Bien al Sur: Notes Toward a Genealogy of Blues Music's Global Spread

Author(s): Adam Gussow

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Adam Gussow

ABSTRACT

The history of blues music includes, or should include, an account of the way in which this substantially African American creation, a product of the US South and the Great Migration, has been transformed over the past century into a global phenomenon, one performed by local musicians and embraced by audiences in virtually every corner of the world. Since that comprehensive account of the blues's globalization has yet to be written, this introductory essay offers a provisional outline based on what is currently known—a knowledge base notably augmented by the seven essays addressing this issue's theme, "blues music in transnational context." The globalization process takes place in six roughly sequential stages, I argue, beginning with the music's transatlantic migration from the US to the UK and Europe in the 1950s and early 1960s, an early diffusion framed by British and continental blues scholarship. The UK blues scene isn't just the first non-US scene to achieve critical mass, but the male blues-rock artists it promotes, especially the Rolling Stones and Cream, end up critically inflecting the aesthetics of emergent scenes in Europe and beyond. B. B. King, touring widely and frequently outside the US, is a key agent of blues's global spread; the International Blues Challenge in Memphis stages an annual rite of return for the widespread cohort of blues musicians produced by globalization, even as digital technologies radically democratize the performative playing field, enabling musicians such as Luna Lee, a young South Korean YouTuber, to seek and consolidate global audiences.

"The most famous Blues, as everybody knows, is the *St. Louis Blues*, that Mr. W. C. Handy wrote down one night on the corner of a bar on a levee street in St. Louis thirty years ago, and which has since gone all over the

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world. The *St. Louis Blues* is sung more than any other song on the air waves, is known in Shanghai and Buenos Aires, Paris and Berlin—in fact, is heard so often in Europe that a great many Europeans think it must be the American national anthem…. [T]he blues have something that goes beyond race or sectional limits, that appeals to the ear and heart of people everywhere—otherwise, how could it be that in a Tokio restaurant one night I heard a Louis Armstrong record of the *St. Louis Blues* played over and over for a crowd of Japanese diners there?"

Langston Hughes, "Songs Called the Blues" (1941)

"Who would ever have thought Ripley, Surrey would become the other home of Mississippi Delta blues?"

caption for a Rolex watch ad featuring Eric Clapton (2006)

"I think there is only one blues. You either play the blues or you don't. I can't describe it. Blues is blues."

Zhang "Big John" Ling, *quoted in* Brown, "Still Got the Blues" (2013)

Pandemic

As I write, in August 2020, the world as we know it has been upended by the COVID-19 pandemic. A virus that managed to migrate from its bat host to a human subject in a wet market in Hainan, China, has spread, eight months later, to virtually every country around the globe: eighteen million confirmed cases, 700,000 deaths, with no available vaccine and no end in sight. A few locales have dodged the bullet, at least for the moment: Tibet has only one confirmed case and no deaths. The United States, lamentably, leads the pack: only four percent of the world's population, we have one quarter of the confirmed cases and 22.4% of the deaths. My adopted state of Mississippi remained a pastoral backwater in the early days of the virus's spread, even as New York City, my birthplace and erstwhile home for twenty-two years, became a charnel house, but Mississippi, with 100% of ICU beds filled, is now poised to become the nation's number one hot spot. Each of us, no matter who we are and where we are sited when this issue of *The Global South* goes live—sheltering in place, Zooming with coworkers, grieving the loss of friends and family, struggling to find secure footing in the shatter-zone—is singing some version of the Coronavirus Blues.

The phrase "singing the blues" has long been the tritest of metaphors, second only in our own day to "viral spread." Yet there *is* something uncanny about the fact that this particular novel coronavirus has chosen the year 2020 to spread around the globe. Precisely one hundred years ago, in August 1920, an African American blues singer from Cincinnati named Mamie Smith inaugurated a race records craze with "Crazy Blues," a convenient starting point from which to assess the century-long process by which blues music, too, has spread around

the globe. Search the phrase "Tibet blues," and you won't find much of a blues scene in that mountainous and isolated territory—as with COVID-19, Tibet is a world unto itself; you'll need to travel to neighboring Nepal to attend the Himalayan Blues Festival[1]—but you will find Loten Namling, a master musician from Dharamsala who specializes in traditional songs from Tibet and feels a deep connection with African American music. "Old songs of Tibet are Blues," he told a French audience in Orleans in 2005. "Loten," according to Phayul.com, a website published by Tibetan exiles,

> is currently working with Didier Ballan, a French musician to compose new Blues songs for his project "The Tibet Blues"…. In the western world, the blues tradition comes from the black Americans who were oppressed by their white owners. So for Loten, Tibet Blues is the appropriate name for his project to express the sufferings of his people under the Chinese occupation. ("Voice")

Is there any other homegrown musical form that has taken root in so many sites around the world, opening itself to local investments and inflections even while remaining anchored, if unevenly, in the brutal particulars of African American experience in the US South and an ethos of shared suffering and persistence emerging from that experience? The root meaning of pandemic is "all people." This issue of *The Global South* seeks insight into the pandemic spread of the blues, even as a real pandemic, a global medical emergency, rages on outside my door, and yours.

