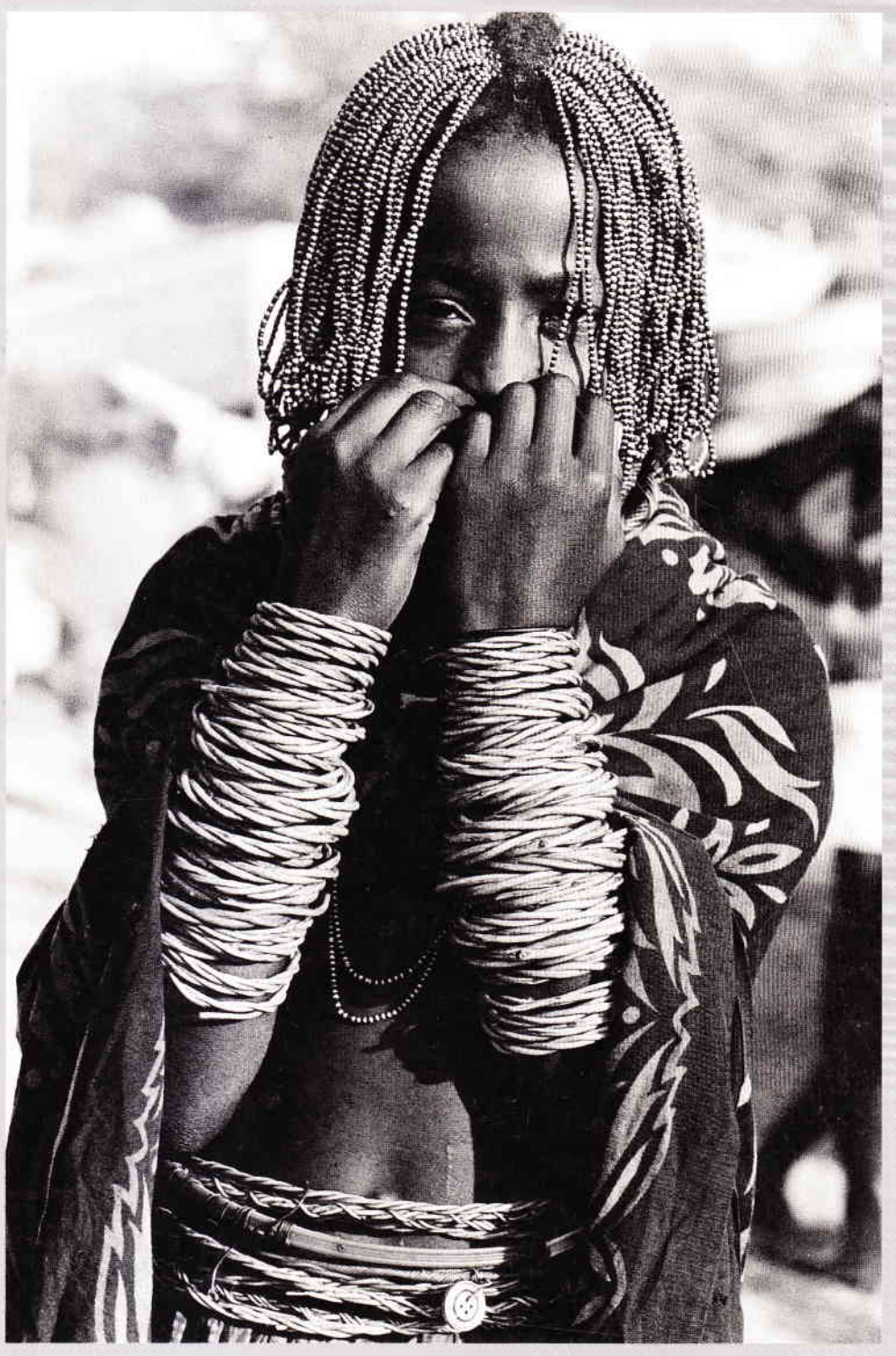
FULL FRAME

SOUTH AFRICAN DOCUMENTARY PHOTOGRAPHY



BEYOND THE BARRICADES
COLLECTIVISM IN THE 80'S

THE RAINY SEASON
JOHN LIEBENBERG IN NAMIBIA

GOING HOME
SANTU MOFOKENG
PAUL WEINBERG

KHIKHI HOSTELS
ROGER MEINTJES

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FULL FRAME

EDITORIAL

Paging through the magazines on a newsagent's rack leads rapidly to the conclusion that the genre of documentary photography does not enjoy the same exposure as its commercial counterparts. One well-established documentary photographer lamented recently that as much as 90% of his work has never been seen. And apart from a few panel discussions on approaches to documentary photography, very little has been done to stimulate debate on the subject. To fill this gap, Full Frame aims to provide photographers with both an exhibition space and a meeting point.

In spite of the lack of public recognition, documentary photography in this country has something of a tradition — from the lone pioneers of the 50's to the collective movement of the 80's. At the start of the new decade, South Africa is in a period of rapid and fundamental change. What is the role of photographers in all this? What are the viewpoints through and behind the lens?

In this, our first issue, we feature a reflection of the 80's from a book entitled Beyond the Barricades, a collective venture by 20 local photographers. War creates dramatic photographs and the violence of the last decade saw the emergence of many young photographers who daily documented resistance to apartheid. News became history. Isolated moments became a record of the times. Yet there were photographers looking beyond the news, trying to give the events of the day a deeper resonance which would lead to a better understanding of our society.

John Liebenberg was a witness to the war in Namibia. This is the other side of the conflict — the one the authorities would rather we did not see. It is a painful reminder of the struggle for freedom in that country and an antidote to the plethora of vacuous images of wildlife, beautiful landscapes and the heroic South African security forces hunting down the "ugly Russian bear".

Township photographer Pax Magwaza, co-author of the play Asinimali, used his camera as an instrument of social record. The final product is a grassroots travelling exhibition for the community. Roger Meintjes, working in the same idiom, takes us into the world of migrant workers in Cape Town and gives us an intimate account of life in a hostel called Khikhi.

Going Home is an exploration of the home towns of Paul Weinberg (Pietermaritzburg) and Santu Mofokeng (Soweto), illustrating the vast differences and occasional similarities between the worlds in which the two photographers began their lives. Graeme Williams takes us into a "grey area", where the obstacles of apartheid have been broken down and a new culture is emerging in the once pure-white city centre.

We hope future issues will provide an outlet for other photographers and for those who wish to write about photography. Anybody who wishes to contribute their pictures or ideas is most welcome to do so.

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FULL FRAME published by AFRAPIX, 86 High St, Berea, Johannesburg, 2198.Telephone: 011- 6431654. Fax: 011 - 4843557. Cover Picture by John Liebenberg. This issue edited by Guy Tillim, assisted by Paul Weinberg and Steve Hilton-Barber. Design by Guy Tillim, Shereen Usdin and Warren Parker.

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Beyond the BARRICADES

PAUL WEINBERG traces trends in South African photography over the years and the emergence of a collective movement in the 80's.

"I intended this book as a documentary to show what life is really like for Africans. The government will probably ban this book. If I were them I would distribute thousands of copies for whites to show their children, if they were concerned with eventual survival." (Ernest Cole from **A House of Bondage**, the first published book of photographs by a black South African).

"Apartheid is violence. Violence is used to subjugate and to deny basic democratic rights to black people. But no matter how the policy of Apartheid has been applied over the years, both black and white activists have actively opposed it. It is in the struggle for justice that the gulf between artists, writers, photographers and the people has been narrowed." (Omar Badsha, editor of **The Cordoned Heart**).

Two comments from two different generations of documentary photographers - pre-1980s and post-1980s.

They share the common thread of all documentary photography, which is to record the truth, but differ in one important way.

Ernest Cole worked as an individual. Omar Badsha, who represents the more recent period, is a product of the collective movement.

A good starting point in the history of South African documentary photography is the 1950s. The influences of the picture magazines, which had made their way down to the southern tip of Africa, together with a decade of defiance and popular resistance, combined

Left: Whip marks by vigilantes in Welkom,June 1985. GILL DE VLIEG.

Above:Police stop workers leaving a May Day meeting,Johannesburg, 1985. PAUL WEINBERG.

Police arrest protesters in Cape Town, 1985.
RASHID LOMBARD

politics and culture in a vital way to inspire Drum magazine. Through the influence of their first photographer, Jurgen Schadeberg, and later Bog Gasani, Peter Magubane and Alf Khumalo, the magazine gave life to the campaigns of the people who made history.

At the same time, working from the inside and hardly known in his own country, was Eli Weinberg. A trade unionist and activist, he recorded the political events of the time. Weinberg, who was involved in the ANC, was banned and under house arrest for most of his life. His book A Portrait of a People is banned in South Africa and his work has seldom been seen.

His contribution remains an indispensable chronology of the struggle against apartheid of that period. Photographs of the Defiance Campaign, the Congress of the People, the treason trials as well as his portraits of popular leaders including Mandela, Sisulu and others, provide an invaluable record.

It is only now, 30 years later, that books reflecting that period are on the shelves.

The Fifties People, edited by Schadeberg, is one of the more recent of such publications. The work captures the mood of Drum at the time - live fast, die young and have a good looking corpse. Music superstars and pin-ups compete for space with reportage of political campaigns. It is an incredible mix which makes many modern picture magazines look weak.

It is important to note the difference between Drum photographers and Weinberg. As Schadeberg said, recalling Drum's heyday at a photographic conference recently, 'we also went out to have a good time then'. Weinberg concentrated on making a political statement, while Drum was characterized by a broad look at black culture, up till then disregarded by the white-oriented media.

Around at the time, but to emerge only in the 1960s as a full-time photographer was David Goldblatt. Magubane, Schadeberg and Goldblatt remain the pioneers of the early period whose influence on the photographic movement has been profound.

