Adler & Dag Henrichsen 165

12 "Coloured nature… isn't that easy to shake off": Gordon Jephtas in Switzerland
Féroll-Jon Davids 174

13 Shalati Khosa's Swiss Sojourn
Chatradari Devroop 183

14 Singing Cowboys and Alpine Goat Herds: The Passaggio of Culture to Nature in Afrikaans Yodelling
Willemien Froneman & Stephanus Muller 191

Part IV: Jazz 205

15 When South African Jazz Came to Switzerland: Abdullah Ibrahim (Dollar Brand), Chris McGregor and the Blue Notes, Joe Malinga and other South African Jazz Musicians, the Anti-Apartheid Movement and "AfriKaribik" in St. Gallen
Richard Butz 209

16 Dollar Brand in Zurich – Taking Notes
Bruno Spoerri 230

17 Harmonies of Foreign Climes
Steff Rohrbach 238

18 Abdullah Ibrahim in Ichertswil: An Interview with Six Trutt
Christian Steulet/Steff Rohrbach 243

19 Interview with Rose Ntshoko
Steff Rohrbach 254

20 Interview with Bob Degen
Steff Rohrbach 263
21 Interview with Stephan Kurmann
Steff Rohrbach 269
22 "Jazz against Apartheid": An Interview with Jürgen Leinhos
Steff Rohrbach 278
23 Interview with Barbara Pukwana
Christian Steulet/Steff Rohrbach 290
24 Interview with John Wolf Brennan
Christian Steulet, ed. Steff Rohrbach 298
25 Interview with Niklaus Troxler
Steff Rohrbach 305

Sources 317
Archives Consulted 318
Bibliography 319
Index of Names and Places 339