To the extent that this issue's theme, blues music in transnational context, currently exists as a purview within blues scholarship, most of the work, at least in English, concerns the Anglo-American connection, with a smaller but significant secondary vein of research in blues's reception and spread in Europe: the Netherlands, France, Germany, Norway, Russia.[2] Beyond the borders of that known world, however, scholarship on the blues in national and regional contexts—in Canada, South America, Africa, the Middle East, Asia, Oceania—quickly grows sparse. *Bien al Sur: Historia del Blues en la Argentina* (2015), the title of which (wittily) translates "Way Down South," is the only book-length monograph I have been able to identify that focuses on a national blues tradition within this immense and surprisingly blues-rich swath of the globe (Grätzer and Sassone). B. B. King played Canada for the first time in 1969, Japan for the first time two years later; he performed more often in those two countries over the course of his life than anywhere other than the US. His debut in Japan, as in Russia, created delighted shock waves that ultimately spurred the growth of a thriving national scene.[3] Yet no substantial scholarly study has yet been published about the history and sociology of Canadian or Japanese blues. (Two of the articles in this issue, by a Canadian and Japanese scholar respectively, begin to address this lack.)[4]

A new global blues studies is urgently needed, one that creates and assembles the quilting squares, as it were, into a much larger and more variegated tapestry than we currently possess. This introductory essay, working with what exists, will venture a provisional assemblage: creaky, gap-toothed, sure to be revised. A schema of blues music's global spread, interleaved with a capsule history of same.

Bluesing It Up and Out: Six Stages

Although I am well aware that some African American blues players and cultural custodians read our contemporary moment as perilous, a familiar (if updated) drama of white appropriation, cultural dilution, and profiteering,[5] I write in what follows as an empiricist, without ethical or aesthetic judgment: a descriptive grammarian of blues music's global spread. How and why did the music travel so far from its place of origin in US black southern communities? What sociohistorical conditions, what ideological currents, what sonic and visual media, what charismatic personalities and accidents of fate, helped enable and accomplish that diffusion?

It is a mistake, of course, to frame the issue solely in terms of an outward movement from imperial center to provincial margins, even if that model, with the US configured as blues music's "home"—and with Mississippi, Memphis, and Chicago understood as core regions within the US—has a certain baseline validity. England has functioned within the history of blues music's global diffusion, crucially, as *both* a secondary center and the leading province. The migration of non-US-born blues musicians into US blues scenes, both as temporary voyagers and as long-term expatriates, is also a key dynamic within the globalized contemporary blues world, one addressed by several scholars in this issue.

With these provisos in place, here is a schema for blues music's global spread over the past century: a descriptive grammar in the form of six stages, roughly sequential but also overlapping and continuing to the present day, through which that spread has been accomplished. Each stage is a research area; the first stage has several subcategories. Far more research has been done on certain stages than on others. Consider this a first-pass attempt at sketching the full picture.

1. *African American blues musicians travel out of the US to perform overseas.* Big Bill Broonzy (1950s) and B. B. King (late 1960s and beyond) are exemplars, but Alberta Hunter (1920s) and Ethel Waters (1920s) are significant progenitors.[6] The American Folk Blues Festival (1962–72, 1980–85), which brings the music's best living black exemplars, male and female, to large concert audiences in the UK and a dozen European countries, is pivotal in all respects.[7] These are short-term visits, but in some

cases African American blues musicians remain overseas for extended periods of time, especially in Europe (Champion Jack Dupree, Memphis Slim, Eddie Boyd, Luther Allison), and, through performances (including club residencies) and recording sessions, become active agents for the continuing transmission of blues energies into local scenes.[8]

Black US blues musicians—their songs and musical ideas, their performance practices and stage imagery, their mythologies—are also projected overseas in the following mediated forms:

a) *Recordings*. Blues records by African American artists, both US imports (including V discs) and, later, locally-produced stock, make their presence felt in non-US countries around the world, especially, early on, in the UK, continental Europe, and Japan. (The worldwide popularity of "St. Louis Blues" by the early 1940s serves as prehistory here.)

b) *Radio*. Blues radio, especially in the UK and Europe, has a multiplier effect, greatly increasing the effective spread of recordings by African American blues artists. It awakens the imaginations of nascent local blues musicians and helps generate and sustain aficionado communities. Blues-themed shows on the American Forces Network (AFN), an arm of the US military, play a key role, not just in the UK and Europe (1940s and beyond), but in many locations around the world where US troops are deployed.[9] Radio outreach by far-flung British military operations plays a similar role, diffusing blues sounds into local populations.

c) *Film and television*. A secondary but significant factor in blues music's global spread. Notable texts include *Blues and Gospel Train* (1964), which features Muddy Waters and Sister Rosetta Tharpe performing on a Birmingham, UK, train platform; *The Blues* (1966), screened by the CBC in Canada, which showcases Waters, Willie Dixon, Sonny Terry & Brownie McGhee, and Sunnyland Slim; and, in Russia, a triumvirate of US films that thematize black-white collaboration and interchange: *The Blues Brothers* (1980), *Crossroads* (1986), and *B. B. King and Friends* (1987).[10]

2. *Books, magazines, liner notes, and other print media offer compelling representations of African American blues musicians, their music, and their sociohistorical milieu.* Here, UK and European scholars and journalists take the lead, both in the postwar decade-and-a-half (*Big Bill Blues* [1955], a pioneering autobiography compiled by Belgian author Yannick Bruynoghe) and during the Blues Revival of the 1960s—a movement at once undergirded and destabilized in the ideological sphere by this cohort's focus on what might be called Real Black Blues and its sonic articulations. British

researcher Paul Oliver publishes six books on the blues between 1959 and 1970, a pivotal decade that also sees the founding of *Blues Unlimited* (UK), *Blues & Soul* (UK), *Blues World* (UK), *Soul Bag* (France), *Rhythm & Blues Panorama* (Belgium), *Blues Notes* (Austria), *Jefferson* (Sweden), and *Blues News* (Finland) ("Mississippi to Europe"). In addition, as one of our contributors notes, the nascent Japanese blues scene in the 1960s is stimulated by the publication, in Japanese translations, of *Blues People* by LeRoi Jones and *Urban Blues* by Charles Keil, as well as the founding of Japan's first blues magazine, *B=B* (Inaba).

