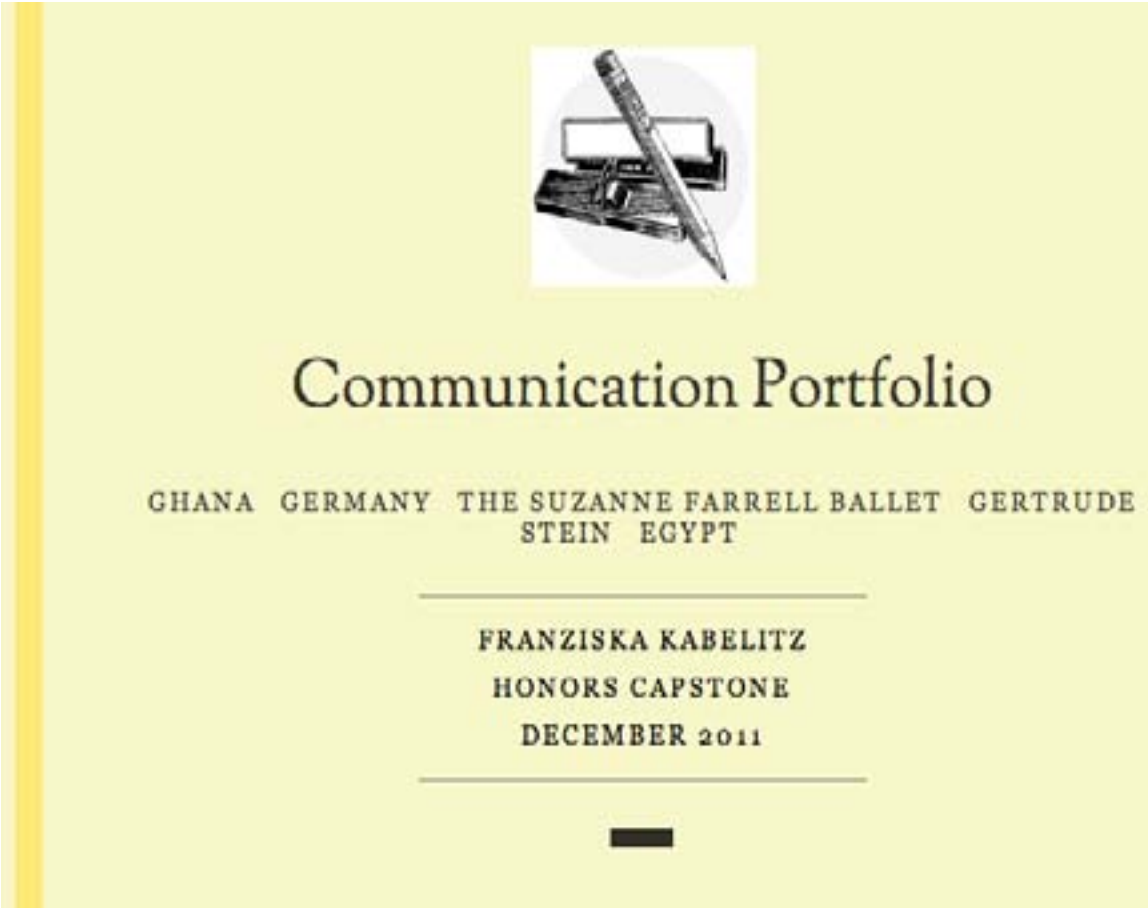

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Introduction

The articles that have been collected in this work were written between August and December 2011 as part of my Honors Capstone thesis for the partial fulfillment of my undergraduate studies at American University. The articles have been inspired by my undergraduate studies and travels, and focus on a broad range of issues and interests.

This booklet accompanies a blog I specifically created for the presentation of my work. You can access it at the following link:
http://extraordinaryaliens.tumblr.com/

Working on this project has deepened my writing skills and knowledge of journalistic writing, editing, and layout. I am very grateful for Prof. Lynne Perri's (American University's Investigative Journalism Workshop) assistance and encouragement.

Franziska Kabelitz
Washington, D.C., 9th December, 2011

All map credit: Lonely Planet.

Tro-tro Tales:

The Challenges of Public Transport in Ghana

ACCRA, Ghana. — The day starts early in Accra, Ghana. "My wife gets up at 4:30 a.m. to sweep the rooms," says Kobe Mensah, smiling a bright smile and patting the trunk of his rusty minivan, "and I follow her soon." If there is breakfast, he will eat a little. Mensah turns on the engine of his minivan, listens to the rhythmic buzzing for a couple of minutes, and starts waving at the first passengers.

As one of Accra's hundreds of tro-tro drivers, Mensah is responsible for the daily shuffling of passengers through Ghana's busy capital. With a population of 2.3 million, Accra is the country's largest city, home to roughly as many people as Houston or Chicago.

Mensah's tro-tro, a minivan he bought from a friend and partly refurbished himself, runs between Madina market and Circle in the heart of Accra's business district, close to a hectic bus station. It is one of the city's most popular tro-tro routes.

The Republic of Ghana is a constitutional democracy in West Africa, bordered by Togo in the East, Burkina Faso in the North, the Ivory Coast in the West and the Atlantic Ocean in the South. It is smaller than the state of Oregon, but with 25 million people, its population is roughly comparable to that of Texas. Attracted by gold trade and mining opportunities, Europeans arrived as early as the 15th century. The Portuguese were first to arrive, followed by Dutch, Danes, Swedes and, eventually, the British. In 1874, the British Colony of the Gold Coast was established. The term tro-tro dates back to this time. In the local language Ga, tro referred to a three pence, the coin passengers were charged in colonial times. In 1957, Ghana became the first country in Sub-Saharan Africa to gain independence.

Ghana's first railway line opened as early as 1898 but has not been developed significantly. Road transport remains the primary form of public transportation, and the tro-tro is the king of the road. Ghanaians, whose average annual income is equivalent to only $433, value the tro-tro as the cheapest form of public transportation. It has become so popular that a weekly TV series has been created dedicated to the bizarre adventures of tro-tro rides.