Magubane still works in the reportage school which believes if you're not close enough, you're not good enough.

'People should know how the underdogs live - even if I wasn't dealing with the underdog, but with the rich; people should know how the rich live' (inter-

People marching on Pollsmoor Prison are dispersed by police, 1985. GIDEON MENDEL

view 1987). Banned in 1968, Magubane is best known for his photographs of the 1976 Soweto uprising after which he spent 510 days in detention.

Goldblatt, on the other hand, a more traditional documentary photographer, is characterized by his use of the portrait. His definitive style has touches of Walker Evans and Paul Strand with flashes of Cartier Bresson.

'I am concerned with looking at the world which I live in, trying to probe it, understand it, and use the camera for doing this and the occasion for doing this ... I am concerned with the choices people make for the themselves' (interview 1987).

The collective

In contrast to the pre-1980s period, the post-1980's period is characterized by a collective approach to documentary photography.

Its early roots can be traced to the cultural magazine Staffrider which emerged in the cultural renaissance after 1976. The magazine became the mouthpiece of hitherto unheard of poets, writers, artists and photographers. Most of the photographers at the time were working in isolation.

The new generation comprised Omar Badsha, Judas Ngwenya, Jimmy Matthews, Biddy Partridge, Mxolise Moyo, Lesley Lawson and Paul Weinberg. They ranged dramatically in opinion and skill but expressed a deep interest in sharing ideas and skills.

Some of these photographers met informally in Johannesburg and the end result was the formation of Afrapix. From the start Afrapix had two clear objectives - to be an agency and a picture library, and to stimulate documentary photography. The library that grew out of this meeting became an important resource for the alternative press and socially concerned groups.

The meeting was the beginning of a new approach: simply put, photographers could say more collectively than individually.

Two years later the Black Society of Photographers was formed in Johannesburg. It had a short but important influence on later events.

In June 1982, the Culture and Resistance Festival organized by the Botswana Museum set the tone for the collective photographic movement. It hosted the first collective exhibition to come from South Africa, bringing twenty

Police teargas Crossroads funeral 1986. GUY TILLIM.

photographers together.

Participants learnt a new language - artists were not above the struggle for change, but part of it.

There were black photographers who did participate but, by and large, it was met with a black boycott, emanating from the Black Society of Photographers whose line was no participation with white photographers.

What was significant about this exhibition, and what characterised the genre from that point on, was the range of skills on view. Experienced photographers like David Goldblatt exhibited side-by-side with young photographers showing their work for the first time. Goldblatt has been the bridge between the generations.

From 1982, collective exhibitions became an annual event. Under the auspices of Staffrider they continued until 1987. In a special magazine highlighting the first exhibition called South Africa Through the Lens some of the thinking behind the exhibitions was reflected:

"The camera doesn't lie. This is a myth about photography in South Africa in the Eighties that we will not swallow. In our country the camera lies all the time - on our TV screens, in our newspapers and on our billboards that proliferate our townships. Photography can't be divorced from the political, social and the economic issues that surround us daily.

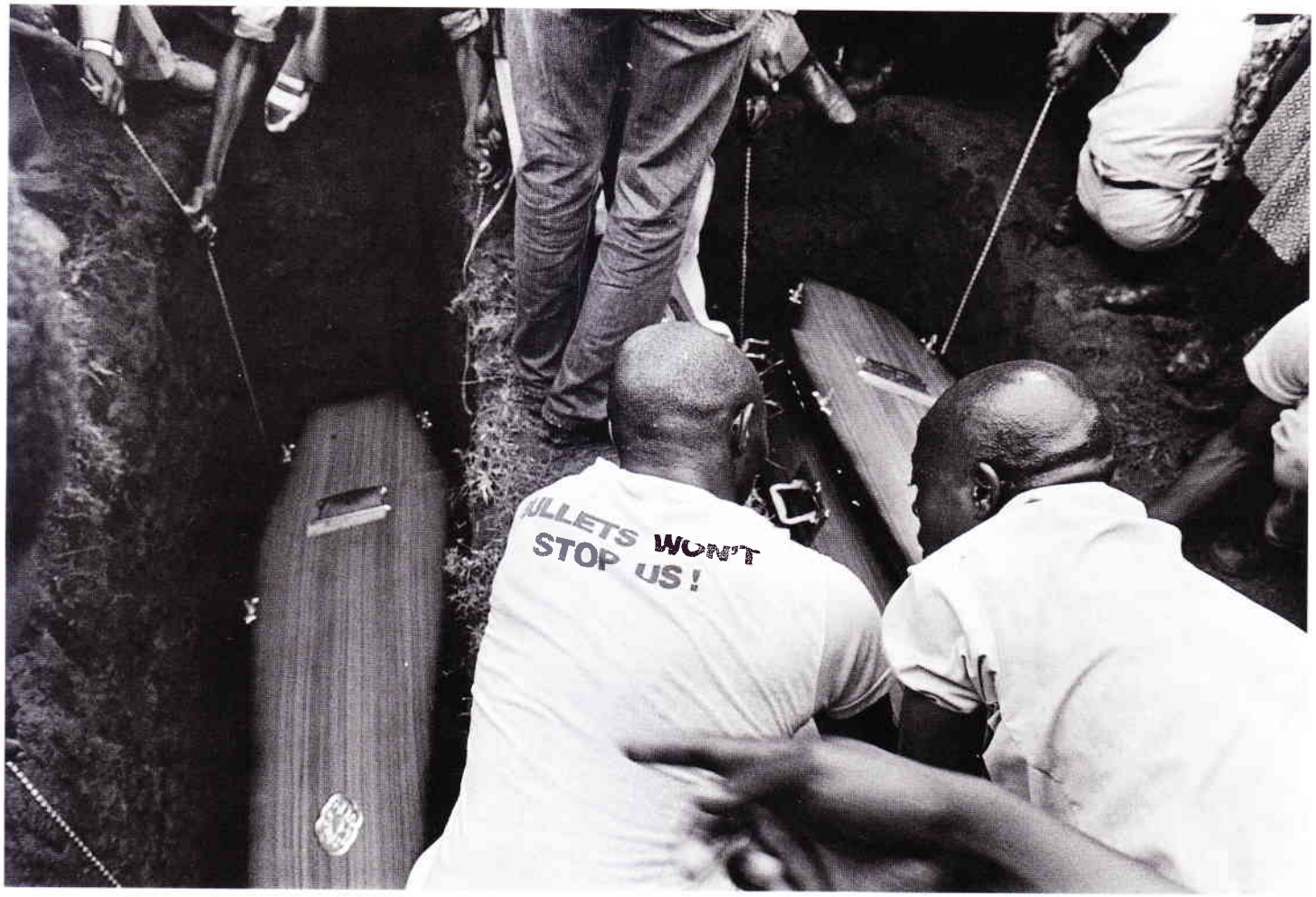
"The photographers in this collection show a South Africa in conflict, in suffering, in happiness and in resistance. They examine the present and beckon the viewer to an alternative future ... Social Documentary Photography is not, in our view, neutral."

Criteria were thus provided for an aesthetic, although this took a number of years to articulate itself in form and content. More importantly, a process had been begun where more and more photographers were drawn into the collective exhibitions.

The Carnegie Inquiry

Another important milestone soon after the Culture and Resistance Festival was the Carnegie Inquiry into Poverty and Development, begun in 1983. In a very thorough way it used photo-essays to record the poverty that underlies apartheid - resettlement, migrant labour, farm labour, squatter life, etc.

However, in a significant break with the past, it also documented political organization and resistance as a way



People killed by police in a consumer boycott protest are buried, 1985. GIDEON MENDEL

out of the plight of poverty.

The new generation had begun to articulate itself through work and ideas. Photography, they asserted, needed to go further - to take sides. Some began to record the growth of the progressive movement and the labour movement, seeking to show a comprehensive picture not seen since 1976.

It should be noted that, in those early days and even with the formation of the UDF, the presence of the international press was small. It was only when South Africa became a 'story' that interest was shown.

It is for these reasons that the indigenous documentary movement has a depth to it that international photographers lack.

However, many of the new generation did some work for the international press and their impact has been remarkable. Professor Neville Dubow, Professor of Fine Art at the University of Cape Town, has suggested that the period of unrest of the past few years has provided powerful images that have helped to articulate the kind of violence that South Africans experience.

The pictures reflected the structural violence inherent in apartheid as well as the violence used to maintain the system. He has also noted the adapting religious rituals that reflect a violent society.

The Hidden Camera

In December 1987, Amsterdam hosted the biggest ever anti-apartheid festival. Under the title, The Hidden Camera, it attempted to draw parallels with the way the camera was used as a form of resistance against the Nazi occupation of Holland.

The exhibition drew a response from 32 South African photographers. It provided encouragement and an outlet for up-and-coming talent. It stimulated the 'travelling exhibition' in a form that goes beyond the 'gallery'.

The `gallery' is often a community hall, a church hall, a public meeting, a foyer, a union conference and so on. When COSATU held their 2nd congress it was accompanied not only by a wealth of cultural events but also an extensive historical exhibition of the labour movements.

One of the spin-offs of these exhibitions has been the development of an accessible archive, a resource that has helped stimulate alternative forms of communication - posters, calendars and

the alternative press.

The collective approach of the 1980s has helped generate a process that has challenged the contradictions of photography. It has brought amateur and professional, teacher and student, together in an exciting fusion of ideas and cultures. This has spurred on a development of non-racial vision and consciousness.

Unrest 1984/1986

The protracted unrest (1984/1986) exposed a contradiction that the lower levels of the government had to deal with. The police and army were caught between attacking the press and the people. The state was caught between showing off its reform to the outside world and its undisguised repression revealed.