3. *The British blues scene achieves critical mass, the first non-black, non-US cohort to do so.* The effects of this development are multiple and far-reaching. The story of how Britain "gets the blues" (Schwartz) and develops its own "blues network" (Kellett) has been explored in depth, as has the story of how the Brits (Beatles, Rolling Stones, John Mayall, Led Zeppelin, Cream) export their version of African American blues, at once reverent and adventurous, to the US, bringing fresh attention to Muddy Waters, Howlin' Wolf, Jimmy Reed, Bo Diddley, and other black originators even as they supercharge the United States's own nascent blues revival (Cataliotti; Groom; Milward). An important element of this transatlantic romance is a black-fathers-and-white-sons dynamic—"reverse adoption," to use Kellett's term—that results in a series of four collaborative albums, three of which are recorded in London: Fleetwood Mac's *Blues Jam in Chicago* (1969), *B. B. King in London* (1971), *The London Howlin' Wolf Sessions* (1971), and *The London Muddy Waters Sessions* (1972). Far less appreciated is the degree to which the UK's homegrown blues-rock stars, not just through touring but through the worldwide reach of the record industry and the British military, help stimulate blues revivals in a range of non-US locations around the globe: Europe, first and foremost, but also Asia, Australia, Canada, and South America. In Singapore, for example, a local correspondent for *Blues Access* looks to England for the roots of that country's thriving 1990s blues scene:

> Singaporean blues history goes back to the early 1960s, when the British Invasion shot past America and into the British colonies of Asia. In the case of Singapore, the key musical catalyst was the British military, whose soldiers brought the first rock 'n' roll and blues records into the country. Just like many American bands of the 60's, Singaporean bands discovered the blues through white British acts like the Rolling Stones, the Animals, the Yardbirds and John Mayall. The big difference was that blues fanatics in Singapore had to really dig in in order to get their hands on original blues

> recordings. Of course, if you had a friend in the Royal Air Force, it always helped your chances. Guitarist Jimmy Appudurai-Chua, who played with Singapore's first blues band, the Straydogs, managed to score his first blues record (a copy of Sonny Boy Williamson and the Yardbirds) from an RAF officer stationed in Singapore. (Chang 24)

The British blues-rock connection critically impacts the aesthetics of blues music's global spread, helping explain why some non-US blues scenes trend in the direction of rock—and, equally important, why globalizing blues culture retains a masculinist bias, making far less space for women blues singers (unless they play guitar) than did the American Folk Blues Festival, which featured Sippie Wallace, Big Mama Thornton, and a handful of other black female stars.[11] To this calculus must be added the parallel global impact of the US blues scene's best known white exports, including the Blues Brothers and Janis Joplin. Here, too, Singapore is an instructive example:

> Singapore still has a long way to go in terms of bringing in more blues acts, getting past the usual blues stereotypes, and pushing the musicianship of local bands up to the next level. On an island where many self-proclaimed blues guitarists complain about '50s Chicago blues being "too black" (Stevie Ray Vaughan and Johnny Winter are the predominant blues yardsticks here), there's often little difference between "blues" and "12-bar heavy rock." (Chang 25)

4. *Beginning as early as the mid-1960s and as late, in some cases, as the first decade of the new millennium, significantly inflected by developments in the US and UK, blues scenes develop in most other regions of the world: North America (Canada and Mexico), South America, Europe (including Russia), Asia (including India, China, and Japan), the Middle East (Israel), Australia, and Africa (including South Africa).*[12] The development of these local and national scenes is stimulated by a range of factors, including the new availability of sought-after recordings; concert appearances by important non-US/UK acts; and the presence of white US expatriates as fans and amateur or semi-pro blues musicians at concerts, jam sessions, and the like. (Alan Paul's *Big in China: My Unlikely Adventures Raising a Family, Playing the Blues, and Becoming a Star in Beijing* [2011] evidences this last phenomenon.) Although on-the-ground appearances by major and minor stars in the African American blues firmament play a significant role in this global diffusion process, evidence suggests that the worldwide touring of B. B. King may have been a particularly important catalyst in the development of local blues scenes—or, alternately, a key early indicator of the health of those scenes.

King begins performing internationally in 1968; he ultimately travels to fifty-seven countries outside the US.[13] His five most popular destinations, ranked by total number of performances, are Canada (222), Japan (153), the UK (146), Germany (126), and France (76). In at least one national context, King's initial visit provokes a cultural earthquake, jump-starting a blues scene almost singlehandedly: according to Michael Urban in *Russia Gets the Blues*, many of his post-Soviet interviewees "spoke of B. B. King's concerts in the USSR in 1979 in terms that suggested musical epiphanies" (27). But there is evidence in King's overseas touring logs for something slightly different: an alignment between the date of his first visit to a given country and the developmental baseline of that country's blues scene, which is to say a receptive and knowledgeable audience of sufficient size to support a tour stop. King debuts early in Europe, for example, playing the UK, Germany, France, Austria, Sweden, and Switzerland in 1968. He adds Denmark in 1969 (when he also plays Canada for the first time), the Netherlands in 1971, and Belgium and Ireland in 1972. Fans in most of these countries were serviced by the American Folk Blues Festival during the prior decade; they are sophisticated consumers of African American blues, their ranks supplemented by a growing cohort of white players. But the AFB bypasses Italy—and King doesn't play there until 1979.