One of Mensah's favorite stops is the University of Ghana's campus in Legon, a suburb northeast of Accra. Says Mensah: "Here I pick up students and teachers. Sometimes, there are new students from America or Europe. They are so much fun because they are scared of tro-tros. I want to give them a good experience."

Effectively navigating the world of tro-tros is an art that requires patience and practice. Indeed, the tro-tro experience constitutes a challenge to many public transportation newcomers, and its success depends on a mix of skill and pure luck. First, there is the challenge to identify which tro-tro serves the desired direction. This can be difficult, since most drivers communicate in one of Ghana's approximately 14 local languages. In Accra, each popular destination has its specific hand gesture, so that once you have figured out which gesture corresponds to which destination, no boarding time is wasted looking for the right tro-tro.

The second challenge is to actually get a seat, which means that one has to act faster, more strategically and with more assertiveness than most others who are waiting. Since tro-tros are privately owned, they run at their operator's convenience. There is no schedule, and a tro-tro rarely leaves before it has reached full passenger capacity.

The third challenge is getting off the tro-tro. This requires an understanding of Accra's major landmarks, since the stops are usually not announced and the car will only stop if a passenger requests so. Jenny Brown, a Georgetown University math and physics double-major studying abroad at the University of Ghana, is just learning the art of tro-tro riding. There have been problems, but so far the experience has been a positive one. "I feel like I'm less likely to get scammed or robbed than in a taxi," says Brown. "Tro-tros are cheap and fun and go everywhere." Adds Anna Biondi, a student in Global Health and Environment from Indiana University: "I held someone's baby once, because the mother's hands were busy doing something else." In August, students reported that a full tro-tro ganged up, debating with a female passenger who stole from a tourist, and eventually threw the woman off the minivan.

Another tro-tro beginner, Bree Keaveney from the University of Seattle, explains: "The ride itself was good, but in order to get to the tro-tro, I had to cross the four-lane busy road without a crosswalk. That was stressful."

Besides hand gestures, tro-tros carry no signs indicating the direction in which they are headed. However, they are often painted with signs and letters referring to the importance of religion in Ghana. The streets of Accra are frequently roamed by God Is Great, Remember Thy Creator, JC's Tro-tro, Praise The Lord/ Allah hu Akbar Tro-Tro, and the like. Few tro-tro drivers give their vans names that are not related to religion, such as Hippopotamus.

Many tro-tros served as company cars in Europe before finding their way to the bustling roads of Ghana. Some of the vans still have the original paint and labels. Mensah's friend drives a tro-tro that reads Paul's Tiles in bright blue letters on both doors and also offers a phone number to call Paul in Germany. Mensah is absolutely positive that he has also seen a couple of ambulances-turned-tro-tro.

Tro-tro operators are subject to minimal regulation. A tro-tro can be roaring and puffing and smoking. As long as it gets people from A to B, it operates. But maintaining a tro-tro becomes more expensive the older the van gets. "Sometimes there's a problem," explains a passenger, referring to the replacement of car parts. "Sometimes, you really need a part but you can't buy it because there is none, because the car is too old." Mensah nods in agreement.

In Ghana, tro-tros run not only within the city of Accra but they also connect towns and villages throughout the country. With the majority of the population concentrated along the coastline and in large cities such as Kumasi in the central Ashanti region, some areas are serviced more frequently than others. Traveling to the northern region, for example, can take days depending on the driver's mood.

Shared taxis constitute a viable but often more expensive alternative. There also are long-distance commuter buses, usually operated by the Ghana's Metro Mass Transit, which has existed for about eight years. But whichever mode of transportation you prefer, congested traffic and long waiting times are almost always guaranteed.

Lanes are used ineffectively, with two or more cars on a single lane at once, resulting in frequent traffic jams. Indiscriminate parking on roads and sidewalks is another problem. And in 2009, tro-tro drivers simply set up a new stop in front of a hospital, which caused severe traffic problems and eventually led to a court case.

Registering one of the world's fastest-growing economies and counting a population of almost 25 million in July 2011, Ghana today faces significant challenges in matching its citizens' increasing demand for mobility. People want and need to be mobile: There are friends and family to visit, and jobs are often located in non-residential areas. Urban sprawl has put significant pressure on Ghana's public transportation system, as more and more areas need to be connected. With a population growth rate of 1.8 percent (2011) and the capital city continuously expanding in territory, this challenge is unlikely to disappear.

"Maybe one day I want to change routes," says Mensah. "I could go to a quieter place and drive tro-tros from Accra to the Eastern region. Many tourists go there." But even on this route he would have to deal with Accra traffic, spending about an hour or so to get from downtown onto the highway. And does he ever get tired of the slow, congested Accra traffic? Mensah laughs. His friend recently wrote to the Ghanaian Ministry of Roads and Highways requesting the government offer alternative public transportation.

"It takes too long! During rush hour, we need 45 minutes for a 15 minutes distance," says Mensah. "Well, I don't know about this. I need to keep my customers."

Above: Seller at the University of Ghana tro-tro stop.
Above: Market in Elmina.

Photo credit this page:
Cecilia Crossen.

Photo credit previous page:
Franziska Kabelitz.

Map credit:
Lonely Planet.

GHANA - General Information

Official name: Republic of Ghana

Government type: Constitutional democracy

Chief of State: President John Evan Atta Mills (since 2009)

Population (2011 est.): 24,791,073

Geographic location: West Africa

Capital city: Accra

Time difference: UTC 0 (5 hours ahead of Washington, D.C.)

Neighbors: Ivory Coast, Togo, Burkina Faso

Independence (from Great Britain): 6 March, 1957

Median age: 21.4 years

Life expectancy: 61 years

How to get there: For example, United Airlines and Delta Airlines regularly servce Accra International Airport from Washington, D.C.

Below: Phone credit seller at Oponglo tro-tro stop. Above: Market in Elmina.

