South Africa is home to the Cradle of Humankind, an archeological site near Johannesburg where the fossils of one of our earliest ancestors (*Homo naledi*), dating back to almost 2 million years, have been discovered. Although our class missed the chance to visit this World Heritage site by just a day, we have experienced more than a month’s worth of learning, encounter, and reflection in the motherland. Each day, our class engaged with an aspect of South African history, politics, society, or natural environment that paralleled global issues, regarding race, religion, industrialization, and economic disparity. It seems appropriate, even necessary, to then call South Africa the microcosm of our planet. And through all of our discussions and travels, I was most transformed by my understanding of *ubuntu*, a Zulu word that describes our interconnected humanity. In English, the saying goes, “A person is a person through other persons.”

As central as this idea is to South African heritage and culture, however, it was neither practiced nor acknowledged in the public sphere until the creation of the Constitution of South Africa and then the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), during political transition from the totalitarian apartheid regime to the now democratic “Rainbow Nation.” But even today, the younger generation considers the spirit of ubuntu to have been appropriated and sterilized in the effort to reach a bare minimum for peace in a society previously soaked with sin and blood. Many arguments claim that true justice was never achieved, despite the election of Nelson Mandela back in 1994. The evidence is there, and our class witnessed it through the lens of spatial justice.

In both Cape Town and the Gauteng Province, where Johannesburg and Pretoria are located, poverty is rampant. Informal settlements, also known as townships, are characterized by tin roofs, off-colored walls, and back-to-back shacks that sprawl throughout districts over gentle hills and sandy flats. They are often conveniently separated by highways for the foreign tourists to ignore as they drive to popular destinations like Table Mountain or Krueger National Park. What are these shacks doing in such a wealthy country where students from Boston are willing to pay $7,000 for a month-long summer course?

Although the TRC tried to address the question of reparations in a land where only the white population had access to wealth, it did not effectively take account of the concept of equity. The native black population had lived through a 400-yearold history of colonialism, slavery, segregation, and most recently, apartheid. I doubt that a $2,000 handout to the victims and survivors of intergenerational human rights violations and unfathomable physical and psychological trauma is enough. To make matters worse, economic violence took the form of spatial injustice during the apartheid regime, as minority populations (Black, Colored, or Indian/Malay/Asian) became displaced and forced into these pockets of poverty, cut off by roads, walls, and the police, blocked from equal access to transportation to cities for jobs. Everything was engineered to have the poorest remain poor in the false prospect of “separate but equal development.”
Issues of race therefore continue to play a major role in conversations on justice today, especially in the growing movement of “decolonization.” I believe America also needs to re-examine our legacy of race sooner than later. With the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s, Martin Luther King Jr. embodied a prophet, voicing the cries of “the other” and envisioning a future “when people are not judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character.” However, before he could get to the heart of the issue (economic injustice), he was assassinated. Today’s racial discontent in America, as represented by Black Lives Matter, is, I believe, another chance for our society to address the need for true justice. Spatial injustice is as common here in the great U.S.A. as it is in South Africa. We have simply become more sophisticated at it, through water resource distribution (i.e. Detroit), suburbanization (i.e. Newton), and now gentrification (i.e. Chinatown).

The policies created in the mid-1900s, in both the U.S. and South Africa, had clear consequences for the marginalized, and their effects are still visible today. At the beginning of the course, I questioned the viability of hope in a world so marred by greed, cynicism, and violence. However, despite what I have written, I do find hope—hope in each person I’ve met abroad there, and in my classmates who chose to enroll in a course entitled “Religion, Racial Justice, and Reconciliation.”