In South America, similarly, King debuts in Brazil and Argentina (1980) more than a decade before he plays Chile (1991). "Blues in its purest form," according to one journalistic history, first becomes popular in Brazil in the 1980s (Zantinge); in Argentina, Memphis La Blusera, "the band that created and gave identity to Argentine blues," is founded in 1978 and releases their first album in 1981 ("Memphis La Blusera"). Chile's blues scene, by contrast, doesn't really coalesce *as* a scene until the late 1990s, inspired in part by local concerts given by Memphis La Blusera and Honeyboy Edwards (Limnios, "Felipe"). Does King's inaugural performance in a given country help stimulate the local scene, or merely indicate its basic viability and readiness for further development? Or are both dynamics present in varying proportions? This is a research question worth addressing.

Finally, there is the example of Asia. King plays Japan, with its rapidly developing blues scene, early in the course of his international career (1971) and returns often, but it will be another two decades before he plays Taiwan (1990), Malaysia (1992), Singapore (1992), or Hong Kong (1994). He plays China only once, at the opening of the Hard Rock Café Beijing (1994); two years later, China's first blues band, the Rhythm Dogs, featuring Zhang "Big John" Ling on bass and International Monetary Fund vice-president John Anderson on harmonica, is founded (Brown).

King never plays India—and the Indian scene, although currently enjoying a "mini blues revolution" (Javeri) with the help of the decade-old Mahindra Blues Festival, gets a very late start relative to its Asian peers. "The blues were inexistent when we started out in 2003," according to Rudy Wallang, guitarist and co-founder of Soulmate, the only Indian blues band that has ever appeared at the International Blues Challenge in Memphis (2007, 2010) (Rebello). Soulmate's Wikipedia entry suggests that non-US blues artists hailing from seemingly unpropitious overseas locations may leverage home-field success into regional popularity and the beginnings of an international career. It also images the crazy-quilt texture of the globalized contemporary blues scene:

> Soulmate has performed at many prestigious festivals like *International Jazzmandu Festival* in Kathmandu, Nepal in 2004, 2005 and 2008, "Mosaic Music Festival" Singapore in 2009, "Du World Music Festival" in Dubai [in] 2011, *Harley Rock Riders Season III* in Bangalore in 2012, *Maximum India Festival* at Kennedy Center in Washington DC in 2011, *Jakarta Blues Festival* in Indonesia in 2009 and 2010, "Monsteros Blues Festival" [in] Sweden … "Baltic Blues Festival" in Eutin, Germany in 2012[, and] *Mahindra Blues Fest* in Mumbai in 2011, 2012, 2013 and 2014. ("Soulmate")

5. *Non-US/UK blues musicians visit the United States—as long-term emigres, as shorter-term sojourners or pilgrims, as competitors in the International Blues Challenge—and participate in US blues culture, engendering a complex exchange with significant ramifications.* This dynamic arguably begins not with musicians but with European blues scholars and documentarians who show up in Chicago, St. Louis, Memphis, and New Orleans in the 1950s and 1960s, looking to encounter in the flesh, and in their native milieux, the African American blues performers they've known only through recordings or within the theatricalized confines of the American Folk Blues Festival.[14] Foreign-born blues players soon follow, epitomized by Peps Persson, a Swedish guitarist who records *The Week Peps Came to Chicago* (1972), a double LP featuring his jams with Sunnyland Slim, Carey Bell, and other Chicago blues notables. Japanese blues musicians, including Shun Kikuta, Shoji Naito, Taro Senga, and Sumito "Ariyo" Ariyoshi, are particularly visible exponents of this transnational dynamic; Chicago-based blues bands and recording sessions featuring African American elders are an important proving ground for their talents.[15] Swiss-born harmonicist Walter Liniger, living his own version of this blues journey, emigrates to the US in the early 1980s, settles in Mississippi, and spends most

of a decade touring and recording with Delta bluesman James "Son" Thomas (Limnios, "Walter"). Seeking the source of the blues behind the British blues-rock he's grown up on, guitarist Javier Vargas moves from Spain to the US in 1988 at the age of thirty-three; he spends three years in New York, Chicago, and Nashville, then returns to Spain and turns out twenty-six albums in as many years, often with fusion themes—*Madrid-Memphis* (1992), *Blues Latino* (1994), *Texas Tango* (1995), *Madrid-Chicago Live* (2000)—and featuring African American bluesmen like Carey Bell, Junior Wells, Louisiana Red, and Preston Shannon (Dicaire 243–46).

Tel Aviv native Ori Naftaly, a more recent example of the blues émigré, journeys to Memphis with his band after they've been voted Best Israeli Blues Band of 2013 and reaches the semifinals of the International Blues Challenge. He relocates permanently to Memphis two years later and forms a new band, Southern Avenue, with vocalist Tierinii Jackson, a product of local black churches, and her sister Tikyra, a drummer. Their debut album, *Southern Avenue* (2017) reaches number one on the iTunes blues chart; their 2019 follow-up, *Keep On*, gets a Grammy nomination for Best Contemporary Blues Album ("Ori Naftaly"; Steinberg).

The International Blues Challenge, staged by the Blues Foundation under that name since 2000 ("International Blues Challenge"), is the single most important way in which the globalized contemporary blues world has become visible and audible to itself as an embodied community. It represents the culmination of the process I have outlined: not just a competition that places non-US blues musicians into the ring with their stateside peers (and in some cases elders), black and white, but a homecoming, a gathering of the extended family that is also a pilgrimage to a storied urban blues locale. Memphis, perched on a bluff overlooking the Mississippi River, is a gateway to the Mississippi Delta—*the* core region for the blues, arguably, and a place viewed with reverence by IBC participants, many of whom in the solo/duo competition deploy songs and styles audibly rooted in the region's classic prewar recordings.[16]

6. *With the fusing of digital sound reproduction technologies and the World Wide Web, epitomized by iTunes and YouTube, the globalization of blues music has entered a new era.* This is a quickly evolving research area. The opening of iTunes, Amazon, Spotify, and other worldwide music distribution platforms to virtually any self-styled blues musician in any participant country neutralizes the gatekeeping function played by major label A&R departments and indie labels alike, giving unheralded newcomers

a chance to connect with global audiences. YouTube performs the same function, superadding video to audio and, through comments, subscriptions, and Patreon-style links, giving audience members a chance to connect with, endorse, and financially gift their favored blues artists. YouTube also transforms the teaching of blues harmonica, making it possible for one individual with an internet connection to gather and minister to an international community of students (Gussow 227–31, 242–48). Yet as Attah notes, the most popular blues teachers on YouTube, judged by view counts, are almost all middle-aged white men from the US and the UK; the top ten countries from which viewers to my Modern Blues Harmonica channel hail, he also notes, are the Anglo-American quartet (USA, UK, Canada, Australia), a handful of major European countries, and Brazil (160–62).