The Range of Balanchine

in 160 Minutes

WASHINGTON, D.C. —There has rarely been a more diverse mix of lead characters: A village girl, a stern, dream-like figure of incredible acrobatic and rhythmic precision, and a woman covered in diamonds all appeared on the Kennedy Center's stage recently, honoring and celebrating the legacy of George Balachine, the Russian-American master of dance.

As part of its 10th anniversary season, The Suzanne Farrell Ballet performed two programs based on choreographies by New York City Ballet co-founder and former ballet master Balanchine. The Sunday evening could not have been more contrasting in style.

The company opened with two company premieres, the Divertimiento from Le Baiser de la Fée (1972) and Sonatine (1975), which left the audience in elated. Hynes designed a simple costume, reminiscent of training clothes with the added features of a skirt and shirt: purple leotard and light skirt for Violeta Angelova, and purple tights with a purple-black striped, long-sleeved shirt for Momchil Mladenov.

The simplicity of both the costumes and music, a Ravel piano piece performed live, put great emphasis on the dance itself, and the absence of any on-stage scenery turned the dancers' movements into a relationship study. Angelova and Mladenov took advantage of the entire stage space available, moving closer together, parting, moving together again, even integrating the piano into this careful analysis of motion in space.

Sonatine, one of the most diverse pieces of the great master's legacy,gives the impression of a dance of improvisation. Angelova's delightfully uplift spirit certainly added to this quality. Here and there, steps borrowed from character or folk dance found their way into the choreography, giving it a lovely individual touch.

One of Balanchine's most lyrical works, Sonatine combines Russian heritage, American spirit, and French grace — the best of all the countries that influenced him. Balanchine was born Giorgi Balanchivadze in St. Petersburg, Russia, in 1904, and studied at the Imperial Ballet School and the St. Petersburg Conservatory of Music. He later performed, choreographed and taught with Sergei Diaghilev's famous Ballets Russes in Paris, then toured Europe and Russia and created his own scompany.

The probably most impressive ballet of the evening was Pithoprakta (1968), which forms part of the Balanchine Preservation Initiative. The juxtaposition of Sonatine and Pithoprakta had a strong effect of surprise on the audience, and an audible gasp rolled through the almost sold-out show as soon as the first beats of Pithoprakta began to play.

Composer, architect and mathematician Iannis Xenakis' sense for geometry is reflected in the rather symmetric and non-melodic score. Pithoprakta's story is worth telling. Until recently, it had been considered a lost ballet by many dancers and choreographers, since the only recorded source existed in form of a low-quality video tape of a performance that was missing the male lead dancer. For the Kennedy Center, Farrell reconstructed the steps from memory, making her dancers watch her perform what she could remember, and filling in parts that were missing. Farrell also commissioned the new backdrop, a distorted image of Xenakis' handwritten score.

The dancers, dressed in black-and-white tight overalls, presented carefully combined and strangely angled staccato movements — a far cry from classical ballet. Just like at the world premiere in 1968, Sunday's audience first was unsure of how to react, but then embraced the abstract dance with lively discussions that started as soon as the curtain fell.

For the grand finale, the Sarasota Ballet joined Farrell's company in its fourth artistic joint endeavor, this time for the performance of Diamonds, Balanchine's homage to Tchaikovsky and creation for his strongly admired dancer and muse, Farrell herself. Diamonds forms part off Jewels, a three-act abstract ballet Balanchine choreographed for the New York City Ballet in 1967, the company Balanchine co-founded in 1948, and for which he served as artistic director until his death in 1983.

Performed as a whole, Jewels (complete with the two additional parts, Emeralds and Rubies) constitutes an evening-long ballet that needs just as much dancer-power as The Sleeping Beauty or Swan Lake.

A common theme that ran throughout the evening was an unusual, surprising ending, something we see frequently in Balanchine ballets. Sonatine's Angelova and Mladenov leaped off stage in a grand jeté while the Divertimiento's Holowchuk and Renko slowly walked in the off-stage direction, their backs deeply bent back and their arms raised up high into the air.

But one ending stood out as the most uncomfortable, eerie one: Pithoprakta left a woman alone on the stage, curled up, her hands nervously flapping in front of her face, before the curtain decisively dipped the theater in black. Holowchuk's energy was at its best in this dramatic piece — worlds apart from traditional ballet vocabulary.

While she certainly demonstrated her talent and skill as the female principal in Le Baiser de la Fée, Holowchuk's performance in Pithoprakta is a must-see for ballet enthusiasts. Farrell made an interesting choice (or statement?) choosing Holowchuk as the lead in both pieces. After all, witnessing this transformation is an experience in itself.

The only ballet with a set design (chandeliers and grand curtains) other than a single-colored background, Diamonds was also the only piece in which the full cast appeared for a glamorous finale. With Diamonds, it seems, nothing can go wrong. The audience never gets tired of marveling at the sparkling costumes and simple but elegant stage design. Like most Balanchine choreographies, Diamonds can be watched time and again, and you will always encounter a new angle, some kind of addition, a fresh perspective, that little hint or meaning you never knew before. The Sarasota Ballet's Danielle Brown and Ricardo Graziano, dancing the famous pas de deux originally created by Farrell and New York City Ballet dancer Jaques d'Ambroise, received the lion's share of the evening's applause.

The Suzanne Farrell Ballet performed Oct. 12 through Oct. 16 at the Eisenhower Theater, John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, Washington, D.C.; (202) 467-4600.

Program A
Serenade (Tchaikovsky)
Concerto Barocco (Bach)
Diamonds with The Sarasota Ballet (Tchaikovsky)

Program B
Divertimento from Le Baiser de la Fée (Stravinsky)
Sonatine (Ravel)
Pithoprakta (Xenakis)
Diamonds

This program information has been taken from the Kennedy Center's website.

The Balanchine Preservation Initiative

The Balanchine Preservation Initiative was established in 2001 at the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington, D.C. Lead by Artistic Director Suzanne Far rell, it seeks to recreate and restage many of Balanchine's lost works that have not been perfromed in decades.

