

DAWNE Y. CURRY  
DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY  
RESEARCH NARRATIVE

Specializing in African history has afforded me the opportunity to interrogate and analyze marginalized communities throughout the continent, but particularly in South Africa. South Africa serves as my lens to explore how Africans engaged in resistance before and during the apartheid era. My current, future and past research examines how people intellectualized and waged resistance. Using over forty original interviews, and under-examined archival sources, my forthcoming monograph *Apartheid on a Black Isle: Removal and Resistance in Alexandra, South Africa*, brings to the fore the underappreciated role that the African and Coloured township of Alexandra, located nine miles northeast of Johannesburg, played in advancing human rights. Alexandra's documented record and the oral histories, gathered in my work for the first time, invite us to conceive of resistance in ways that established scholarly models fail to reckon. This book examines protest not only in its manifestations of underground movements and the student uprising but, more importantly, in its relationship to the environment and environmental destruction and how these amplified the dwellers' opposition to apartheid during the 1970s. During this key era, when several nations such as Mozambique and Angola gained independence from Portugal and the United States and the former Soviet Union viewed for pieces of Africa, Alexandra also experienced its own internal partition. Apartheid officials destroyed homes in order to convert the township from a family dwelling area to a place for migrant laborers only. Partition impeded Alexandra's organic growth, reducing the population and changing the physical landscape, which forced people to sell homes far below market value. Alexandrans swiftly responded, from using the media to highlight their plight to risking their lives by spurning government offers and remaining in Alexandra.

In this regard, my book contradicts findings by earlier scholars who underestimate the period between the 1960 Sharpeville Massacre and the 1976 student uprising as a period of inactivity or quiescence between more visible, conventional protests. Other scholars such as Gregory Houston, Bernard Magubane and Raymond Suttner have also addressed this critical period, but only a few historians have examined Alexandran activists. My book proves that Alexandra was a major hub of clandestine activity and that the township's captive geographical location played a crucial role in operatives' abilities to recruit, to train and to transport insurgents, money and weaponry. The township's layout, makeup, density, and compactness shaped its response to government policy that banned the African National Congress (ANC) and the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) along with other political organizations following the 1960 Sharpeville Massacre, a peaceful pass protest that turned into a killing orgy. Like these organizations, Alexandrans resorted to clandestine ways to sustain the struggle, forming political cells of three to four people that worked secretly and independently of other units, even those existing within the same township.

My research also contributes to and extends a larger body of scholarship that seeks to understand how insurgents organized to challenge and eventually overturn apartheid. In particular, I argue that mobility, limited as it was, was crucial to the movement. While Suttner's study examines how insurgents used secret codes to communicate, my manuscript builds upon his observations by discussing how people and weapons moved. Alexandrans disguised

weapons by placing explosives inside household items, and created the illusion that they represented innocuous articles rather than ready made bombs that could decimate entire communities. By showing this aspect of mobility, the work diverges from and expands Suttner's study by exploring ways in which Ramokgadi orchestrated, spearheaded and supervised the transport system. My book makes two important points regarding mobility: it refutes Tim Creswell's notion that mobility in South Africa was primarily a leisurely exercise of whites and instead shows it to be a crucial political strategy of blacks. Secondly, my book explores how people moved around even when the government controlled funerals by determining their order and the time allotted for remembrance. Instead of accepting the government's impositions, Alexandrans traveled within and outside South Africa to honor African traditions by visiting the sites of death. *Apartheid on a Black Isle* also builds upon but adds new layers to recent scholarship by Philip Bonner and Noor Nieftagodien that examines Alexandra's contribution to the student uprising. During this nationwide protest against the imposition of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction for all courses that Africans took, hundreds of people lost their lives, as townships united in solidarity with the movement's epicenter, Soweto. To capture this historic watershed, Bonner and Nieftagodien emphasize inequality in education, and while this precipitated the revolt, they often exclude or downplay other factors. My book examines these additional dimensions, including Coloured/African/Indian race relations, and how people grieved, which are crucial to the Alexandran story.

My attention to the personal and political importance of rituals of grief, in fact, marks my work as distinctive. By taking this approach, the work builds upon Belinda Bozzoli's discussion of funerals' and their theatricality to analyze what transpires before and after these highly politicized rites. Grief stricken from their relatives' and friends' sudden passing, residents, encumbered by apartheid rules that regulated funerals and burials, used the morgue, the police station, the streets and neighboring countries to reflect upon the decedents' lives. They also internalized their pain. Bodies became sites of commemoration, as hypertension and other ailments indicated the pressure and stress that women endured on a daily basis. This strain was also evident during the forced removal process when the government evicted longtime residents to make way for migrant laborers to live in single sex dormitory-like hostels. Through the stories of the dispossessed, *Apartheid on a Black Isle* examines the bodily impaired and the dearly departed to argue that people underwent corporeal, financial, and emotional resettlement whether they physically moved or not. Lastly, *Apartheid on a Black Isle* places Alexandran history within the context of transnational movements that shaped and defined experiences throughout the world. Because the work compares and contrasts other similarly related histories, the manuscript speaks to broader issues of gender, urban studies, history, geography, human rights, colonialism, township studies, and space. The work resuscitates, amplifies, and restores Alexandra's historical place during a crucial period in South African history and the world at large.

