



Numerous novels and plays by Swiss authors were translated into Afrikaans during the Apartheid era (Image: Cape Town & Pretoria: Human & Rousseau, 1964).



Prisoners of the showpiece prison 'Leeuwkop' in Johannesburg, shown to visitors (including Swiss guest artists) as 'proof' of apartheid's humanitarian approach to convicts. (Image: *Prison Administration in South Africa*, ed. Department of Foreign Affairs, Cape Town, [1969])



Swiss jazz vibraphone player Remo Rau performed with prominent South African exiles at the Cafe Africana in Zurich in the early 1960s. (Image: record cover, no label, Zurich, 1961)

Research Area Interpretation

Cultural relations between Switzerland and South Africa, 1948–1994

Abstract: The relationship between Switzerland and apartheid South Africa might have been dominated by gold and diamonds, but it was in the arts that some of the most complex interactions occurred. On an official level, exhibitions, orchestra tours and visiting lecturers served to bolster large-scale business interests; but there were also innumerable instances of individual artistic contact across the colour bar. This multi-ethnic, multilingual project will conduct the first-ever investigation of cultural relations between Switzerland and South Africa up to the end of apartheid.

In den Beziehungen zwischen der Schweiz und Apartheid-Südafrika waren zwar Gold und Diamanten von vorherrschender Bedeutung, aber im Bereich der Künste waren die Wechselwirkungen besonders komplex. Auf offizieller Ebene boten Ausstellungen, Orchestertourneen und Gastreferate eine Stütze für wirtschaftliche Interessen, auf individueller Ebene aber gab es unzählige Einzelfälle von künstlerischen Kontakten über alle Rassenschranken hinweg. Ein multi-ethnisches, mehrsprachiges Team wird in diesem Projekt erstmals die kulturellen Beziehungen zwischen der Schweiz und Apartheid-Südafrika unter die Lupe nehmen.

Introduction: The relationship between Switzerland and apartheid South Africa has been the focus of extensive research over the past two decades, most notably in the large-scale National Research Programme NRP 42+ funded by the SNSF in the early 2000s. However, the focus has consistently been on the role that Swiss business and politics played as enablers for the apartheid state. The current project aims instead to shed light on cultural relations between the two countries from the beginnings of apartheid in 1948 through to the first democratic elections in South Africa in 1994. The various stances adopted by both 'official' state actors and private individuals, institutions and organisations will be mapped out in hopes of elucidating understandings and misunderstandings in fields where meanings and intentions became fluid, and where relations existed in a complex process of give and take.

On the one hand, Switzerland and Swiss artists gave implicit support to the apartheid regime through organising tours and performances in South Africa, and Swiss apologists for white supremacy lobbied widely to garner support for their stance. But on the other hand, South African exile artists of all races found a second home and enthusiastic audiences in Switzerland, and there were also Swiss artists, administrators and NGOs who themselves endeavoured to bridge the racial divides in South Africa. Altogether, the situation was in interpersonal, social and moral matters highly complex and, perhaps ironically, anything but 'black and white'.

Methods: There will be five focus areas. One will deal with overarching cultural relations between the two countries across all the arts; the others will engage with classical music, jazz, South African theatre in Switzerland, and Swiss literature in translation in South Africa. Each focus area will encompass a discussion of the cultural boycott of South Africa – its intent, efficacy, and Switzerland's refusal to participate. The project will be conducted by a multi-ethnic, multilingual team, led by the HKB Bern and its principal project partner, the Africa Open Institute of the University of Stellenbosch. Further project partners are the Universities of Fribourg and of Kwazulu-Natal.

Results: This project will culminate in a doctoral thesis, two books and numerous scholarly articles across the focus areas. The research conducted will be documented on a website housed at the Africa Open Institute at the University of Stellenbosch and thereby made available to future scholars in South Africa and beyond.

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