The Suzanne Farrell Ballet

The preservation of Balanchine's is a major goal of the company she established. Born in 1945, Farrell received her early training at the Cincinnati Conservatory of Music, Ohio, and was soon awarded a Ford Foundation scholarship to study at George Balanchine's School of American Ballet. She later joined the New York City Ballet, first as a dancer and then – following her unusually long career on stage - as a ballet instructor.

In 1993, the capital city's John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts invited Farrell to teach a series of master classes as part of an educational initiative for talented young ballet students. Two years later, her program developed into a three-week summer intensive program, which continues to exist today, attracting students from all over the world.

In 2000, Farrell hand-picked her own group of dancers to perform Balanchine's ballet Divertimento No. 15 as part of the Kennedy Center's Balanchine celebration pro gram. Thus, the Suzanne Farrell Ballet was born. Since 2001, the company has been housed in the Kennedy Center and has toured both nationally and internationally. It is one of the most critically acclaimed contemporary U.S. ballet companies.

Immigration and Human Rights: Challenges of Health Care Provision in Germany

KIEL, Germany, Oct. 3 — Where would you seek health care without legal immigration status? Where would you give birth to your baby without fearing deportation? Such questions have come up again and again in the context of Germany's relatively newly acknowledged status as an immigration country.

The country faces a vibrant mix of challenges in terms of social environment, identity formation and legislative framework. One of these challenges, the question of health care access for undocumented immigrants, has only recently begun to surface as a consciously contested policy issue.

Although German legislation mandates health insurance for every German citizen and legal immigrant, far from everybody is insured. A significant number of people without insurance are those who are living illegally and without documents in Germany. Since undocumented people are only counted when they get in contact with authorities, it is difficult to determine the exact number of undocumented people currently living in the country. In 2008, the government estimated? there were between 500,000 and 1.5 million illegal immigrants.

Throughout recent years, many EU member states as well as the EU Parliament initiated hearings and discussions on the situation of undocumented immigrants in need of health services. The law regulating this issue differs tremendously across Europe. While some countries offer substantial health care assistance to undocumented and uninsured persons, other countries, such as Germany, tend to limit health care access significantly.

In Germany, undocumented immigrants cannot legally receive federally subsidized health coverage, and German law allows undocumented persons and asylum seekers to access health care free of charge only in case of emergency. Legislation distinguishes between lengths of stay: undocumented persons have the same medical rights as asylum seekers who have been living in Germany for less than 48 months (asylum seekers who have been living in the country for longer obtain the same medical rights as German citizens).

In addition, German law entitles undocumented people to emergency care if they are employed. Employing undocumented persons, however, is illegal, and in many cases the employer does not alert medical staff in case of an accident or emergency due to fears of exposure.

Costs incurred by doctors when treating uninsured patients can be reimbursed by the Social Welfare office. But that, too, means acknowledging an illegal iimmigrant. Until recently, workers at the Social Welfare office were obligated by law to report undocumented people's data to immigration authorities. This practice often led to deportations, causing fewer and fewer undocumented people to claim health services.

However, in 2009, the German government published a General Administrative Directive to univocally explain which institutions would be exempted from the obligation to report data. The directive specifically addresses doctors, who are bound by medical confidentiality laws, but also health care workers in a broader sense

as well as social workers who are accessed by undocumented persons for emergency treatment. But in practice, the General Administrative Directive remains implemented in parts only. Most undocumented people refrain from seeking health care even in case of emergency either because they do not know their entitlements or because they fear that their data will be transmitted to immigration authorities.

In order to ensure that no requests for reimbursements will be made and no data will be transferred, undocumented patients need to cover treatment costs themselves. This requires thorough planning as costs accumulate quickly. An immigrant from Bulgaria explains: "When I first came to Germany, I didn't have documents or insurance. I had to pay the doctor in cash. It wasn't a problem, though. It was expensive, but I knew I would have to pay, so I saved some money."

But not every potential patient accumulates sufficient savings. Consider a cost example. Depending on complications, the delivery of a baby in Germany can cost more than 10,000 € (about 13,404 U.S. $). For undocumented patients, the Social Welfare office frequently covers delivery costs. Sometimes, hospitals jump in. However, costs for follow-up treatment and exams are not usually covered.

A frequently overlooked problem is the issue of vaccinations. Representatives of the Medinetzwerk Kiel and organization that connects undocumented people to health care services, said that children of undocumented parents often do not receive the recommended vaccines because the parents cannot afford their high costs.

Recently, for example, the Medinetzwerk witnessed a case in which the city paid fort he unusually high costs of the delivery of twins to an undocumented patient. Eventually, however, the mother became homeless and gave her kids to foster care. Only then did her children receive the recommended vaccines as it was in the foster home's general interest to have everybody vaccinated. The mother had been unable to come up with enough funds to cover the vaccination costs herself.

Health care workers are often not sufficiently informed about the legal situation and are unsure about their obligations when it comes to data reporting. As a result, many undocumented people continue to avoid doctor's visits, which often leads to delayed treatment and the development of chronic illnesses. This can be particularly risky when it comes to pregnancy.

A mother from Central America reports that out of fear of deportation she decided not to see a doctor until 17 weeks into her pregnancy. For similar reasons, some undocumented women also decide to deliver at home. Dr. Sybille Schramm, director of the Medi-Netzwerk Karlsruhe, said: "While the delivery in a hospital will be officially registered, deliveries at home will often not be registered. This can have significant implications, for example once the mother decides to leave the country." There would not be any papers for the child, either.

Organizations like the Malteser Migrant Medicine exist throughout Germany. They help connect undocumented patients to health care services and are often also active politically. These organizations are primarily in big cities since this is where the majority of undocumented people live. Still, the landscape of health care assistance to undocumented and uninsured people in Germany varies from region to region, and some cities look at the issue with more urgency than others.