This last statistic is unsurprising, tracking as it does the broad outlines of blues music's global spread. We are right to think critically, however, about the way in which YouTube's democratization of the blues teaching-and-performance transmission process, driven by algorithms and monetization and favoring computer-literate entrepreneurialism, may accrue financial and cultural capital for a largely white class of "winners" even while it renders (proportionately) invisible other, older forms of culture transmission—a differential that may well have racial manifestations worth pondering. What seems clear is that digital technologies, including audio and video streaming, have accelerated the blues's global spread, making the music and its performance practices, however skillfully or incompetently rendered, freely available to anybody with a smartphone. Although blues music has long made itself available to transnational fusion projects of the sort embraced by Javier Vargas, YouTube, with its heightened emphasis on producing the next new viral thing, has become the dominant contemporary example of what one critic has termed "the vast successive forms of cultural hybridity afforded through globalization processes" (Martin 293).

Luna Lee, a young South Korean YouTuber—four videos per month, each funded to the tune of more than $1,100 by a total of 200 Patreon donors—exemplifies this phenomenon. Lee plays the *gayageum*, a traditional Korean instrument that resembles a long slim zither with arcing strings. Her specialty is translating sixty years' worth of Anglo-American rock and pop, including blues-based repertoire ranging from Delta blues (Elmore James) and urban blues (B.B. and Albert King) through heavy blues-rock (Cream, Aerosmith, Jimi Hendrix, Stevie Ray Vaughan), into *gayageum* terms with the help of slithery, sometimes spooky microtones. A split screen enables her to play both rhythm and lead. A self-replicating monad whose

performance space is a soundstage, her music clearly doesn't emerge from an immersion in blues culture as such: apprenticeships with masters, jam sessions, gigs, extended face-to-face encounters with blues-hungry, blues-knowledgeable audiences. Yet her versions of "Dust My Broom" and "Sunshine of Your Love" are exceptional and uncanny; she signifies on Clapton's well-known solo in the latter. She has leveraged her prowess into a pair of appearances at South by Southwest in Austin and, judging by her press ("Woman Plays Jimi Hendrix, Stevie Ray Vaughan Classics on Traditional Korean Gayageum," proclaims *Guitar World*), she is well on her way to a professional career (Fanelli, Flores). She may not be *the* future of the blues, but she is *one* future of the blues. How did she, as a young South Korean woman in the land of K-pop, first become interested in that music?

> "Let me think about it," she says with a giggle. After a few moments of considering her history with the genre, she continues, "As I told you, I loved to play acoustic guitar music first, and then I got to know there are other types of guitar. It was the electric guitar, and it was amazing…. But it was not blues music, like Steve Vai, those are rock musicians, and I loved their music first. They also used a different tone scale. It looks similar to *gayageum* melody, so I followed them. At some point I found Jimi Hendrix, so from him I started to learn about blues music." (Cy)

Thus does the blues journey, and blues's journey, continue.

New Work

This issue of *The Global South* began with the suggestion half a dozen years ago by my longtime colleague at the University of Mississippi, Adetayo Alabi, who was then the journal's editor, that I might at some point want to guest-edit an issue. I quickly mentioned the blues; I may well have uttered the phrase that has become this issue's theme, "blues music in transnational context." "Sounds good," he said. "We'll do that."

A long road has been traveled between that day and this. I owe my seven contributors, as well as current journal editor Leigh Anne Duck and a set of referees who shall remain nameless, heartfelt thanks for helping me bring this issue to fruition. The essays divide themselves quite elegantly into four groups. Two focus on Africa; two focus on the UK; two focus on musicians—from Sweden and Japan, respectively—for whom Chicago is a key locale. The seventh focuses on intersections between Canadian and US blues in literary as well as musical contexts. Each essay adds something new and important to the conversation. Each essay pressures my schema in some fashion, suggesting

that it may need to be expanded and/or revised, even while (I hope!) broadly evidencing its validity.

In "Songhoy Blues: Using the Blues to Navigate Geopolitical Conflict in Mali and Music Industry Landscapes," Keerthi Chandrashekar brings us a first-person report from contemporary Mali, one that works surprising variations on the by-now clichéd concept of Africa as the place scholars go to find the roots of the blues. Although the band whose progress he tracks, Songhoy Blues, does indeed have familial and stylistic connections with the late Ali Farka Touré, who was frequently marketed as a "source" of "African blues," their own recordings, according to Chandrashekar, strike western ears as something more on the blues-rock spectrum, a space occupied by musicians such as Jimi Hendrix. Yet the term "blues" remains critically important to them, for several different reasons. As migrants from Mali's north who fled south from their Songhoy homeland to the nation's capital, Bamako, after Islamic jihadists took control in 2012, banning western music and the playing of music in general, the band's members write songs about their shared trials as exiles. "[O]ur situation," insists bassist Omar Touré, "is a blues situation." The music of Songhoy Blues is a postmodern mélange, one in which the rhythms of northern Mali, including *takamba*, *gambari*, and *n'djarou*, are intermixed with the African American sounds of John Lee Hooker and B. B. King that the band grew up with—the long tail, as it were, of the blues globalization process. That same process has also resulted in a worldwide public broadly receptive to the marketing category "blues" and more than willing to embrace Songhoy Blues's eclectic blend as long as that B-word is attached, an aspect of the contemporary music business that the band members frankly and shrewdly acknowledge.