It was in this gap that the camera played its most crucial role. Some of the most dramatic images to emerge from South Africa were made in this period of continual arrest, confiscation, harassment and, at times, assault.

World opinion was altered irrevocably and took sides against the South African government. The State of Emergency allowed the state to shift its attack to the press and the camera, which had inflicted heavy punishment on the country's image and had to be sorted out.

The camera was seen by the government (except for its own propaganda purposes) as an instrument of insurrection. Louis le Grange, Minister of Law and Order in 1986 went further, and accused television crews of inciting violence.

The subsequent media restrictions refined the attack on the media to the point where a documentary on children made by the BBC could be the lead news item for three days.

However, photographers continued exploring the metaphors and symbols in an attempt to find creative responses to state interference.

Recent work has shown a shift to in-depth community photography and more personal probes into the photographer's own community.

The camera seems likely to turn its energies to popular history and oral tradition as has been the case in the struggles of Central America.

However, the documentary tradition has shown there is one war apartheid will never win, and that is suppression of the truth. ❐

*"Use these photos as a means of transport .Ride on them. No passes needed. Go close. Imprudently close. They leave every minute. Their drivers are there on the spot - often at considerable risk to their cameras and themselves. But we who are travelling risk nothing - except for a reminder that justice has to be fought for, that often it has to be fought for, generation after generation, against men armed to the teeth and against men, there where the photos take us, who have even manufactured a nuclear bomb to defend their wicked white power. Go close" - **John Berger** writes in an introduction to **The Hidden Camera**, 1989.*

Opposite left: Matthew Goniwe salutes the crowd at a funeral in Joza township,Grahamstown,1986. JULIAN COBBING.

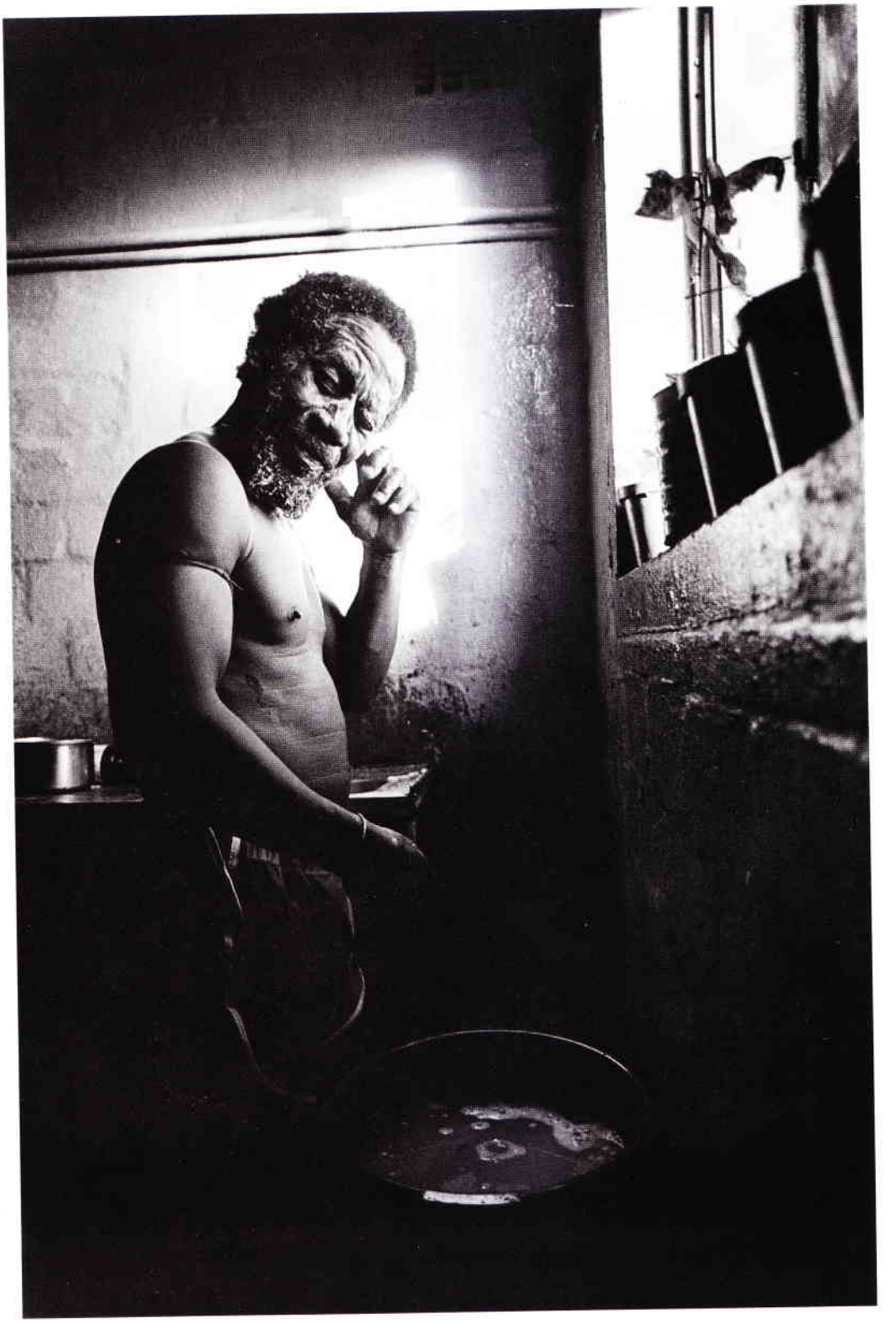
Above: Congress of South African Trade Unions' Cultural Day,1987. OMAR BADSHA.

Below: Congress of South African Trade Unions' Cultural Day,1987. PAUL WEINBERG

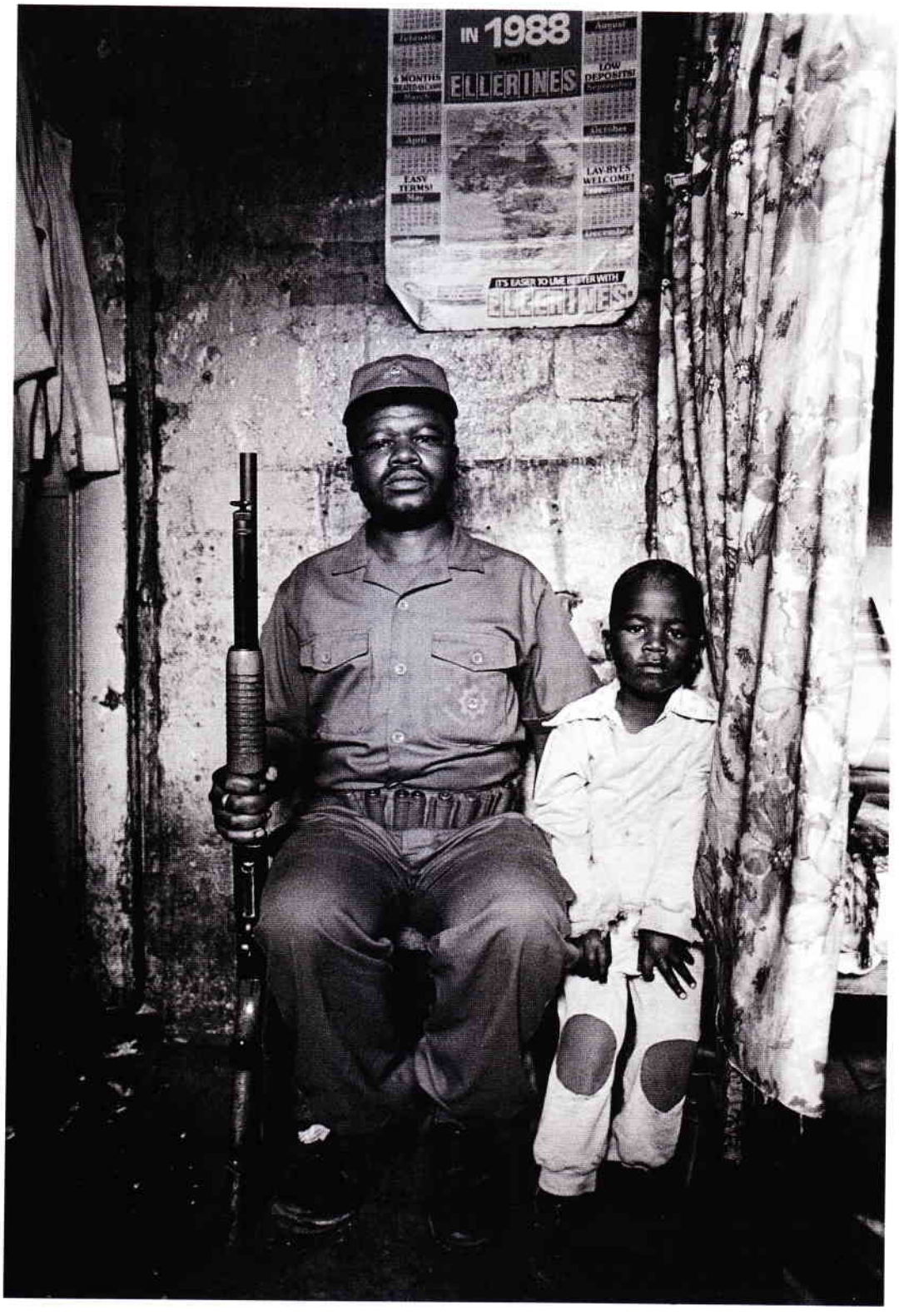
Khikhi HOSTELS

ROGER MEINTJES started drinking at the cheapest shebeen in Guguletu - Khikhi Hostels - and has slowly got to know people living in the area. The single sex hostels are the home of migrant labourers from throughout the country. Over a two- year period starting in 1987 Meintjes took pictures and conducted interviews with the help of a friend. This work forms part of a book that is still to be published.