The city of Munich, in the South of Germany, constitutes a particularly interesting case. In 2003, the city asked researcher Dr. Philip Anderson of the University of Regensburg to conduct a study on the living situation of undocumented people in Munich. Anderson's study highlighted a number of health-related challenges and stressed that there still were significant levels of uncertainty regarding the legal framework of data reporting

among health care and social workers.

In reaction to Anderson's study, the city of Munich created a new cooperation model between doctors, policy makers and regional legislators. This new model improved access for patients without health insurance and is today known as the Munich Model. The rare cooperation between the Social Democratic Party and the Green Party governing Munich has been an important catalyst for the creation of the initiative, and it has not been replicated elsewhere in Germany.

Reformist aspects of the model include the idea that pregnant patients living without documents are granted an exceptional leave to remain of up to three months following delivery. This allows for important time gains when it comes to obtaining a long-term permit to remain in the country.

Munich also established a financial fund to support health care services for uninsured patients. A 2010 study, again chaired by Anderson, found that this fund can only constitute an interim solution because it was heavily criticized for using tax money. Another unique part of the Munich Model is a hotline connecting health care and social workers to the Aliens Department.

This allows workers to obtain information on legal questions, specifically on how to obtain official permits to remain in the country. If (on a case-by-case basis) the Aliens Department sees opportunities to obtain a leave to remain, the patient will be informed about procedures and requirements. However, if the Aliens Department cannot find a solution, no data will be transferred and the patient remains unregistered. In spite of its success, the model as a whole has been criticized for using taxpayers' money to finance health care for people who do not contribute to health insurance.

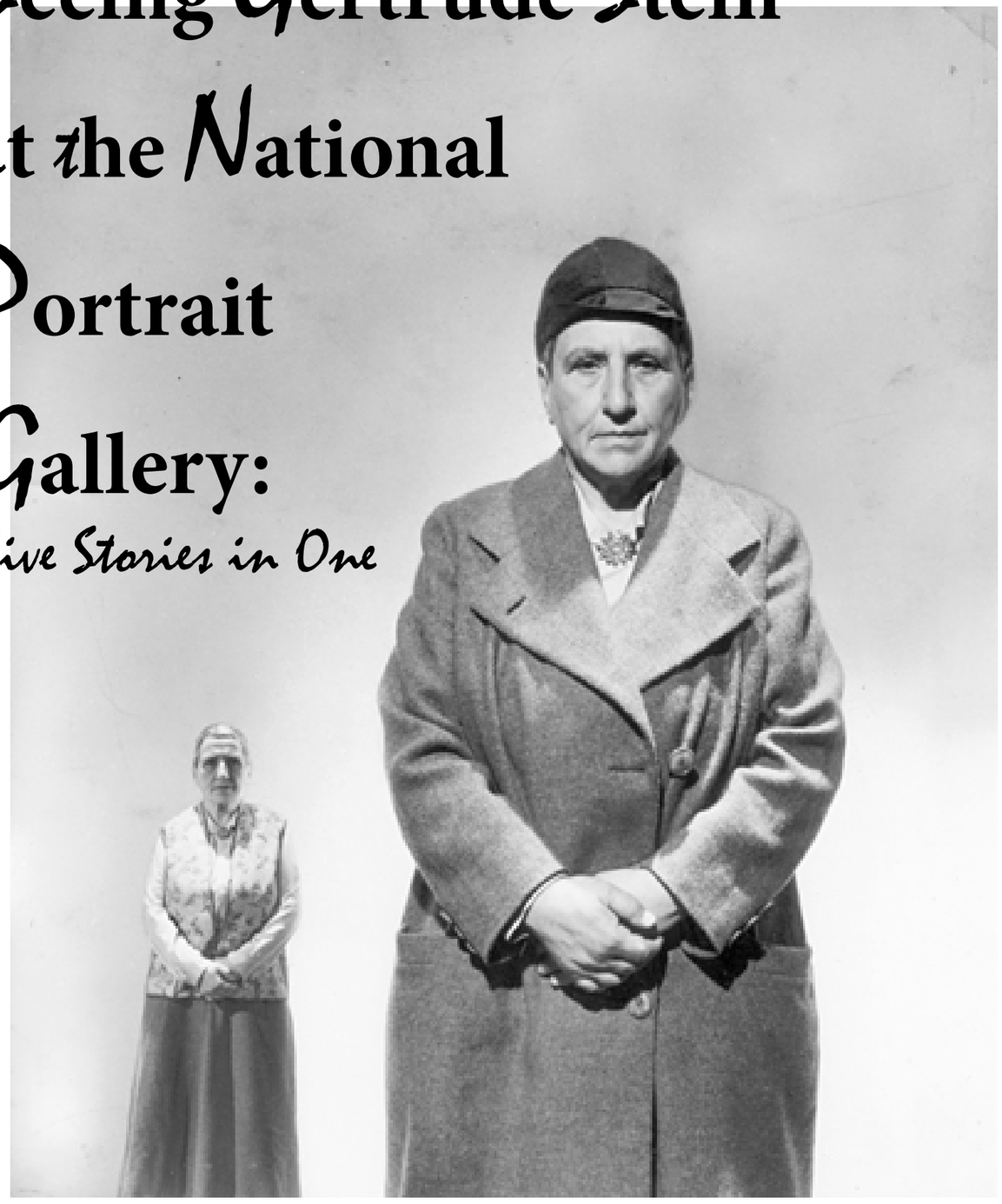
In December 2010, the European Parliament discussed the topic of health care access for undocumented pregnant women and children. The Parliament emphasized that undocumented people find it especially hard to access the health care system in Germany in comparison to other EU member states, and this in spite of the fact that the right to health care has been covered in many international, multilateral agreements ratified by Germany.

In March 2011, the European Parliament then adopted a resolution calling on EU member states to work on the elimination of inequalities concerning undocumented people's health care access. In addition, more than 100 national and European health organizations adopted a declaration.

