

Using the Holocaust and the 1994 Genocide in Rwanda to connect to Xenophobia in South Africa today.

In recent years there has been a wave of xenophobic attacks in South Africa, which has often resulted in the displacement of foreigners, violent destruction of property and fatalities. Perhaps xenophobia is too general a term and the attacks would be better described as Afrophobia, as the discrimination displayed has not been against European foreigners but rather the targeted groups have been from other African countries. Broadly speaking Afrophobia, in South Africa, is fueled by competition for jobs, housing, an intense rivalry to access basic commodities and in some cases, powerful feelings of nationalism."

The worrying increase of incidents in our country should raise alarm bells to those involved in teaching about scapegoating, prejudice and human rights abuse. It is often difficult for learners to examine these sensitive issues. Despite this we have a responsibility to educate learners to ensure that the "othering" of foreigners in our country is addressed. The permanent exhibition at the JHGC provides us with many opportunities to enable learners to confront Xenophobia in a non-threatening manner.

The first image visitors are confronted with as they enter the permanent exhibition, is that of people with their luggage having to flee their homes. The two images – the one outside the ghetto in Kraków during the Holocaust and the other of refugees fleeing the genocide in Rwanda are contrasted in the black and white and coloured images – yet the underlying message is the same and can lead to a meaningful discussion. Where are these people going, why are they moving, what would they have in their luggage etc.?

The second space where this topic can be explored, is in the 'Racial State'

where all the targeted groups who suffered discrimination and mass-murder under the Nazi regime are named. Here, educators can connect and ask which groups may be targeted in South Africa today. This space also offers a number of opportunities to discuss refugees and the many individuals desperately trying to flee situations from which they have no control; leaving the familiarity of their countries, homes and all that they hold dear. The photograph of the refugees on board the St Louis as well as the photo of people queuing for visas in Vienna offer excellent opportunities for discussion.

Another entry point is through the video testimony of Gita Rossi Zalmons. Gita tells the story of leaving Germany with her brother on the Kindertransport. Her testimony allows students to reflect on the fear, uncertainty and difficulty of adjusting to a new life in a foreign country. Gita's testimony opens the door to students confronting their own attitudes towards "foreigners" in a non-threatening manner and raises awareness of the crisis faced by refugees on a global scale. This self-introspection encourages a shift from bias towards the "other" to a more inclusive and empathic acceptance of those who have been forced to leave their countries of origin. Later in the exhibition this conversation can be continued and connected to current challenges that foreigners face right here in South Africa. The powerful photographic exhibition which documents the xenophobic violence raises the awareness of the dangers that lie in discrimination and indifference.

Through the use of our permanent exhibition we can aim to shift student's thinking from suspicion of the "other" to becoming more inclusive, accepting all people and embracing diversity.



Fleeing the Genocide, Rwanda. April-July 1994. Photo taken by Jean-Michel Clajot.



MS St. Louis returning to Hamburg, Germany, June 1939

THINK ABOUT IT:

If during the COVID19 pandemic there was one country which was a safe haven, where the virus did not exist, would you leave your worldly possessions, your home and country of birth and try to move there with your loved ones? How would you cope if it was a country where they spoke a different language to yours, where the culture was completely different? Relate this to the global refugee crisis of today.

ARLENE SHER

EXTENSION ACTIVITY:

You have to live in somebody else's country to understand.

What is it like when you are an opposite?

When you wear the clothes of your country and they think you are crazy to wear these clothes and you think they are pretty.

You have to live in somebody else's country to understand.

What is it like when you try to talk and you don't pronounce the words right?

They don't understand you.

They laugh at you but you don't know that they are laughing at you, and you start to laugh with them.

They say, "Are you crazy, laughing at yourself? Go get lost, girl!"

You have to live in somebody else's country without a language to understand.

What is it like when you walk in the street and everybody turns around to look at you and you don't know that they are looking at you.

Then, when you find out, you want to hide your face but you don't know where to hide because they are everywhere.

You have to live in somebody else's country to feel it.

- Extracts from a poem written by Noy Chou

Activity

Place copies of the poem in the centre of a number of large pieces of paper and divide the participants into groups so that each group has a copy of the poem and something to write with. Ask participants to engage in a "discussion" with one another based on their thoughts and reflections on the poem. However this is done *silently* in the form of a written conversation between the members of the group. Each participant must write at least once and can either respond to the poem directly or can respond to a comment made by another participant on the page. On completion participants can read the conversations that took place in the other groups.

This activity gives every member of the group an opportunity to have their opinion "heard", especially those who are not as involved in verbal discussions, and it enables participants to learn from the wisdom of the larger group.