Men drink in a shebeen - the township speakeasy.



Washing after returning from work.



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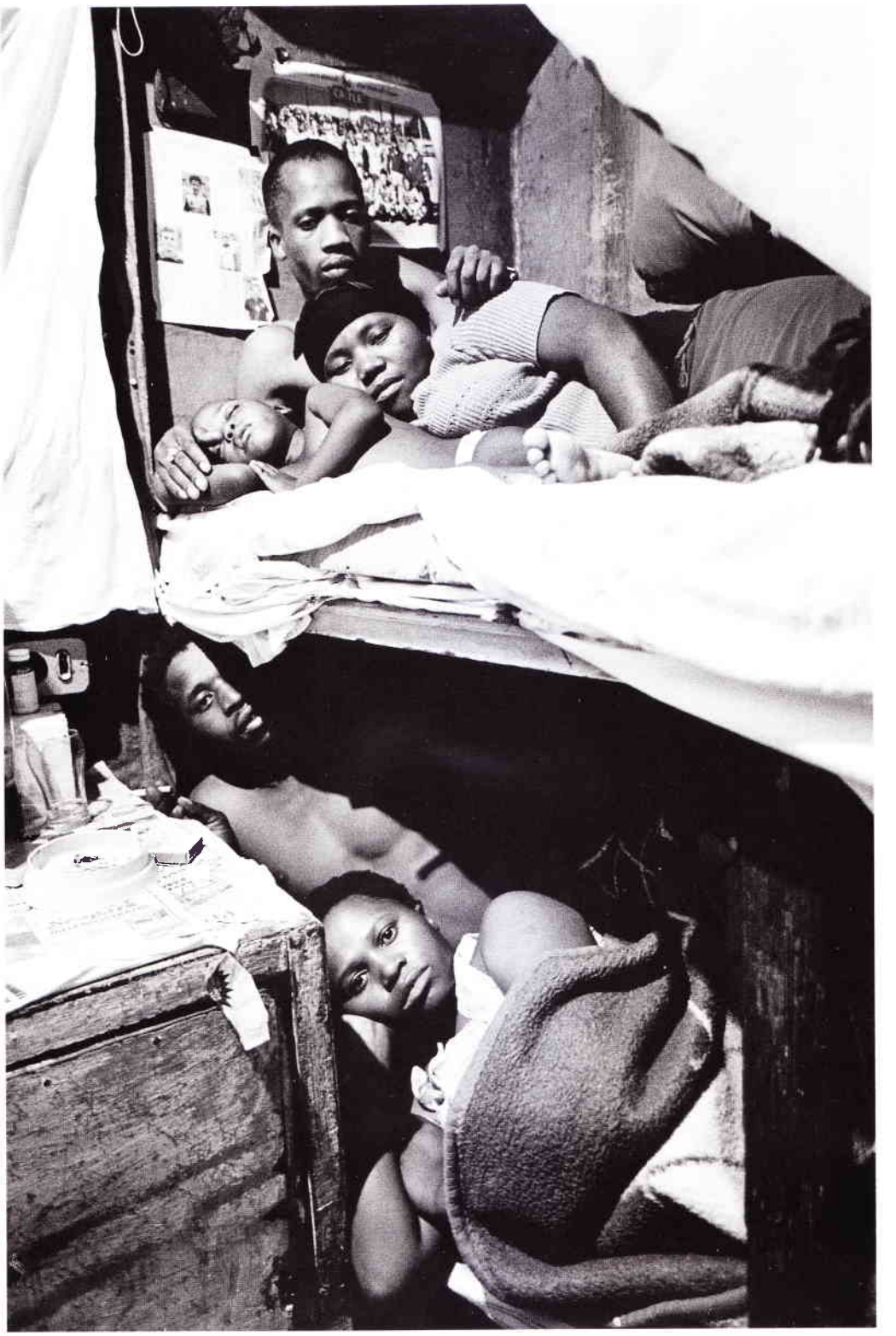
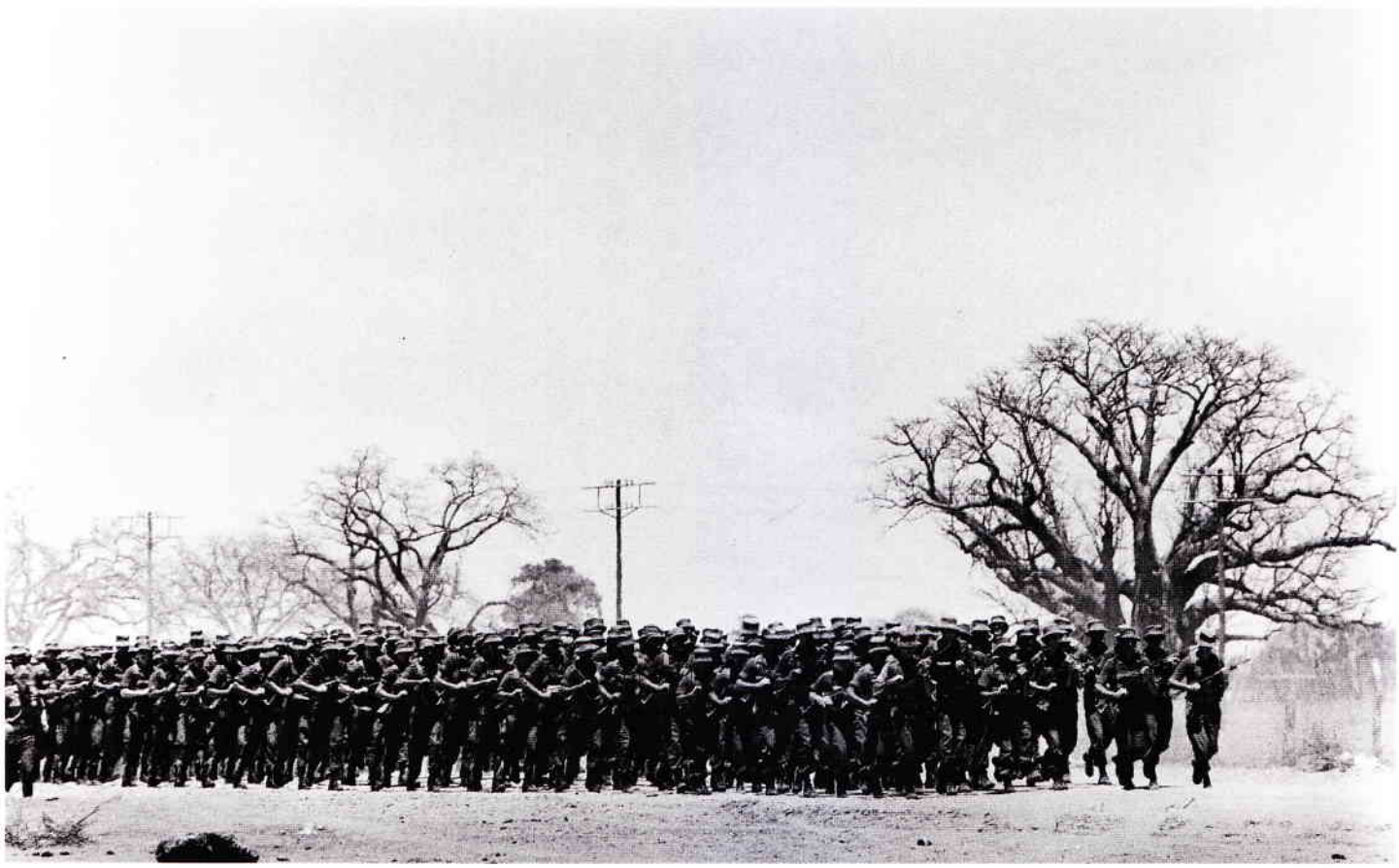


Many hostel dwellers refer to their room as their home and their beds as their rooms.

Top: Man takes leave of his wife and child.
Bottom:Hostels,Guguletu.

John Liebenberg in NAMIBIA

The Rainy SEASON



Above: South African Army on manouvers,Northern Namibia.

FULL FRAME talks to him in Windhoek

Lunch at John Liebenberg's house and the tape is running. The news broadcast of the SWABC blares in the background. John has his ear half-cocked as we travel through his photographic history. He talks fast, staccato, pauses briefly then knocks you with another burst.

Liebenberg has lived in Namibia for 10 years now and considers himself part of the scenery. Well if he had any doubts on the subject others certainly don't - and that is from the right and the left of the political spectrum. Widely published overseas, his work has appeared locally mainly in the Namibian, a Windhoek-based anti-apartheid newspaper and have either received endorsement or strong antagonism. The bearded photographer has been the target of cartoons caricaturing him in action. One that springs to mind appeared in an army newspaper after John had photographed a young black child in the north in army uniform who was 101 battalion's mascot. The cartoon showed the little boy shooting at John as he ran away, cameras flying, hair waving. The caption read in Afrikaans - "He may be small, but he sure can shoot."

Between bretchens, the SWABC and the mustard, I get my first question in: Where did it all start?

Not too far from where he photographed the little boy in army uniform actually. As a troop, Liebenberg was posted to the Namibian border where some social realism descended on him. "I saw the hearts and minds campaign in operation, and the so-called border war. For me it was not something I felt proud of, or any of that sort of thing. It was a violation and a war against people, not the so-called enemy."

On his return to Namibia in 1978, Liebenberg worked as a social worker for the government for a number of years. He came into contact with poverty first hand which later formed the basis of his commitment to photography. He was, by his own admission, a keen amateur doing what most photographers do a lot of in Namibia: capturing the beauty. Then a job offer came up at the Namibian. From there, Liebenberg began to break the barriers other white Namibian photographers had very little interest in doing - witnessing the war and its effects on the people of Namibia.