The book was accepted for publication by Palgrave Macmillan, an internationally recognized press with an established record of award-winning monographs. My book will be joining a stable that consists of these works: Michael Onyebuchi Eze's *Intellectual History in Contemporary South Africa*, Rob Skinner's *Foundations of Apartheid*, or Marina Rieker and Kamran Asdar Ali's edited volume *Gendering Urban Space* interpret African history by exploring the multiple ways they exhibited agency. Africans, as was the case in Alexandra, South Africa, emerged from the margins of society to take their rightful place in the political

center. These authors, as I do in my work, show how Africans negotiated and redefined resistance while under the constraints of gender, the state, apartheid and other institutional structures. These works not only reclaim the lives and contributions of Africans, they provide fresh ground on how to interpret history from below. I received the copy edited manuscript in June 2012, the page proofs in August 2012, the final page proofs in September 2012. The book will be published in November 2012.

## Published Works

I have also published a number of journal articles and book chapters and co-edited a book. I have served as a co-editor of *Extending the African Diaspora: New Histories in the Scholarship of Black Peoples*, which the University of Illinois Press published in 2009. The essays approach many familiar topics with fresh perspectives. In doing so, they offer insightful and thought provoking analyses of the Black Diaspora. Using a variety of methodologies, contributors examine such topics as slavery and emancipation, transnational and Diasporic experiences, social and political activism, popular culture, and cultural and political identity in different locales. With multiple essays centered on common themes, these case studies also collectively speak to each other across the thematic sections in which they are grouped. Thus, this edited volume speaks to my philosophy on understanding African experiences holistically. I co-wrote the introduction. My first article, "An African American Constructs and Confronts Race in Post Apartheid South Africa," takes readers on an ethnographic journey where I discuss the complex nature of race and its social construction. Using my own experience and case studies of other African Americans who traveled to South Africa from the 1930s to the early twenty-first century, I grapple with the complex issues of race and identity. I conclude that race involves more than complexion, for it also encompasses linguistic ability, geography, cultural traits, body language, and nationality. These identity markers, I observe, played an immense role in my "social transformation" from an African American to a South African Coloured.

Another peer-reviewed work, "When Apartheid Interfered with Funerals: We Found Ways to Grieve in Alexandra, South Africa" examines how residents fought for the basic right to mourn. Before funerals took place Alexandrans reclaimed the bodies and visited the sites of death. These alternate strategies, I argue, helped Alexandrans to defy the apartheid system when police officials prohibited and inhibited funerary rites. Instead of the funerary space serving as a site of reflection, Alexandrans used the morgue, the streets, the ANC Khotso House, and the police station to honor the fallen. When survivors, seeking comfort, visited sites of death, they not only fulfilled a traditional African custom, they also began something new. This work laid out the theoretical foundation for Chapter 5 of my book, in which I use that space to interrogate how people eulogized the deceased. Through the interviews I conducted and mined from the archive of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), I concluded that when people recounted stories about how loved ones died, they created different forms of obituaries. Instead of discussing the decedents' accomplishments, mourners recalled visiting the sites of death, how they passed, or how they used the landscape to ascertain how they died.

I have also presented my work at national and international conferences, which include the African Studies Association (ASA), the International Studies Association (ISA), Southern

African Historical Society, and Interdisciplinary Social Sciences Conferences (ISSC). I have also published book reviews in the *Canadian Journal of History*, and *Peace and Change* and have several book reviews appearing on the widely read online websites of H-Africa and H-SAfrica. In addition to these works, I have published encyclopedia articles in the *Encyclopedia of African American History*, and the *Black Women's Encyclopedia*.

