

Hello, again! I'm Jim Tedder in Washington. Today we travel to South Africa to hear about a powerful movie that has people thinking and talking. Then we will examine the buildup in China's navy. What does it mean to China's friends ...and others? Near the end of our program, we remember a man of many voices. And we'll hear a jazz song that had a whole generation of people dancing. "As It Is" is on the air, from the Voice of America.

Five years ago, xenophobic riots broke out around the South African city of Johannesburg. The violence spread to other communities across the country.

Rioters attacked housing areas where foreigners lived. Sixty-two people were killed, and countless others injured. Thousands of immigrants fled, many to Malawi or Zimbabwe or Lesotho. Or they took refuge in camps within South Africa.

In 2011, filmmaker Akin Omotoso made a movie about the tragic events. It is called "Man on Ground." The film tells the fictional story of a Nigerian banker from Britain who goes to South Africa in search of his brother and gets caught up in the riots.

The movie was well received in South Africa and around the world. But something did not seem quite right to Akin Omotoso and the film's producers. They had told about the violence. But they wanted to know why and exactly how it happened.

So Mr. Omotoso and a few others asked a researcher to help them get the movie shown in places where the riots had been worst. The people in those areas had not seen “Man on Ground” because of a lack of movie theaters. Over the next months, showings were set up in four communities across the country.

The showings opened up communication. A camera crew questioned South Africans and foreigners who saw the movie. Their comments provided evidence that some people were angry about poverty, poor local services and overcrowding. Foreigners were accused of taking available jobs for less pay than local citizens will accept. The immigrants were also blamed for criminal activity.

From all the comments came a 24-minute long video called “Tell Them We Are From Here.” It is shown on a loop – played repeatedly – as part of a traveling exhibition, which opened recently in Johannesburg. Rethabile Motho is project manager for the show. She describes the reaction of a teenage boy.

“And they asked him, well, if you could see your attackers again, if you could meet them again, what would you say to them, what would you want them to know?”

The reply was, “Tell them we are from here. We’re all people, we’re from here. Why are you doing this to us?”

Fabian Lojede was a producer and an actor in "Man on the Ground." He went to the showings of the film, and praised what happened.

"The exhibition for us now and this whole community engagement is perhaps one of the best things to happen to our dream...because now the aim of it really was not to become millionaires by making this film. The aim really was to be able to put our own creative voice to an issue we felt really strongly about. To see it now living...is really heartwarming."

In the exhibit, three televisions are placed on the ground. All three play videos over and over. A video of police dragging a Mozambican immigrant with a police truck is on the right side. The middle images are of a South African who says the answer to the tension is understanding. On the left is a video of the picture of a man burned to death during the 2008 riots.

The walls are covered with pictures of South Africans and foreigners interviewed during the project. Visitors to the exhibit are invited to write their comments on two long pieces of canvas material. Organizers have announced plans to bring the show to other communities in South Africa.

Asian countries are expanding their navies at a time of competing sea claims over fishing rights and oil exploration. Experts say that China is leading the way. Steve Ember provides us with details.

China is making its navy more modern with new spending on destroyers, submarines, and aircraft carriers. But some observers say China's government must also make other improvements.

Geoffrey Till is with King's College London. Professor Till likens the Chinese navy to what he calls "the new kid on the block." He says efforts to stop attacks along the coast of East Africa have improved the ability of the navy to travel great distances. But he says territorial disputes over waters closer to home are of more concern to allies of the United States, such as Japan and the Philippines.

"If China focuses exclusively on the defense, in quotes, of its near seas – in the East and South China Sea – it would pose a serious – 'risk' is the wrong word – but a constraint on the freedom of operation of the U.S. navy in those particular areas."

The United States is increasing spending for security in the Asia-Pacific. The biggest single increase is going to the Philippines. Professor Till says it is not yet an Asian arms race, but that greater military spending does increase risks.

"Any day in the disputed East and South China Sea could easily generate a crisis that turns a mild competition in risk-taking into a full-blown international crisis at sea."

President Xi Jinping says China's navy will defend its sea borders. Chinese claims in the South China Sea, for example, are marked on maps. The government calls a nine-dashed line.

Michael Auslin of the American Enterprise Institute says China faces a clear choice. He wonders whether China wants territorial disputes with all its neighbors. Mr. Austin says there is tension in Chinese relationships with India, Mongolia, and Russia. And he says he does not think that Mr. Xi wants to deal with a world filled with so much tension during his 10-year term as president. I'm Steve Ember.

And I'm Jim Tedder in Washington. Thank you for spending some time with us on this Thursday, the thirtieth of May. Today we remember Mel Blanc. He was born on this day in 1908. Mel was the voice for such famous cartoon characters as Bugs Bunny, Elmer Fudd, Porky Pig, Sylvester the cat, and many others.

And we leave you with the music of clarinetist Benny Goodman, who was born on this date in 1909. He was known as the "King of Swing," and he kept Americans dancing in the 1930s and throughout World War II.