By challenging the authorities Liebenberg ran the gauntlet as getting images of the war in the north was a risky business.

"I really got to know the north and the war up there. I preferred to travel with the people or on my own, avoiding the military photo-opportunities.

"For years I became accustomed to doing a story that no-one really cared to listen to. Namibia's north has been South Africa's hunting ground and I felt that Namibians needed to know what's going on. The security forces, of course, didn't want me there and did a lot to keep me from the public."

Liebenberg has survived a number of attempts on his life, the most recent being a few months ago.

"I got this call, I dragged a colleague with me and we raced down the highway. In Katatura (the black township in Windhoek) a car passed us, guns blazing, ripping my car to pieces. Ten more centimetres, and the pics would have really sold."

Now that Namibia is independent, perhaps John and his family can look forward to more peaceful times. But there is still another war north of the border in Angola. Liebenberg feels it hasn't been photographed...He's right of course, but can it ever be?

The conscript Liebenberg in Ondangwa, Northern Namibia. 1978.

SWAPO soldiers killed by Koevoet are buried in a mass grave, April 1989.

By John Liebenberg

The long awaited clouds, laden with thunder and life, drift over the distant horizons. Out in the fields of Northern Namibia Oshiwambo women toil under the threatening sky, preparing the barren and sandy soil for their husbands - migrant workers in the distant capital, Windoek or the desert diamond mining town, Oranjemund.

Coming home once a year, the men sow their seed in the fields and in the womb and leave again before they see the wind blowing through the Muhango and the first cry of a newborn in the shadow of the candlelight. In many rooms and behind closed doors in late November, thoughts and dreams turn to schemes, and history is plotted in collaboration with the rainy season. Young men and girls, their hearts thumping, find comradeship and equality and respect in the plotting of this course. The road to Freedom. To Angola.

The call for freedom is answered by a messenger from the bush and the land across the river, who comes before it rains. The messenger threads his way through the open, dry and hostile land, that with the rain will offer cover behind the green and the water shal-

SWAPO soldiers, southern Angola, 1989.

low in the pans.

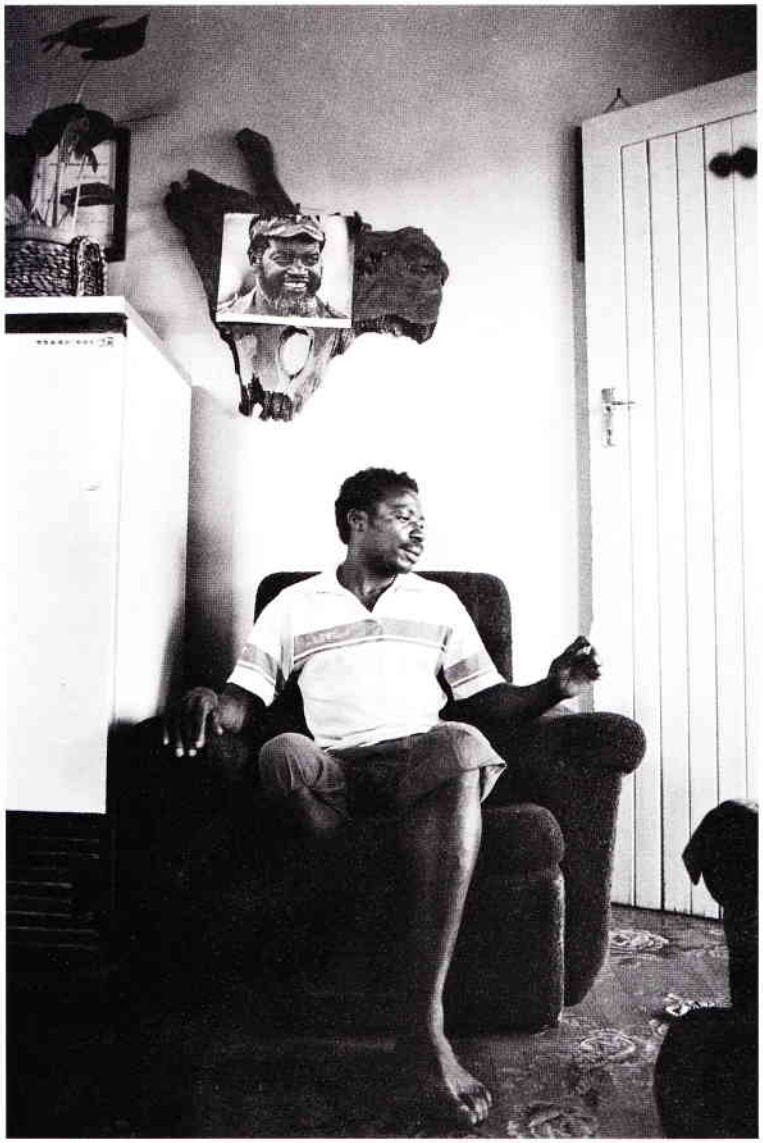
They will access the friendliness and help offered by the comrades and the sympathetic village people and the mission churches - carefully taking note of the collaborator and noting the positions of the Makakunja. Their bases and the sandy routes, to mine and ambush later.

He speaks to the students, and plans with them their escape. Sings with the women who will hide his forces, and takes long walks with the children to find the place where last years' comrades buried the arms. The men he instructs on the making of war. It's crude ideology - to assemble a rifle and learn explosives in the name of freedom.

He returns to Angola, his pistol tucked deep inside his soul. Mission complete, he relates his assessment to a command structure in whispered breath - his honesty the only insurance for the many men who will follow. Waiting for the rainy season.

For them it is the moment of truth, when education and privilege disappear and a fighting knowledge of the terrain and the hope for a good rainy season remains the only prayer.

White boys from home count days but know its months before they will



leave this hostile and strange land filled with unnecessary visions - as if the two-year prison sentence for being eighteen was not enough.

The fields planted under bursting clouds, in the spirit of the rainy season, look empty and destroyed after battle.

The wire fences and poles are uprooted. It is the questioning time of the rainy season, when the merits of the armed struggle that brings this Koevoet to the land is questioned.

But always silently. Government sprang logistics of kills and victorious battles on the South African audience who could never argue back and who did not even know the Oshiwambo speaking people.

They captured the struggle's guerrillas and "turned" them through a process of proven methods involving horrendous torture. They "turned" them back into the field, enough to form a batallion.

The women, almost silent, surely suffered the most. They gave birth to the men and buried them, but, in between, their menfolk were never there.

Windhoek and a job was life away from anyone's army. Harsh labour laws had to be accepted, absorbed and lived by young and old. Coming home after eleven months without prospective savings proved difficult to explain to a wife, who kept the house and soul together.

Above: Former SWAPO guerilla detained by Koevoet for 2 years.

Left: After a battle with SWAPO's Typhoon battalion, 1985.

Angola became a port of freedom to many who were displaced like orphans to any corner of the world - whoever would help - in refugee camps, assembly halls and universities.

Metallic grey jets fall out of the sky on well-planned bombing missions; the rumbling of armoured vehicles and casspirs on operations. Friends and comrades killed in battle or left behind became a way of life for many. Township heroes found themselves detained by forces alien to the consciousness of their own struggle.

Fighters once honed in battle, spat on the ground and spoke of their own detentions by the liberation they had come to find.

In Windhoek and mostly the North, some of the scars can never heal. The amputated limbs can never grow back

Only the children remain behind.

All this happened in the rainy season when the fresh ground held its water.

In Namibia the clouds are drifting together. Less naive, Koevoet cleans its guns and oils its machines of war - modern day chariots, spilling from their holds a legendary force. Experienced, victorious, notching up the dead. Their ears ring with the sobbing sounds of messengers caught, or of the early infiltrators, twisted and turned, gulping out their last breaths of information on anything they can humanly think of.

In bush camps, Koevoet waits after

Above: 911 Battalion prepare for battle, 1989.

Right: SWAPO meeting disrupted by Koevoet.

A survivor of the Cassinga massacre teaches children

intense briefings, in rooms too small to contain the amount of intelligence work. They wait for the rain and check for bootprints.

In Windhoek we wait and check the newsprint for mythical reports on the progress of the rainy season operations from Intelligence officers who have also been receivers of lies.

Bodies toughened by training in Africa and overseas move in small groups, now that the rain has come.

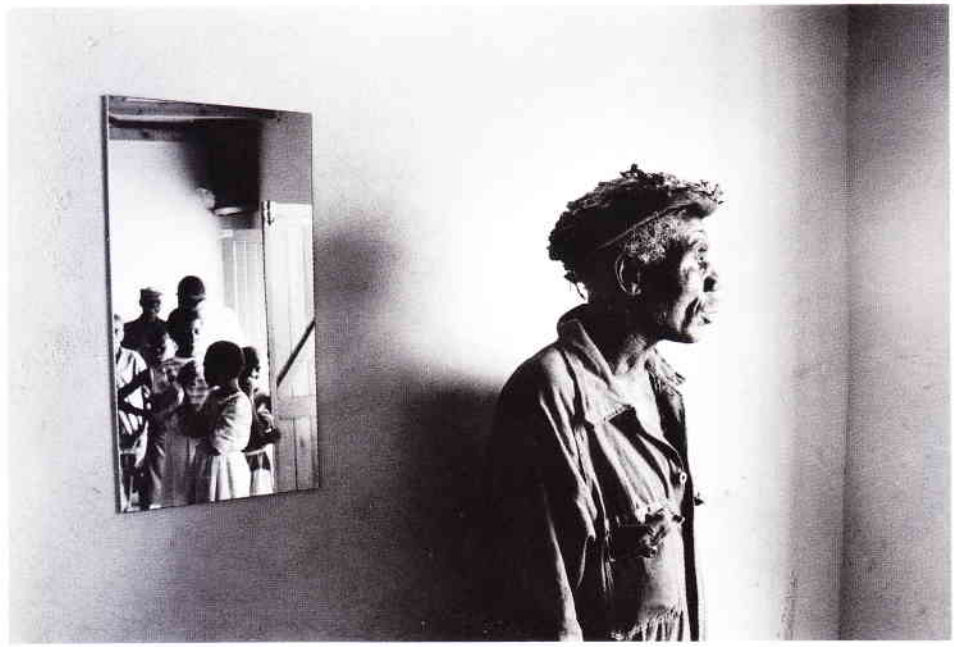
Their shoulders weighed down by the fury of their liberation.