The second essay, "Charting Aminata Fall's Cosmopolitanism: A Comparative Study of African American and Senegambian Blues Lyrics" by Babacar M'Baye, further complicates any residual sense we might have that the blues "came" from Africa as part of a simple, unidirectional process through which enslaved and then Jim-Crowed black folk in the US South developed the music out of African cultural materials. Senegambian culture, M'Baye argues in line with Joseph Roach's *Cities of the Dead* (1996), has been part of the circum-Atlantic vortex for centuries, creating "mutual and circular flows of culture" between black communities on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean. The always already cosmopolitan city of Saint-Louis and one of its most famous products, the female jazz-blues singer Aminata Fall, are M'Baye's principal focus; both city and singer were shaped by the first stage of the blues globalization process I sketched earlier. That process, taking place between 1946 and the early 1970s, included not just a veritable feast of imported rock, blues, and R&B records, but "familiarity with and exposure to cosmopolitan Senegalese bands that were experimenting with jazz, blues,

Cuban music, and other sounds," plus "jazz and blues concerts performed by black artists from the United States," including B. B. King, who played Dakar in 1970. M'Baye leverages this rich social history into an adventurous exploration of the parallels between some of Fall's best-known lyrics and specific US blues songs by Muddy Waters, Robert Johnson, Memphis Minnie, and Bessie Smith.

If cosmopolitanism in postwar Senegal—Afropolitanism—is one of M'Baye's central themes, then Lawrence Davies's subject is the workings of African American cosmopolitanism on British soil in the early years of that country's postwar romance with the blues. In "'Those Songs Are Gonna Be Sung All Over This World!': Josh White, Big Bill Broonzy, and the Tangled Routes of Folk Blues in Early Postwar Britain," Davies vividly evidences the first two stages of my schema, paying particular attention to the way in which the ideological ground for blues music's reception had been laid by a decade's worth of journalistic and critical writing before White (1950) and Broonzy (1951) first set foot on British soil. Primed by that point to see blues not as a subset of jazz but as uncommercialized "Negro folksong" that, in Max Jones's words, "carried a note of [covert] protest" and voiced "the singer's discontent," British blues aficionados saw White as a cosmopolitan—i.e., spiritually and stylistically compromised—product of New York City's bohemian Café Society, while they viewed Big Bill Broonzy as the Real Real straight from the cottonfields of Jim Crow Mississippi. Yet the truth was more complicated than this opposition suggests. Even as Broonzy, in Davies's view, was a cosmopolitan Chicagoan who "capitalized on the essentialism that lay at the heart of many [British] jazz and blues enthusiasts' understanding of the blues" by roughening his voice and spinning folksy tales, White modified his set list so that it more closely resembled what was wanted from him, and he created extended backstage performances for an inner circle of aficionados, staging his own bluesy authenticity with cosmopolitan calculation in a way that placated his critics. As African American bluesmen romancing their early British audiences, Davies argues, White and Broonzy were far more alike than those who viewed them as an opposed pair seem to have realized.

When I first read an early draft of Roberta Freund Schwartz's "From Blue Horizon to Saydisc: Independent Record Labels in the British Blues Revival," I worried that its tight focus might strike some readers of *The Global South* as overly narrow, an exercise in discographical minutiae that many associate with a certain kind of hard-core, old-school blues scholarship. Schwartz responded with a brilliant rewrite, one that helps us understand just how important Britain's quirky, effervescent, but somewhat ingrown record-producing and -appreciating culture was to the way in which the British blues revival actually proceeded. She reminds us, for example, that it wasn't just

prohibitively expensive to order blues records from the US during the postwar years, but it was technically illegal to do so between 1949 and 1960. The huge splash made by Josh White's and Bill Broonzy's first live performances was simultaneously prepared for in advance and augmented after the fact by a "small handful of collectors and connoisseurs" who indulged their own ever-expanding hunger for African American blues by getting into the record business. Their machinations, as Schwartz evokes them, are rarely profitable and sometimes hilariously off-kilter. "In some ways, *Blues Keep Falling* is the quintessential British independent blues release," she writes of a notable postwar blues compilation disc from the late 1960s. "Only seventy-five copies were issued, they were available only through the mail from an anonymous source and label, and you had to be one of the cognoscenti to understand it or identify the tracks." Even as she inventories this distinctive and critically important sector of postwar British blues culture, Schwartz carves a bold narrative line through the period, from trad jazz, skiffle, and Mersey Beat through the sudden emergence and then explosion of a white blues subculture between 1958 and 1964.