The basis for a long and needed discussion thus exists. It now is the responsibility of national and local authorities to follow the EU's recommendations. Although there will always be suggestions for improvement and new ideas, the Munich Model constitutes an important first step towards the realization of the right to health care, but it is unclear if other states have equal political support, will and finances to take the plunge.

Seeing Gertrude Stein at the National Portrait Gallery:

Five Stories in One



WASHINGTON, D.C. — There have been curious curlicues in the life of Gertrude Stein, one of the U.S.'s most famous writers and most painted, sculptured women of the 20th century.

In October, the National Portrait Gallery opened an exhibition examining these curlicues, inconsistencies, surprises and controversies in the life and legacy of Stein (1874-1946). The exhibition, titled Seeing Gertrude Stein: Five Stories, presents works by Stein and about Stein, biographical information, criticism and ideas.

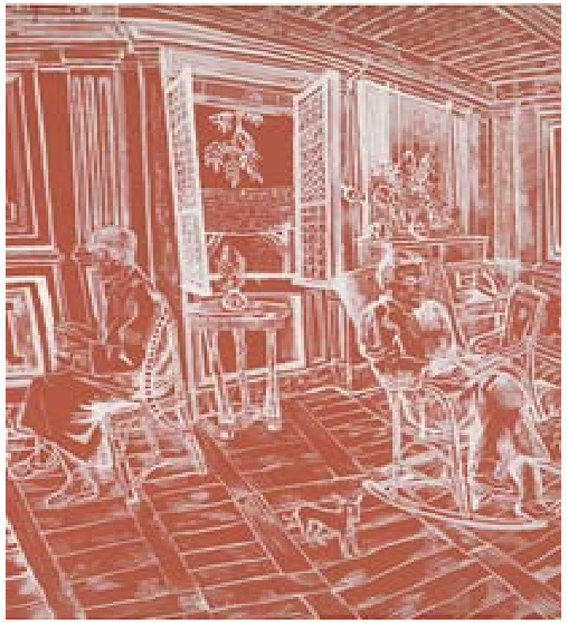
This visual case study of Stein as a celebrity and public figure —then, as today — is primarily presented through portraiture, but also through journalism, caricature and home-décor (so important for conveying the domestic Stein). Visitors who are new to Stein and her work will receive a profound insight into her life, while those who have already been acquainted with this controversial writer will be able to delve into their issues of interest in depths.

The exhibition, divided into five parts, is organized into stories that each depict Stein in a different light. Stein was a mass of contradictions: Her work and thought often provoked strong and not always kind responses and harsh criticism, even up until today. Many times, her experimental work has been discredited; her writings on Picasso on the Portrait Gallery's exhibition wall might strike you as a nonsensical word salad. But Stein should be studied as a complete unit; one should look at her body of work before reaching a decision or judgment. The five distinct parts offer a much-needed holistic approach to Stein.

The first story, titled Picturing Gertrude, traces Stein's early life through portraits and sculptures. We move on through Domestic Stein, which presents the importance of the domestic sphere as for Stein's inspiration and entertainment, and Art of Friendship, which looks at Stein's (strategic?) friendships with artists, publishers and writers. Celebrity Stein, the fourth story, examines Stein's celebrity status in the U.S. following the publication of her book The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas (1933). The fifth and final story, simply titled Legacies, studies Stein's legacy both in Europe and in the U.S., primarily as a public figure who continues to inspire artists today.

Although born in Pennsylvania, Stein spent some time in Vienna and Paris with her parents as an infant, and soon fell in love with Europe. In 1903, she eventually settled in Paris for good. It is here, in the alluringly glamorous French capital, that Stein made a famous name for herself and an almost famous one for her lifelong partner, Alice B. Toklas.

Stein, inspired by evening salons she had attended back in the U.S., set up her own salon and later art collection, and befriended young writers and artists, including Pablo Picasso, Henry Matisse and Ernest Hemingway.



Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas by Sir Francis Cyril Rose, Gouache on paper (1939).

Through her circle of friends, Stein became powerful and influential primarily as a collector and patron of the arts.

However, Stein has been widely criticized for her political views and connections. She survived World War II as a Jewish woman in Nazi-occupied France, which some have attributed to her friendship with Vichy Chief of State Philippe Pétain. Earlier, Stein had openly endorsed Spanish General Francisco Franco.

Curators Wanda M. Corn and Tirza T. Latimer have been working on the exhibition for years, with the idea initiated through various workshops at New York University as well as through the Contemporary Jewish Museum in San Francisco (Stein and Toklas both were Jewish survivors of the Holocaust), which hosted the exhibition before it travelled to Washington. While teaching at Yale, Corn asked Latimer to do a research errand for the Stein project at Yale's library, where the papers of Stein and Toklas are housed. Explained Latimer: "I did the errand. And then others. And got hooked."

Corn, Latimer and their assistants began by researching the locations and prices of about 240 items. In the end, the exhibition features about half of this list, based on what was available where and for how long, as well as reasonable prices.

The curators' story-approach is an interesting choice and a powerful method to study Stein from various angles. Latimer said, "The curatorial approach really came out of the archive. We first found visual material that raised questions or told tales and then organized it into a narrative with five stories."

In collaboration with American University, the Portrait Gallery also hosted a panel on the exhibition on Nov. 4, in which curators Corn and Latimer talked about the exhibition with other scholars and gallery staff. The speakers emphasized Stein's variety of writings and argued that there was not one coherent Stein style.

Stein had a witty but dry sense of humor, which made her writings and comments sometimes highly funny. On the art of being a genius, she is said to have commented that one has to sit around and do nothing, nothing at all for a very long time.

It would be interesting to see what Stein has to say about the contemporary world, in which Paris has to share its status as the global center for the arts, and in which art is displayed and traded in a more and more commercial setting. Professor Catharine Stimpson from New York University said, "One of the lost literatures of the 21st century is the Twitter feeds of Gertrude Stein."

Gertrude Stein with U.S. flag. Carl Van Vechten, Gelatin silver print on board (1935).