On aching feet, they make their way in uniform through the dangerous bush. Incorrect and dishonest intelligence reports, no water, no friendly villages, no food: betrayed by those who "help".

In earlier days, the war on foot against machines started 200 kilometres inside Angola. South Africa and its forces had stopped fighting a bush war and became an invader.

The South Angolan bush war is a story so brutal that only the upper military echelons of both forces will ever be able to tell the story.

Kassinga was the only published massacre, but there were many more At Nqiva, west and east, bodies lay in the



sun for days, until nature's children wiped out their tracks. Cuito Cuinvalle recently as well as the older Operations - Reindeer and Smokeshell - will never be forgotten.

In the late eighties, the internationalists, the Cubans, beame a force to consider, and brought the guerillas close to the border. South Africa the invader became a fact of the past.

The scenes of battle remain only in the minds of the young soldiers and in the inquest files of the Magistrate's Court. But what sometimes remains behind reflects the intensity of these battles; casspir tracks; thick trees crushed, blown from their roots; deep mortar holes and thousands of shiny copper rounds; a bomb bandage or two or the charred remains of a once-human being.

The villages burning and the casspirs bursting through, the children tortured for information, or left limbless by another country's mortar bomb, surprise searches for weapons or guerillas can only be described in mother tongue. The curfew always took its innocent toll, as did the landmines planted on the spur of the moment.

For guerrilla fighters who were helped after dark, it could mean a speedy exit or a shallow grave dug by Koevoet. ❐

Top:Migrant worker,Northern Namibia.

Bottom:Women watch troop patrol,Ondangwa,Northern Namibia.

GOING HOME...

Santu Mofokeng *and* ***Paul Weinberg*** *go back to their roots. Weinberg to Pietermaritzburg and Mofokeng to Soweto.They look at themselves in the South African reality and come up with a unique photo essay. They spoke to Staffrider Magazine about their roles in photography and objectives of their current work.*

Staffrider: *Could you briefly sketch how you became involved in social documentary photography?*

Weinberg: I was studying law at university during 1976 when, in the light of the historical events, I began to question whether a legal career would satisfy my personal and social needs. I eventually gave up law and studied photography as a way of finding an outlet for what I realized were repressed creative needs coupled with concern for the social and political problems in this country.

After acquiring the necessary technical skills I set out to explore the South African reality. In the process I became part of the new generation of social documentary photographers that emerged in the seventies.

Mofokeng: I first came into contact with photography as a laboratory assistant and later as a darkroom technician. I was basically involved with the production of specifications. It was restrictive and boring. I felt I had to take up something that would provide a greater challenge.

I was taking photographs on a casual basis as a means of supplementing my income. I had acquired the basic techniques - the challenge, however, was to move from casual photography to a position in which it became a full time activity.

Staffrider: *What were your individual and collective aims when you embarked on your project?*

Weinberg: Since we share the same workspace, Santu and I often exchange ideas about photography. We hit on the idea of making personal statements through our work. We had thus far both been involved in mainly social documentary photography.

We felt that looking at our own personal lives and backgrounds would provide new challenges to produce images which speak for themselves through a lyrical narrative. We wanted to move away from the generalised nature of the work we had done before.

Mofokeng: I remember clearly how "Going Home" was first conceptualised. We were chatting about the things we have in common; like working in the same photographic collective; that we were both almost the same age. We ended up asking ourselves what it means for each of us when we say: I am going home. What does this mean in a society like South Africa? As can be expected, we conjured up different associations and experiences.

Weinberg: For me "I am going home" meant to get in my car and reach home within a matter of minutes.

Mofokeng: For me, on the other hand, it meant walking to the bus-stop or station and often spending more than an hour going home.

Weinberg: There is a tendency to think that life in the white suburbs and life in the townships are unrelated. By tracing our personal histories, we have tried to bring into the open our belief in non-racialism.

Top: Shebeen,White City, Soweto. SANTU MOFOKENG.

Bottom: Flower show,Pietermaritzburg. PAUL WEINBERG

Opposite top: PW Botha gets an ovation, City Hall. PAUL WEINBERG. Opposite bottom: Rent meeting, Evethu Cinema. SANTU MOFOKENG

Top: Caledonian Society Band at a Fun Day. PAUL WEINBERG Bottom: Wood-seller, Orlando East. SANTU MOFOKENG

Mofokeng: This meant that the worlds which lie behind the routine of going home had to be looked at in an honest and exploring fashion.

Weinberg: Incidentally, our home towns, Pietermaritzburg and Soweto, happen to be flash points in South Africa. Soweto is closely associated with a history of resistance to apartheid and Pietermaritzburg is the centre of the current political violence in Natal.

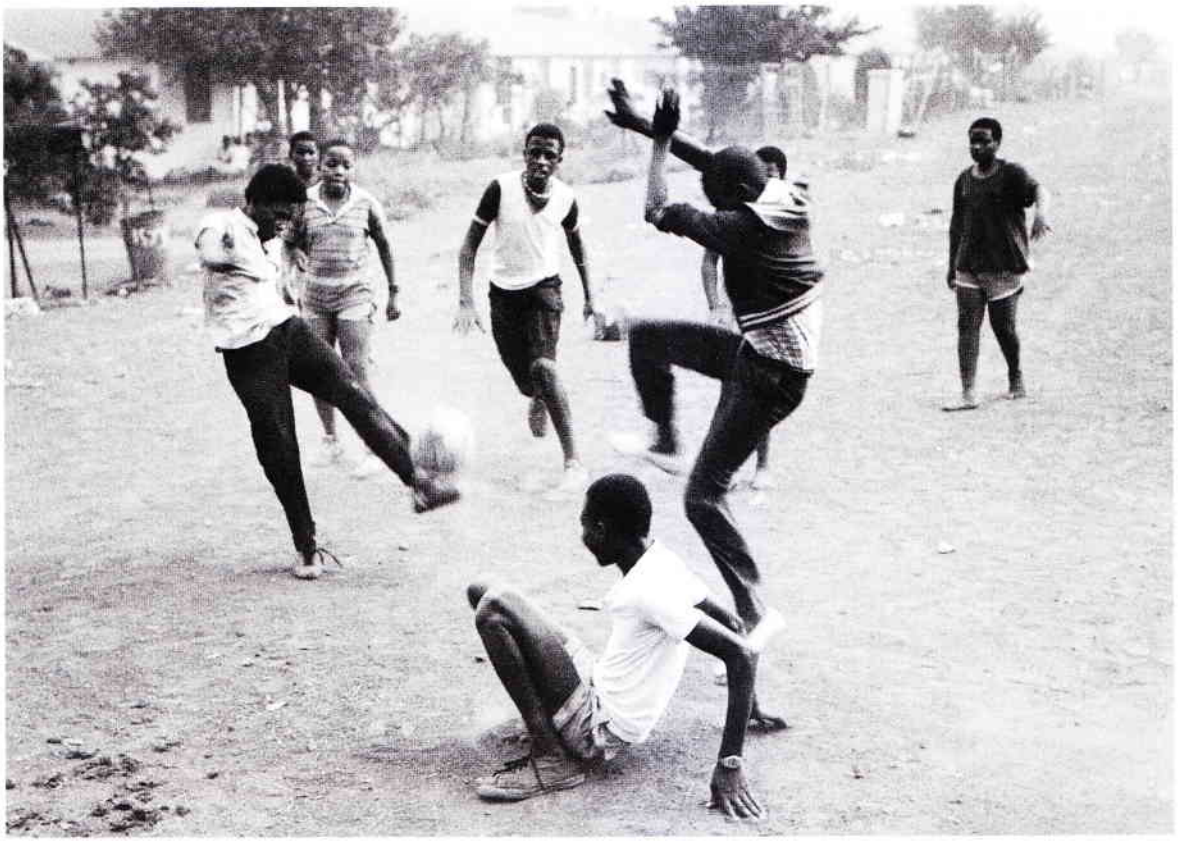
Staffrider: *A project like this is always in danger of being misconstrued as a perpetuation of the segregationist realities in South Africa. Do you think you have managed to overcome this in your work?*

Mofokeng: Our aim was to avoid rhetoric and go beyond it towards a greater degree of mutual understanding. Whether we succeed in overcoming the problem of segregation is, of course, another question. In going to Soweto I have tried to search for the human aspects, the dehumanising forces, the suffering, the courage, the resistance and the beauty which people manage to maintain against great odds. I tried at all points to avoid the stereotyped images that are marketed abroad.

Weinberg: Our link has been our understanding that the diversity in our work is something which unites and enriches us. Against this background, I wanted to look at my own home town, to explore the realities which operate there and share it with others. I feel I can only speak with authority of my own experiences. So I went home to look at the people caught up in the webs of apartheid and those who struggle against it, those who liberate themselves and those who capitulate.