### **Forthcoming Works and Ongoing Research**

My recently completed book has inspired me to research a number of significant new topics in South African history. My ambitious research agenda for the next six years includes writing several journal articles, editing an anthology, and publishing a book. My future work builds upon ideas and research conducted with funding provided by the University of Nebraska-Lincoln (UNL), including the Maude Hammond Fling Faculty Research Fellowship, the Layman Grant-in-Aid Fellowship, the Arts and Humanities Research Enhancement Fellowship, and the Charles Henry Oldfather Fellowships. My second monograph will focus on women's activism during the segregation era. From 1912 to 1948,<sup>1</sup> Daughter of Africa founder Lilian Tshabalala and other women were prominent in the political terrain that defined African politics, yet as historian Peter Limb points out, more work needs to be done on this period, to not only restore women's historical place, but also to analyze different forms of African nationalism that developed.<sup>2</sup> Tshabalala constructed her own brand of nationalism using newspaper editorials and the Daughters of Africa as a platform to refine her concept of female empowerment. Tshabalala and other African women contributed to South Africa's intellectual landscape by defining nation and womanhood, by engaging in the politics of respectability, and by galvanizing the masses. My conference paper delivered at the Social Sciences Conference held in Barcelona, Spain in June 2012, will serve as a chapter in my monograph and as a subject in an article length manuscript to the *Journal of Southern African Studies* for their consideration in 2013. I have also submitted a Fulbright proposal and will apply for internal grants to further engage in research on this silence about women's activism.

Building upon my excavation and analysis of Natal's history, I am revising a paper about the predominantly male body, the Natal Native Congress (NNC). In this work, I analyze African responses to British intrusion in Natal, using the African educated elite as the primary focus. In particular, I examine the evidence of a relationship between the intelligentsia and the rest of Natal's African population to explore the extent to which a class-based rift did or did not develop in the consciousness, attitudes, and actions of the colony's black population. Towards this end, I chronicle the formation of Natal's early African political organizations, including Funamalungelo (We Demand Civil Rights Society), and its successor and contemporary, the Natal Native Congress (NNC) in addition to discussing articles appearing in Durban's first African and Zulu written newspaper, *Ilanga laseNatal (Natal Sun)* established by John L. Dube in 1903. This compliments my second monograph on Tshabalala and the Daughters of Africa because it provides a way for me to continually explore alternate and parallel political spaces that African men and women used to fight colonialism, and segregation among other forms of repression. I plan to submit this article to the *Journal of Natal and Zulu History* in June 2013.

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<sup>1</sup> These dates bookend the establishment of the African National Congress in 1912 and the end of segregation and the beginning of apartheid in 1948.

<sup>2</sup> Peter Limb, *The ANC's Early Years: Nation, Class and Place in South Africa before 1940* (Pretoria: Unisa, 2010).

In addition to this piece, I am also building upon my knowledge of Alexandra and resistance. I am revising two articles, already written, about the township. One work discusses the township's 1940s bus boycotts. These protests occurred because the bus company raised the tariff by a penny on four different occasions during this decade. For this analysis, I am using African newspapers such as *Umteteli wa Bantu*, *UmAfrika* and other vernacular mediums whose content originally appeared in isiZulu and Sesotho to unearth how Africans responded to the fare impositions. In addition, I am also using the personal papers of former African National Congress President-General Dr. Alfred B. Xuma. This work differs from previous studies because it provides a gendered analysis of the bus boycotts. It also disproves the Alexandra Bus Owners' (ABOA) argument that they lost revenue, the rational the body used to justify tariff increases. In another work in progress, entitled, "Displaced but Still at Home: Alexandra's Third Forced Removal," I explore the history of forced removals within the township. I argue that Alexandra's first removal came in 1947 with the squatters' relocation to Moroka township, its second one occurred from late fifties to late seventies, and its last removal was during the 1990s ethnic violence between the Zulus and the Xhosas. This work is a macroscopic overview of how the government and outsiders defined how people and land changed hands. I anticipate submitting these articles for publication in mid-2014. Further, I will be submitting a methodology article to the Oral History Review in 2015. That piece will discuss how to conduct research in a foreign country and in an urban Johannesburg township such as Alexandra. I trace my sojourn from my landing in Cape Town amid the oceans and the mountains, to my initial arrival and year-long stay in Johannesburg. I outline an approach to conducting oral history by using these themes: race, gender, class, and nationality.

Lastly, I seek to do an edited volume on squatter movements throughout Africa in 2016. This volume would conceptualize the term, and analyze how squatters confiscated land to build homes. This work will be the first of its kind to interrogate and feature squatters in Africa. Its conception stems from an article length piece that I am revising about the 1946-1947 Alexandra squatters' movement. In my examination of the squatters' movement, I show how leader Schreiner Baduza created a territory within a territory by using two of the township's public squares to establish a separate space replete with a magistrate's court, a secretary, a police unit, and a registration system. In addition to explaining how Baduza created his own territory, I explore the tensions between Alexandra proper residents and the squatters whom the government dumped on their doorstep. I will write a book proposal for this volume and send out a call for submissions on H-Africa, and H-SAfrica, which are major resources for scholars studying the continent.

My research agenda supports my quest to continue publishing as an oral and social historian of Africa. I have outlined works that illustrate South Africa's complex history but also its different evolutions. Thus, by further studying South Africa's tumultuous and glorious past, I will contribute to many ongoing conversations on key issues that shaped and define that country's place in the world and on the African continent.