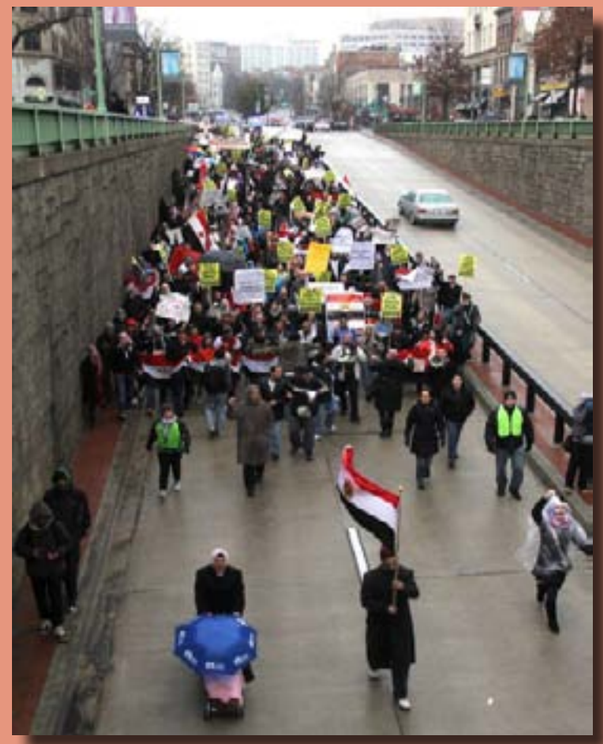
Cover page: Gertrude Stein by Sir Cecil Beaton, Gelatin Silver print (1937).

All photos used with permission from the National Portrait Gallery's exhibition website.

The exhibition Seeing Gertrude Stein: Five Stories can be seen at the National Portrait Gallery, Washington, D.C., until Jan. 22, 2012. Museum hours are 11:30 a.m. to 7 p.m. daily. Closed December 25. Admission is free. Metro: Chinatown/ Gallery Place. Contact www.npg.si.edu or 202-633-8300 for more information.

Jan #25:

Notes from a Revolution



Notes from a Revolution

On Jan. 25th, 2011, the world was watching as millions of protesters took to the streets in Cairo and other Egyptian cities and set up camp on Tahrir Square. Egyptians, and soon supporters around the world, demanded the resignation of President Hosni Mubarak.

Just days before, a successful revolution in Tunisia had overthrown President Ben Ali. Egypt and Tunisia soon inspired related movements across the Middle East, many of which continue until this day. Even Egypt itself is far from having overcome the revolution, and recently, violence began again over the military's continued rule.

The following collection of interview excerpts was inspired by a political science course I took at the American University in Cairo and the events of the revolution.

The photos on these pages were taken during the protests in Washington, D.C. The mural paintings can be found in Cairo, Egypt. Photo credit: Sara Meleika, Hossam Mansour.

Washington, D.C., Nov. 30, 2011.

Mariam Aziz, *20, is an Egyptian citizen studying at American University in Washington, D.C. She is studying abroad at the University if Ghana in Legon, Accra, wehre she also works as a volunteer at the Haven of Hope orphanage. Aziz played a major role in organizing protests in Washington in support of the Egyptian Revolution.*

How did you experience the 25th of January?

Mariam Aziz (MA): My experience of the revolution actually started a day before the revolution began. I was in D.C. at American University where I study, and I called my dad in Cairo to discuss the prospects. I expected my dad to share the same enthusiasm; he didn't. Nothing is going to happen, he said. Well, we are both glad he was wrong!

On the 25th I received an email from a listserv of Egyptian Americans living in D.C. saying that they would be echoing the protests in Tahrir at the Egyptian embassy; I went there that night, not knowing anyone. I kind of stood in the back and repeated the chants; I later met some of the other youth. The next day we did the same thing, except this time, no one spoke of meeting on the third day, so I just jumped in with a couple of others and said that as long as they're protesting in Egypt, we need to be doing the same. And from there I found myself leading and organizing (along with six other Egyptian youth) the protests in D.C.

In your opinion, what were the reasons/ factors that eventually led to the revolution and Mubarak's resignation?

MA: Injustice is the easiest way to frame this. Social, political and historical injustice. Had the Tunisian revolution not happened, would the Egyptian have? I don't know, but I definitely think that it was a catalyst. Egyptians are very proud, and love claiming motherhood of the world: "Masr Om El Donya." And now it was Tunisians who were setting the world on fire? Oh no! We can do that, too! And well, we did. But it's not just injustice, it's worse than that, a lot worse, it's human rights atrocities, it's the underground torture cells, the emergency law, the starving children, and on and on. Even though not every Egyptian family has experienced it to this extent, everyone suffered to one degree or the other, be it from the struggle to put food on the table, the constant demand of bribes, or the inefficiency of the system as a whole.

What was the most surprising aspect of the revolution for you personally?

MA: The most surprising aspect by far was the hesitancy of the older generation. One day they were in Tahrir, the next they were saying it's enough, this is too much. It was definitely frustrating, but they've been socialized all their lives and made to believe that "he's better than others," etc. I should have seen this coming, but I was surprised by how unbelievably rude people were on facebook, the few pro-Mubarak's on my friends' list, most of whom I went to high school with, made my blood boil. I shouldn't have been surprised, though. They were the chil dren of ministers and others who directly benefited from the corrupt regime.

A good surprise, on the other hand, was the connection forged between myself and the other Egyptian youth in DC. We found ourselves spending every evening together, every morning on the phone or the tremendously long facebook message chain, organizing for the marches, protests and vigils. Most nights after

everyone left, we'd head over to eat somewhere, and plan for the next day, assign tasks, make calls to human rights groups and reach out to politicians, and of course, answer the media's unending stream of questions.

In what political and social direction is Egypt headed now? What political changes do you hope or expect will have occurred by the same time next year?