Staffrider: *A general criticism leveled against social documentary photography is that the distance which exists between the photographer and the subject often results in a loss of intimacy. Is this a valid criticism?*

Weinberg: It's definitely valid. Documentary photography is burdened in the choice of its subjects such as "poverty" or "war" which are often presented from a distant perspec-



Soccer, White City Jabavu.
SANTU MOFOKENG

Vooortrekkers, Hugenot Festival.
PAUL WEINBERG

tive. Photography needs, however, to be more accessible. A photographer who claims to care about people and wants to portray their humanity must get close to them.

In this project it's the closest I've ever been to the people who were part of my work. Therefore, whatever statements I make, they are at the same time statements about myself, my past and the place where I grew up. In a sense I'm laid open. It is unavoidable if one wants to get beyond platitudes.

Mofokeng: I have always approached my work by trying to get a feeling of what I see while at the same time, keeping my distance. In other words, remaining uninvolved. I've been thinking about this. In the past I felt whatever I did was aimed at symbolising that which I thought was inherent in the things people do. I've come to question this method of working. It's of concern to me that the people I represent should not be anonymous or unknown to me. I feel the necessity to get closer and produce the photograph that will say more than the obvious.

Staffrider: *Did you experience any encounters which proved to be problematic or enriching in the course of the project?*

Weinberg: Well, part of the project involved tracking down old classmates. In my case I knew some of them were still in Pietermaritzburg. I anticipated some encounters would involve resistance.

There were also their memories of me as a schoolboy, a prefect and a sportsman and then the fact that I rejected many aspects of my past. In one case, an ex-classmate told me he had been informed of my radicalism and that I was untouchable and not worth relating to. I tried to overcome his resistance and in the process we got to learn something about each other. At this stage a new problem emerged: when one moves so close to people, one begins to understand their most intimate fears and it becomes morally unacceptable to exploit them. What was very enriching and valuable to me was that I could involve the people in the project by showing them the pictures as I progressed. I invited them to the opening of the exhibition. They bought their children along. It gave them a sense of being part of the whole exercise.

Mofokeng: In going home, I also went in search of my former classmates and schoolfriends. The one case which stands out was finding out about an old friend Sello Matau with whom I had spent a great deal of time, especially after matric. We were part of a group that met regularly to discuss a wide range of topics such as politics and our futures.

Then one day at the end of 1975 Sello said that he was going to disappear. It did not mean much to me at first. In 1976 he did disappear. The general assumption was that he had skipped the country. Eleven years later, I received news about him. He had been killed in Swaziland. His death made headlines. When I went to his place to take photographs many things went through my mind about what had happened to all of us who were part of the class of '75. I wanted to give something back. It was a highly personal thing and the process was painful.

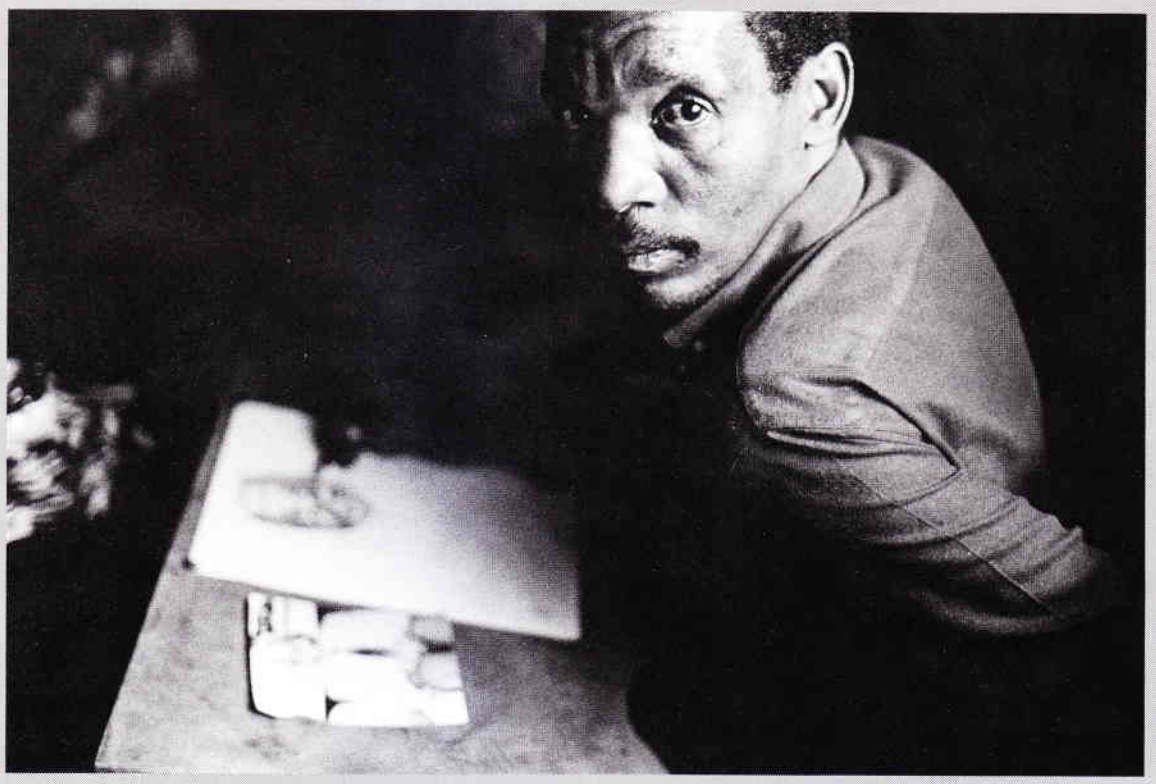
Staffrider: *How does this highly personal approach to photography relate to matters such as the struggle for democratic change in South Africa and the role of socially committed cultural workers?*

Weinberg: This project was an attempt to find a creative way in dealing with the realities I am confronted with. As a photographer creativity is the spark which forms the basis of my attempts to participate in political change. By avoiding rhetoric and developing the means of creative self-criticism, as well as working with other photographers and cultural organisations, I hope to contribute to the struggle for change.

Mofokeng: My struggle is a search for excellence in photography. It is only when I am good at what I do that I can be of use to society. I have a need to communicate what I see, feel and think as well as to explore my own position and role in society. Since I have a profound abhorrence of the status quo, it makes me gravitate towards others who want change. By participating in the organised struggle for social justice I am also involved in the struggle for self-realisation. ❐

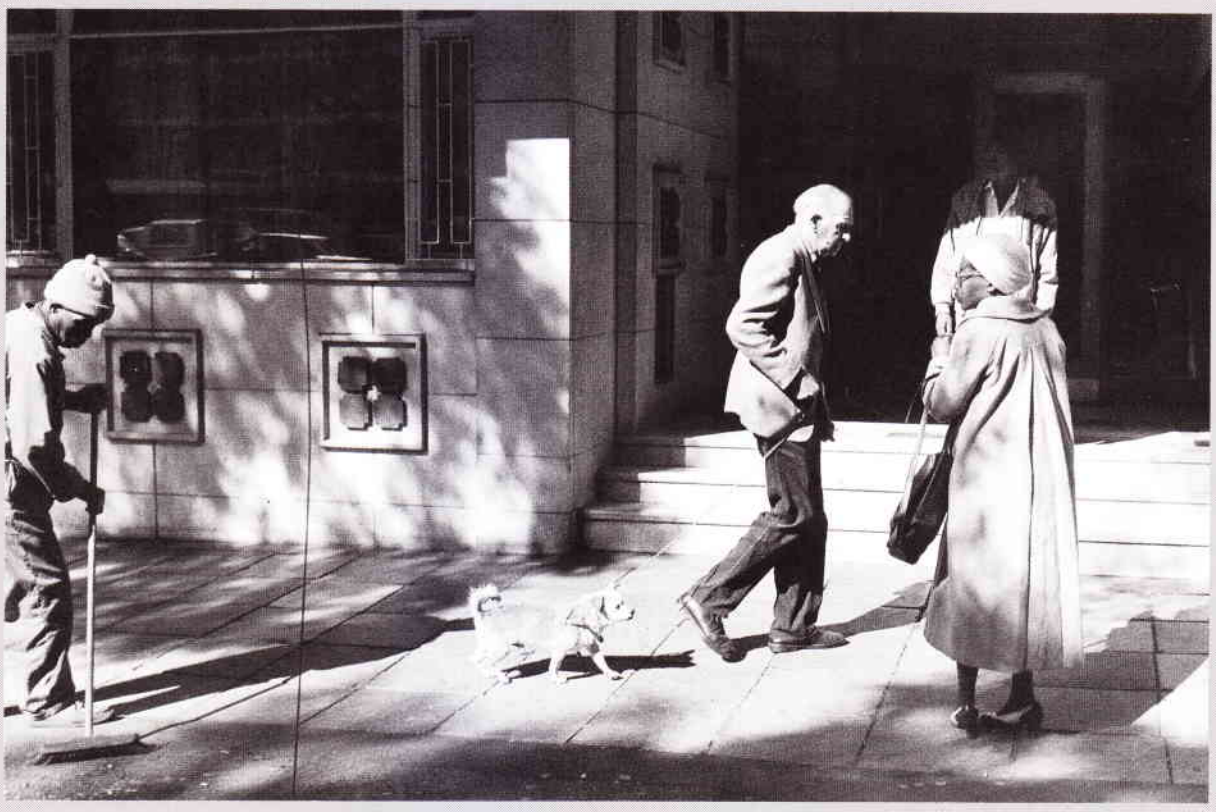
GALLERY

Pax Magwaza snaps portraits in his home town - Lamontville.



GALLERY

Graeme Williams goes into the 'grey areas' of Johannesburg, where a new culture is emerging in the once pure white city centre.



BOOKS

Southern Circle
Another pictorial journey
by Obie Oberholzer
Published by Jonathan Ball (R98.00)
Reviewed by Michele Witthaus.

