

REPORT

UMSAEP Teaching & Research Fellowship

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Dates of fellowship: 25 March – 17 May 2007

UM Collaborator: Prof Shannon Jackson, UMKC Dept. of Sociology, Criminal Justice & Criminology

0. Preliminary remark

In this report I shall report on the activities during my teaching and research fellowship at the University of Missouri at Kansas City, 25 March – 17 May 2007. The reporting responds to the aims and objectives, as set out in the funding proposal, submitted to UMSAEP in June 2005, and sets out plans for further co-operation.

1. Aims of the exchange (as stated in the funding proposal, June 2005)

UWC Need being addressed:

This proposal addresses the need for the further development of an area of specialisation in public culture & public anthropology within the UWC Anthropology & Sociology Department. The exchange with the University of Missouri (UMKC; Dept of Sociology, Criminal Justice & Criminology) is aimed at strengthening this field at UWC. More specifically, it will strengthen urban studies as a significant sub-field of social sciences studies in public culture and public anthropology.

Objectives/outcomes

- 1) The exchange with the University of Missouri (Kansas City; Dept of Sociology, Criminal Justice & Criminology) is aimed at strengthening the field of urban studies in public culture studies & public anthropology at UWC.
- 2) The exchange will also contribute to the further development of the field of urban anthropology at UMKC.
- 3) A possible joint publication with her UMKC collaborator is intended.

Methodology

The applicant will teach at UMKC and will be involved in a research project matching her ongoing NRF funded research in the Cape Town Metropolitan area.

2. Activities

During my stay in Kansas City I engaged in the following academic activities:

- a) I designed, taught and assessed four weeks of a 300-level course in Urban Anthropology (main instructor: Prof Jackson), which consisted of designing a case study on South African Urban Anthropology, giving three 50-minute classes per week (altogether 12 lectures), as well as setting and grading the final argument paper of the course. For details, see below.
- b) I gave a guest lecture to UMKC's Interdisciplinary Honors Program (April 4, 2007) on the topic, "We Can't Care About Every Butterfly' – Environmental Politics in South Africa".
- c) I presented a paper, with images, to the UMKC Interdisciplinary Faculty Workshop (May 4, 2007) based on my recent research on "Culture and mediation in contemporary South Africa: Photographic self-representations from the Cape Flats".
- d) I conducted preliminary explorations of how people in Kansas City negotiate an urban landscape, which appears extraordinarily racialised and segregated and, thus, challenges intellectual concerns as well as needs of social transformation in ways, which may not be too dissimilar from those in contemporary South Africa.
- e) I also conducted preliminary investigations of a selected urban heritage project in Kansas City, namely the reconstruction of the city's Historic Jazz District, in which Dr Jackson had been involved in a consultative capacity prior to my stay in Kansas City.
- f) Based on these preliminary ethnographic investigations, Dr Jackson and I held a series of planning meetings to delineate further comparative research in the field of urban anthropology in Cape Town and Kansas City.
- g) During and following my fellowship in Kansas City, I also attended (at my own expense), two conferences/workshops: a) the 7th Northeastern Workshop on Southern Africa (NEWSA), Burlington, Vt., April 13-15, 2007, where I presented another paper drawing on my urban research in the Western Cape; and b) "On Fakes & Fetishes: History, Authenticity & Counterfeit Modernities in Postcolonial Africa – Ralph Austen: a tribute", University of Chicago, May 18-19, 2007.

3. Evaluation: Did the UMSAEP fellow's activities contribute to achieving the aim of the exchange?

Overall, my participation in the exchange was highly successful. I am confident that both UMKC and UWC have benefited from the exchange, and will continue to do so.

More specifically:

Firstly, my participation in the exchange has strengthened urban studies as a significant sub-field of social sciences studies in public culture and public

anthropology at UWC. This is evident from the following: a) During the academic year 2008, 'Urban Anthropology' will be offered, for the first time, as an elective course for graduate students in the UWC Dept. of Anthropology & Sociology; b) elements of this specific, highly contemporaneous sub-field will be integrated, more so than previously, in Third Year (300 level) courses in Anthropology at UWC. Finally, I and some of our graduate students are now prominently involved in an emerging research niche area in the UWC Arts Faculty, "Cities in Transition". These are highly significant developments since previously none of the three Anthropology programmes in the Western Cape province were actively engaged in Urban Anthropology – which has been a definite lack in a province, whose residents are characteristically concentrated to over 80 per cent in its major metropolitan conglomeration.