MA: Oh, I wish I could answer that! I honestly don't think anyone can! Where are we headed? Well right now it's not looking good at all, with the military council still in power and making all these ridiculous decisions right and left. In terms of social direction though, I think that the revolution hasn't changed Egyptian society at its core all that much. There needs to be a revolution of mannerisms. Same time next year as in January 25th? Not much at all. Historically, revolutions have incurred real change in the fabric of society after 30 to 60 years, if not more. It's only been a couple of months!

What has the revolution meant for U.S. – Egyptian relations? In what way have these relations been affected by the revolution and the removal of the Mubarak regime?

MA: For one thing, Egyptians like the American government a lot less, I think. The response and speeches given by the U.S. President and Secretary of State during the first two weeks of the revolution were embarrassing. The U.S. has supported Mubarak for the entirety of his tyrannical rule, and that, in itself, is a shame. Yes, the claim is that this is aid money, but anyone on the ground will tell you that Egypt has been deteriorating, with poverty doubling in the last two decades. Mubarak's regime's corruptness is a thing to be studied, so no one ever believed that the U.S. green bills were actually ever reaching the people.

The more important relationship at this point, I believe, is the Egyptian-Israeli relationship. There's always been this U.S.-Israel-Egypt trio, but how long will that last? We saw what happened two weeks ago when the Israeli embassy was attacked; there's huge anti-Israeli sentiment in Egypt, which the Mubarak regime was able to suppress, but not properly, as we can obviously see that they pushed down the problem, but never healed it. Tampering with Egyptian-Israeli relations is likely to have a direct effect on Egypt's relationship with the US.

To the extent that the Egyptian-U.S. relations have been actually wounded, I cannot tell. It will depend on the power that assumes place.

Heba Mahmoud Khalil, *22, works as a full-time researcher with the Egyptian Center for Economic and Social Rights in Cairo. She has lived in Egypt for most of her life.*

How did you experience the 25th of January?

Heba Khalil (HK): I was in the UK, following the Tunisian uprisings closely, and taking part in planning and discussing Egypt's 25th of January through social media. While I was well aware that large protests would take place on that day, I was very pessimistic regarding their success.

What were the reasons and factors that eventually led to the revolution and Mubarak's resignation?

HK: I think the social mobilization of Egyptians has to be traced back to many origins: The workers' movement was, for instance, very active and mobile in using protests and strikes; the demonstrations in support of Palestine and Iraq brought hundreds of thousands to the streets as well. But also the humiliation and murder of Khaled Said was a milestone on the way to the revolution, a shocking incident that moved and angered every Egyptian. The economic standards of living and the poor prospect for youth to find an adequate standard of living and work is another essential factor. There isn't one aspect or one factor, but different pressures from the regime came together to create this state of boiling.

What was the most surprising aspect of the revolution for you personally?

HK: When the phones and Internet were blocked. As an Egyptian activist once said, when you cut all communications, there is only one way to access people: the streets!

In what political and social direction is Egypt headed now?

HK: Hopefully, we're heading towards democratic rule and can have parliamentary and presidential elections by next year. However, the tight military grip on politics and the "victories" of the Islamists, especially the Salafis, are a dangerous concern that threaten the very prospect of democracy.

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Sara Meleika, 22, is an Egyptian student studying for her master's in Teaching and Learning in Montréal, Canada.

How did you experience the 25th of January?

Sara Meleika (SM): I was in Montreal on the 25th, and was flying back to Egypt on the 26th. Naturally, I became aware of what was going on Egypt through the frequent statuses and updates on facebook and also a little bit through the news. However, it never ever occurred to me that anything was about to happen. I just thought it would be one incident that would quickly be squashed by the authorities and which would pass away forgotten. So I was completely confident about returning to Egypt the next day.

In your opinion, what were the reasons that eventually led to the revolution and Mubarak's resignation?

SM: In my opinion, it was the deteriorating quality of life that Egyptians had. The element of food is especially significant because until recently most Egyptians have always been able to eat even if they had nothing else. Indeed, we saw in 2007 and 2008, the way a rise in bread prices first encouraged the Egyptian people to begin to unite and demonstrate. Unfortunately however this rise in bread prices did not quite affect the middle and upper classes, and thus they did not really get involved. For that reason, I would say that the murder of Khaled Said was a highly significant factor in the rise of the uprising in Egypt, as it alerted the middle and upper class to the fact that they, too, could be victims of the deteriorating condition in Egypt.

What was the most surprising aspect of the revolution for you personally?

SM: That it happened! Honestly, I never saw it coming. As I mentioned there was significant loss of hope in Egypt over the past couple of years, which resulted in a significant rise in apathy. Also, it was entirely evident that the cost of demonstrating against the government could be death, torture or life imprisonment. Thus, there were truly dire consequences at stake.

In what political and social direction is Egypt headed now? What political changes do you hope or expect will have occurred by the same time next year?

SM: I don't think anyone can entirely say which way Egypt is headed. However, I think more than anything else Egyptians want to see their quality of life improve and see Egypt improve economically. I think more than anything economics will govern what happens in Egypt, and that this will be the defining factor over any religious or social aspirations.

What has the revolution meant for U.S. – Egyptian relations? In what way have these relations been affected by the revolution and the removal of the Mubarak regime?

SM: I think the US government made the wise decision in supporting the Egyptian people after supporting the dictatorship for 30 years. However, recently when three Egyptian soldiers were shot by the Israeli military, inciting the Egyptian people to revolt in front of the Israeli embassy, the United States gave very little attention to that fact that Egyptian lives were lost and an enormous amount of attention to the fact that Israeli diplomatic representation should've been better respected. If Egyptian military had shot three Israeli soldiers by accident it would have been a whole other story. Egyptians realize this, and it is elements such as this more than anything which hurt U.S.-Egyptian relations. The U.S. should pick its battles with other Middle Easter and Arab countries a little bit better, in order to ensure that in supporting Israel they do not completely alienate the others, especially with the amount of economic, political, and military support that Israel gets from the U.S.