As a former editor of both *Living Blues* and *Jefferson*, the oldest and most important blues magazines in the US and Sweden, sociologist Scott Barretta is uniquely qualified to tell the story of how Swedes got the blues—a story, he argues, that has received scant attention outside Scandinavia. In "Sweet Home Stockholm: The Roles of Radio and the Search for a Swedish Voice in the Making of a Local Blues Scene," he begins with a brisk comparative survey of the Blues Revival's proceedings in the US and overseas, noting how many of the most important gatekeepers for that movement were participants in earlier music subcultures oriented around political folk songs and/or trad jazz, including Alan Lomax in the US, Paul Oliver in the UK, and, in Sweden, Olle Helander. Although Josh White would tour Sweden multiple times beginning in 1950, the Swedish music scene prior to the early 1960s was marked by a relative paucity of African American blues. All of that would change when Helander, a radio host, concert emcee, and writer, visited Chicago in 1962 and again in 1964, the latter time on a five-week recording trip through the "blues quarters" of the city's South Side. Accompanied by Sveriges Radio technician Hans Westman, Helander returned to Sweden with almost a hundred recordings, ranging from unknown street singers like Arvella Gray and country bluesmen like Yank Rachell through Chicago stalwarts like Sunnyland Slim, Eddie Boyd, and Otis Spann, a treasure trove he then transformed into a twenty-one-part radio documentary series, *I Blueskvarter* (In the Blues Quarters). Broadcast to a captive nightly audience on one of the two extant Swedish radio channels beginning late in 1964, interspersing studio quality raw blues with artist

interviews and Helander's own evocative commentary, the shows captivated members of the nation's emergent blues scene. "Many who listened to the programs at the time," according to Barretta, "talked about these recordings as the Holy Grail: a life-altering experience that marked the moment when blues became a consuming passion, leading to a lifelong obsession." Several young Swedish blues musicians, including Per "Slim" Notini and Peps Persson, were moved to follow in Helander's footsteps, flying off to Chicago and immersing themselves in that scene. Persson and harmonica player Roffe Wikstrom would ultimately veer away from what might be called purist aesthetics, using their distinctive local identities and flavorful accents—working-class Stockholm, rural deep south Skåne—to create blues voices that felt authentic to them.

In "'I Am Not the Bluesman': Authenticity and Identity of a Japanese Pianist in the Chicago Blues Community," Mitsutoshi Inaba does something that is, to my knowledge, unprecedented in the annals of blues scholarship: he offers us an extended, fully-contextualized interview with a Japanese-born blues musician who speaks frankly, provocatively, even bitterly, about the contemporary Chicago blues scene as he has experienced it over more than thirty years as a working pro. Pianist Sumito "Ariyo" Ariyoshi came to Chicago from his native Kyoto in 1983, the product of a surprisingly vital college-town blues scene in which Magic Sam's *West Side Soul* (1967) was more popular among students than Japanese pop records, and in which the First Blues Festival, held in Tokyo and Osaka in 1974 and featuring Sleepy John Estes, Hammie Nixon, and Robert Lockwood, Jr., led one of Ariyo's friends to exclaim, "The gods are coming." After sitting in with Eddie C. Campbell at a Chi-town jam session, Ariyo quickly became friends, roommates, and bandmates with drummer Tony Mangiullo, an émigré from Italy (and future proprietor of Rosa's Lounge, an important club) whose own journey to Chicago was prompted by an encouraging backstage encounter with Junior Wells when Wells and Buddy Guy played Italy for the first time in 1978. At the heart of Inaba's article is a fascinating question, one that preoccupies and vexes Ariyo: as his talents and hard work settle him ever more deeply into Chicago's blues culture, a culture where white club owners and black band leaders often prioritize blackness on the bandstand even as the cohort of working pros slowly whitens, will there ever come a moment when he can say with confidence, as an Asian man, "This is my music too"? Or will he always finally be considered an outsider, even a potential liability? "We are on the bottom of the totem pole," he insists at one particularly bitter moment, remembering the way that he and another Japanese member of Billy Branch's Sons of Blues were excluded from the band photo by a Swiss promoter during one overseas tour. Yet Ariyo's long tenure with Branch, James Cotton's successor at the top of black Chicago's blues harmonica

pantheon, and his work as de facto arranger for the band's recording sessions, are sources of pride to him as well, suggesting the betwixt-and-between position that he occupies within Chicago's turbulent blues precincts. "I Am Not the Bluesman" is his story.

The seventh and final piece is a lagniappe. "The Africadian Blues: A Conversation with George Elliott Clarke" by Josh-Wade Ferguson focuses less on blues music per se than on the capacity of that music to inspire, and be transubstantiated into, literary art. The name George Elliott Clarke will be unfamiliar to most in the US; it was unfamiliar to me, as a blues literature scholar, until Ferguson, my then-doctoral student from Winnipeg, insisted that he was one of the great Canadian blues poets—one of the great Canadian writers, period. His presence in this issue raises the question of whether the six-part schema for blues music's global spread I offered earlier needs to be expanded or supplemented to account for the way that blues literature, too, has become a part of the diasporic tapestry, rather than remaining solely the province of US (especially African American) writers. The answer is surely yes. A rangy, erudite, and explosively joyous man, a native of Halifax, Nova Scotia, who identifies himself simultaneously as black Canadian, Africadian (black Nova Scotian), and Afro-Metis (he's got Indigenous heritage), even while holding fast to the British elitism that is the birthright of all Canadians, a passionate advocate for the broadest possible African American blues-musical continuum—he's the Canadian Larry Neal in this respect—who nevertheless engages in what he calls "resistive appropriation" in order to maintain the distinctiveness of his north-of-the-border blackness, Clarke, once encountered in this extraordinary and wide-ranging interview, is unforgettable. "A 'global blues' does exist," he insists:

> I hear it in the plaints of Bollywood films, in weeping Chinese strings, in Dylan's *Highway 61 Revisited* harmonica, in Leonard Cohen's Zen-cantor drone, in Astrud Gilberto's aspirated vocals on "The Girl from Ipanema" (1964), in Michel Legrand's bossa-nova infused soundtrack for *The Umbrellas of Cherbourg* (1964), in the soundtrack for *Black Orpheus* (Marcel Camus, 1959), in Italian *gialli* (thriller) films, in Piero Piccioni's soundtracks (yes, he's better—much better—than Ennio Morricone), in Otis Redding and Aretha Franklin Soul, in Stax records and even some Motown (more glitz than blues?) cuts, in Isaac Hayes and Al Green…. I think the blues is a spontaneous song everywhere anyone's got some pain to express….