Secondly, UMKC has also benefited to a great extent from my stay, which has contributed to the further development of urban anthropology in Kansas City. More particularly, the students whom I taught in Dr Jackson's Urban Anthropology class learnt a great deal from the South African case study, as being taught by a South African academic. I designed the case study in such a way, as to bring together a classic of South African (and indeed) international urban anthropology from the late 1950s/1960s (Philip & Iona Mayer, *Townsmen or Tribesmen*) with a recent critical re-study of the Mayers' famous East London research (Leslie Bank, *Revisiting the Xhosa-in-town trilogy*) and other, innovative urban research in contemporary South Africa, including Abdoumalik Simone's on inner-city Johannesburg and some of my own (and my UWC students') work in metropolitan Cape Town. Beyond the immediate topics of my lectures, the UMKC students also learnt much about South Africa; the discussions and questions asked by the students revealed that, prior to the month that I taught them, most of them had only had a very rudimentary knowledge of the country's past and present. Similar points can be made in respect of the students participating in the UMKC Honors Program, as well as some faculty, who attended my paper presentation at the Interdisciplinary Faculty Workshop.

Thirdly, my exploratory research in Kansas City has bolstered the intended comparative urban anthropology of Cape Town and Kansas City. Both cities, as spatial and social formations, pose highly complex and challenging questions to the issue of 'race' as social interaction, social relation and social geography. In South Africa, and in Cape Town particularly, 'race' remains an immensely significant, all-pervasive subject of academic investigation as much as of policy-making, and indeed everyday life more than a decade after the end of apartheid.

For a Cape Town-based anthropologist, the apparently extremely rigid racial and social segregation of Kansas City is astounding and raises crucial questions about the historical and contemporary social processes underpinning it, as well as the politics of aesthetics and public and popular culture. In addition to extensively "walking the city" (including downtown and various suburbs), as suggested by de Certeau (1984), I also spent extended periods of participant observation exploring two, architecturally, historically and socially very different urban spaces within Kansas City. The first of

these field sites was the 'Country Club Plaza', an upmarket, fake Mediterranean shopping centre, dating back to the 1920s which, in addition to shopping and entertainment with its safe, open spaces also becomes a centre of social activity on warm evenings. Many hours of "deep hanging out" (at different times of the day and week) at the Plaza as a field site revealed that this famous KC landmark is part of a thoroughly racialised urban landscape: almost every Kansas Citian that I encountered at the Plaza was White (with a few Asians in between), African-Americans, who form a substantial proportion of the city's inhabitants, were virtually absent. In contrast, my second field site, the Historic Jazz District (18th and Vine Historic District), presented a very different image, and clearly occupies an apposite within the racialised urbanscape of KC. Except for the American Jazz Museum, where I could observe a broad range of visitors (broad in terms of 'race', and apparent socioeconomic class), the important heritage site, and particularly the Mutual Musicians Foundation, housed in a National Historic Landmark building in the centre of the Historic Jazz District, which operates as a "living museum" (MMF pamphlet), appeared to be used almost exclusively by African-Americans. This was particularly obvious during the Friday afternoon jam session, where the visiting anthropologist was the only White person around; to a lesser extent this was also the case during late night sessions and performances at the near-by "Blue Route" historic jazz club, whose customers were overwhelmingly Black.

Unfortunately, due to the necessary postponement of my fellowship from September-November 2006 (as initially planned) to March-May 2007, I could no longer participate, as originally intended, in the Mutual Musician's Foundation Feasibility Study, a multidisciplinary project to carry out an ethnographic and architectural feasibility study of this urban heritage site, since this project, in which Dr Jackson had been involved, had come to an end before my arrival in Kansas City. This study would have certainly given me an even deeper insight. However, in the context of our further planning, Dr Jackson gave me a detailed account of this project and other urban planning projects, in which she has been involved, which suggest that urban planning and heritage projects in Kansas City are deeply fraught with issues of 'race' relations, past and present – which appear to bear similarities as well as dissimilarities with the situation in Cape Town.

Further joint research will therefore include studies in both cities (Cape Town and Kansas City), around an appropriate range of urban issues, including the interrelationship of modernist urban planning (such as extensive GIS usage), racialisation, and the development of living urban heritage. The inherent similarities and dissimilarities of the two cities in South Africa and in the United States allow for a sharply focused comparative perspective: Their racialised geographies and 'cultures' appear sufficiently similar while also diverging in a number of aspects in the past and present times, which makes them appropriate objects for a reflective comparison.

4. Further co-operation

This final section indicates future steps in the UMKC-UWC co-operation, involving Dr. Jackson and myself.

- 1) As detailed above, the partners in this UMKC-UWC co-operation have made preliminary explorations in Kansas City, which need to be complemented by similar ethnographic research in Cape Town. This shall be done during a fellowship to be applied for by Dr Jackson for the period July-August 2009.
- 2) During this period, Dr. Jackson will also participate in the further development of the Urban Anthropology teaching and research focus in our Department, as well as in the emerging interdisciplinary research niche area in the UWC Arts Faculty, "Cities in Transition".

Prof Heike Becker

Bellville, 23/01/2008