Obie Oberholzer is a lucky man. His art is a by-product of a life-style which seems to come naturally to him, and what's more, he enjoys his work. There is something very irreverent about Oberholzer's approach to photography. To begin with, he offends the purists by messing about with lenses and filters in pursuit of hallucinogenic effects. His interventions are frequently inspired, lifting his subjects beyond the realm of documentary and into that of dream or fantasy.

In "Southern Circle", Oberholzer sets out on a journey similar to that which gave rise to his last book "From Ariesfontein to Zuurfontein". Once again, he chooses an eccentrically-structured itinerary. Instead of visiting all the towns suffixed with "fontein', this time he has chosen to follow a circle traced on a map of South Africa, spilling over now and then into neighbouring territories. His journey takes him back to some of the places he covered in his first study, and perhaps the most interesting repetition is the use of dear Ouma 'Roos' Cloete for the cover shot of "Southern Circle". The old lady, smartly attired in her new pink kappie, proudly holds a copy of the first book on her lap.

Oberholzer has a nomadic spirit and plenty of cheek, and these qualities enable him to capture an astonishing array of photographs. People allow him access to their pain and their joy, their fear and their arrogance.

Occasionally he meets a subject who is less than thrilled to see him, but he will get a portrait nonetheless, and include an amusing description of the encounter. The whimsical commentary is one of the best things about this book. It is humorous and thought-provoking, never patronising. Oberholzer is as much at home in a remote kraal as he is in the living room of the town's leading citizen. His comments, both visual and written, can be acerbic, but always with a core of gentleness and acceptance of life in all its forms.❐

Why Are They Weeping?
Photographs by David Turnley
Text by Alan Cowell
Stewart Tabori and Chang (R53.95)
Reviewed by Paul Weinberg.

First time round I devoured this book. Though much of the content was painful and sad, I learnt a lot as I travelled through my country in the company of award-winning American photographer, David Turnley, and New York Times correspondent, Allan Cowell, during the unbroken period of unrest from 1984-86.

This period comes alive with images of funerals and police action juxtaposed with the apparent normality of life in the white suburbs.

We see the Afrikaner at play and at prayer, whites and blacks frozen in the attitudes of master and servant - the white kid held by the domestic worker, the black groundsman collecting the bowls at the feet of some white aunties, behind-the-scenes at the Miss SA competition showing a black woman adjusting the skirt of one of the white finalists. The book ends on funerals and resistance; the final images a repeat of the cover photo of Winnie and a shot of Archbishop Tutu in prayer.

As a body of work, I have some reservations. Turnley attempts an impossibly broad picture recording every aspect of life in South Africa. That is its weakness.

Among the images are some real gems and some corny cliches. There is a truly beautiful image of a young black woman washing inside a cramped little shack — a rare and intimate moment. There is a powerful portrait of an Afrikaans worker on the mines with the foundry in the background; an excellent juxtaposition of white jorlers in a pub and black jorlers in a shebeen; a great photograph of young comrades on the march — again, a superb moment. The rent eviction in Soweto is a classic. The municipal police instructor barking orders at his juniors is well caught and very strong.

But the overworked images are there too. The inclusion of some shots seems purely opportunistic. Winnie Mandela features prominently smack on the cover. A reworked cliche of Winnie looking out from the bars of a gate. Alf Khumalo shot a similar photograph in the 60s when she was banned. At the time, it was a very important statement. Twenty years later and in colour, it falls flat.

A "whites only" sign hangs in the corner of a train carriage where two black workers stare self-consciously into the camera. Archbishop Tutu poses with a bunch of kids — there is no justification for this photograph. It is weak and badly set up. These situations should evolve themselves. Many photographs force the issue between black and white.

There are some glaring lemons, one a wide-angle close-up of a woman who, obviously uncomfortable with a lens being forced into her face, scowls at the camera.

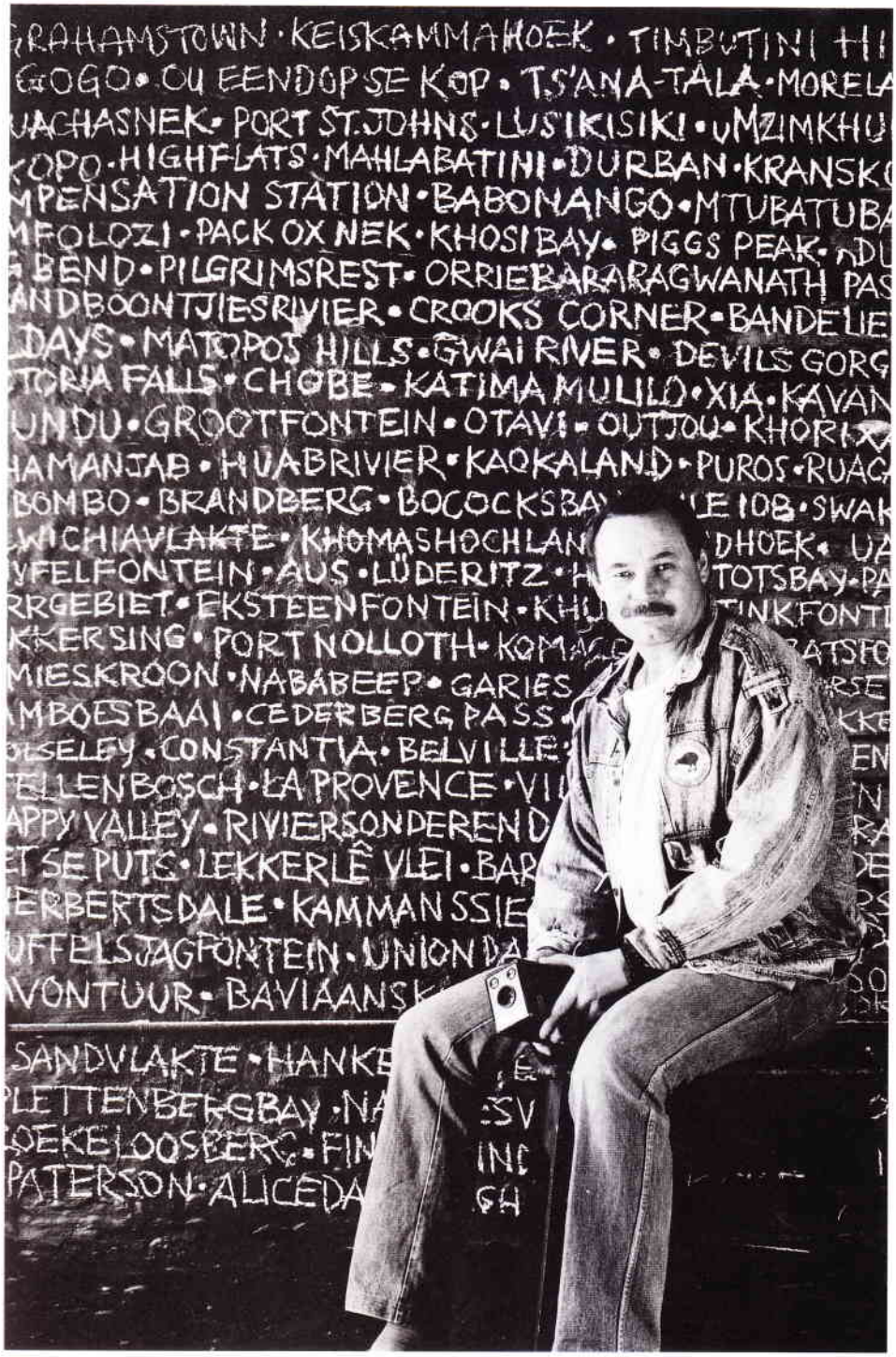
The strength of Turnley's pictures lie in his gutsy, "on-the-run" photo-journalistic style. But much of this work fails to get close to black, and to a lesser extent white people.

There is an uncomfortable feeling that runs through the book — a kind of formula designed for a foreign audience.

The introduction puts it quite clearly: "At Africa's tip, the fault lines shifted and people faced decisions that determined lives. Whose side are you on? black or white?"

I wouldn't for a moment deny these contradictions exist. But it is certainly not only the Afrikaner who is responsible for maintaining apartheid, as the pictures tells us. Nor is it just the black man who can change this.

The action as it presented itself to the media from 1984 to 1986 was the basis of a much more powerful process which Turnley does not accurately document — the formation of a strong, non-racial alliance which swept through the



Obie Oberholzer, 1989.

country like veld fire.

"Why are they weeping?" is a sugary title and a misnomer. A good listener or observer at funerals, rallies and meetings of this period would have picked up the far more militant and positive imagery that came through the toi-toi dance, the liberation songs and the slogans. It was a time for the development of a culture of resistance and not the time for self-pity.

The significant difference between the 1980s and the 1970s (as pointed out by Allan Cowell) is about non-racialism as opposed to black consciousness. Cowell's text is well thought-out and stimulating. It is both critical and cautious.

The overall value of the book lies in its documentation of the period and its attempt to travel inside the experiences of people who have become statistics. It provides a vehicle for the views of a sensitive and sharp journalist but also highlights the shortcomings of the visions of outsiders. ❐

SCHOLARSHIPS

OFFERED IN 1991

Two scholarships to study documentary photography in the USA are being offered by the Documentary Photo Project at UCT and Duke University, North Carolina; in honour of two ledendary South African photographers.

ELI WEINBERG MEMORIAL PHOTO AWARD

To start in January 1991.

ERNEST COLE MEMORIAL PHOTO AWARD

To start in June 1991 and is open to photographers who are engaged in or who have completed in-depth photo projects.

Application forms can be obtained from:

Documentary Photo Project
c/o SALDRU
University of Cape Town
Private Bag
Rondebosch 7700.

Tel: 021 - 6503274.

Deadline for entries is 17 August