Let's stop there. Better yet, let's keep the conversation going. Stay healthy!

Notes

1. The Himalayan Blues Festival was held annually between 2007 and 2014 but doesn't seem to have been staged since then, although it has an active Facebook page ("Himalayan Blues Festival").

2. For the Anglo-American connection, see "Blues Britannia," Cataliotti, Dicaire, Goody, Jamison, Kellett, Oliver, "Early Morning Blues," Schwartz, and Wynn. For Europe in general, see "Mississippi to Europe" and Terry and Wynn. For the Netherlands, see van Rijn and Dicaire 217–24. For France, see "Cahors, France," Dicaire 228–34, Prévos, Sauret, and Springer. For Germany, see Adelt. For Norway, see "From Miss. to Norway–Notodden." For Russia, see Urban and Wynn 10.

3. The aggregated international touring archive for King at setlist.fm ("B. B. King Concert Map") is a good starting point for the sorts of provisional claims I am making here, but I suspect that it undercounts King's actual show count—certainly it does that for US shows—and I am invoking it in the hope that others will do additional research to corroborate, modify, and, if need be, correct my assertions.

4. For scattered additional bibliographic entries on the subject of blues music in non-US contexts, along with non-US scholarship on blues music in the US, see Ford xiii–xv, 1–20. Sosa offers a brief but instructive Spanish-language introduction to, and history of, African American blues as seen from the perspective of a Mexican scholar. Also see Ponton and Zagratzki.

5. I write extensively about this dynamic, which I term "black bluesism," in *Whose Blues?* See especially 1–11, 19–23, 71–72, 197–200, 244–46.

6. For Broonzy, see "Cahors, France"; Dicaire 199, 218; Kellett 61; "Mississippi to Europe"; Sauret "Chapitre VIII"; Schwartz 24–25 and passim; Springer 238, 241–42; van Rijn 223–24, 232; and Wynn 4. For Hunter and Waters, see "Cahors, France," Oliver, "Early Morning Blues" 24–25, Springer 236, and van Rijn 223.

7. See Adelt 81–94, "From Miss. to Norway–Notodden," and "Mississippi to Europe."

8. See "Eddie Boyd," Springer 243–44, and van Rijn 232.

9. See Bowman; "Cahors, France"; Dicaire 218; "From Miss. to Norway–Notodden"; Kellett 50–55, 182; "Mississippi to Europe"; Paul 225–26; Springer 239; and Wynn 8.

10. See Urban 40 and Bowman. Note: Urban has the date of *B. B. King & Friends* as 1991; the Blues Archive at the University of Mississippi dates both the VHS and DVD as 1987.

11. I offer this claim about the masculinist bias of globalizing blues culture and its possible origins on the basis of wide-ranging but preliminary research. In the final section of his book, entitled "Blues Around the World," for example, Dicaire offers capsule portraits of Eric Clapton, Rory Gallagher, and ten other non-US blues performers from Canada, Australia, Holland, Sweden, Italy, Spain, Switzerland, Russia, and Japan, all of them male, each of them framed as an exemplar of a specific non-US blues scene. At a certain point in my research it became clear that first-pass due-diligence sorties into a number of non-US blues traditions were returning much less information about female players and singers than their male equivalents, and that the fathers-and-sons dynamic that obtained between core figures in the 1960s British blues invasion and their African American mentors also appeared to govern the relationships between other, later, non-US blues musicians who came to the US "in search of the blues" and *their* African American mentors.

12. For North America, see Bowman and Dicaire 212–17. For South America, see Grätzer and Sassone; Limnios, "Felipe"; and Zantinge. For Europe, see "Cahors, France"; Dicaire 218–19, 228–46; "From Miss. to Norway–Notodden"; Limnios, "Maiju," "Pepe," and "Walter"; Springer; Urban 9 and passim; and van Rijn. For Asia, see Brown, Chang, Colvin, Dicaire 251–54, Javeri, and Rebello. For Australia, see Dicaire 224–28, John, Pleffer, and Stratton. For Africa, see Myerson–Knox.

13. All of the aggregated international touring information on which I base my claims has been harvested from "B. B. King Concert Map" and should be understood to be both provisional and incomplete, if broadly representative. See note 3.

14. See, for example, Oliver, *Conversation with the Blues*, and Prévos.

15. For Kikuta, see Dicaire 251–54. For Naito, see Gussow 254–55. For Senga, see Gussow 255–56. For Ariyoshi, see Inaba's essay in this issue.

16. See International Blues Challenge programs for 2015, 2017, and 2020. My claims about the social function of the IBC and the attitudes and practices of IBC participants are anecdotal; they are based on my own observations and conversations with many participants while I attended half a dozen IBCs between 2003 and 2019.

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Adam Gussow, agussow@olemiss.edu, is a professor of English and southern studies at the University of Mississippi and a blues harmonica player and teacher. He has published a number of books on the blues, including *Mister Satan's Apprentice: A Blues Memoir* (1998), *Seems Like Murder Here: Southern*

Violence and the Blues Tradition (2002), and *Beyond the Crossroads: The Devil and the Blues Tradition* (2017), which the readers of *Living Blues* selected as "Best Blues Book of 2017." His latest book, *Whose Blues? Facing Up to Race and the Future of the Music*, has just been published by University of North Carolina Press. His longtime musical partnership with Sterling "Mr. Satan" Magee is the subject of an award-winning new documentary, *Satan & Adam*, which is currently streaming on Netflix. With Magee and earlier, as a busker, Gussow has performed in a range of non-US locations, including Canada, the UK, Ireland, France, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Germany, Denmark, Finland, and Australia.