

In other societies, justice is an abstract idea. In South Africa it is a very clear thing. Justice for me means I can walk wherever I want; I can stay where I want; travel however I want; send my child wherever I want; and have the right to vote. Now that some of our freedoms are being won, our words and our photographs must continue the struggle for justice, for genuine economic advancement, and for the reconstruction of our communities.

Omar Badsha, Cape Town South Africa, 1991

The exhibition *South Africa: The Cordoned Heart* opened simultaneously in New York and Soweto in 1985.

At the time bloody battles were flaring-up across South Africa. The country had entered a period of violent equilibrium. The Nationalist government was too powerful to be ousted. Neither could its security forces defeat thousands of South Africans who were fighting apartheid, the system of entrenched segregation, political domination, and economic exploitation that had been in effect since 1948. The government declared a "state of emergency" in a <sup>an</sup> ~~last~~-ditch attempt to <sup>crush</sup> ~~quell~~ the ongoing popular revolt against its policies.

Despite an atmosphere of intimidation and repression directed in no small part at the media, South African photographers continued to work throughout this period, serving often as the only recorders of <sup>the violent confrontation.</sup> ~~violence~~. Their dramatic images of stone throwers and burning barricades, of police whips and fleeing crowds, appeared around the world on the

front pages and in the nightly news. Their pictures preserved for all time the story of the popular resistance the government wanted so desperately to hide. Their cameras focused the attention of the world on the struggle in their divided country. Their photographs played an important role in helping to bring to an end the system of apartheid. ~~It is~~ <sup>ly</sup> <sub>h</sub> unfor- tunate their efforts could not banish as quickly the legacy of that system.

*South Africa: The Cordoned Heart* is the story of that legacy. It is the story of the loneliness of the migrant worker compounds, the desperate poverty of the townships, the overcrowding and resulting environmental degradation of the homelands, the worsening conditions in burgeoning squatter settlements, the weariness and waste that came out of "separate development." Despite the abandonment of apartheid laws, *The Cordoned Heart* is the story of the conditions of life and work that still exist for the vast majority of black South Africans.

*South Africa: The Cordoned Heart* is the work of a multiracial group of twenty South African photographers, coordinated by Omar Badsha, a South African artist and union organizer turned photographer, whose pictures are also represented here. The prints in this exhibition were selected from more than a thousand pictures originally submitted by these photogra-

phers for the conference of the Second Carnegie Inquiry into Poverty and Development in Southern Africa held at the University of Cape Town in 1984.

In putting together the photographic survey of the Carnegie Inquiry, Badsha could have relied on South Africa's few established independent documentary photographers, along with members of AFRAPIX, a South African photographer's collective he helped to form in 1982 to serve the alternative press and community-based organizations. Instead Badsha opened up the project to all South African photographers, regardless of experience, because he hoped to build a larger community of documentarians. One result of these efforts has been the establishment of a Center for Documentary Photography at the University of Cape Town, the first center of its kind in southern Africa.

Although in some cases the photographs in this exhibition were made almost a decade ago, the conditions they document are not dated. Poverty continues to be the lot of the majority in this wealthiest of African countries. At the same time, the piecemeal efforts at building a more just and efficient economy, seen in a number of these photographs of trade union activities and community-based agricultural development projects, are gathering strength and coherence.

From the point of view of the South African

photographers responsible for The Cordoned Heart, these photographs are as important as the better known images of violent confrontations. The documentation of the battle in the streets showed that change was coming to South Africa. Change is here. This exhibition is about the everyday lives and activities of the people who will shape those changes, the people who will set the priorities for a new South Africa. Who are these people? What are their problems and hopes?

These South African photographers concerned themselves with people and organizations largely ignored by the <sup>general</sup> media, ~~at large~~. They worked in regions of the country normally inaccessible to outsiders. In so doing, they helped to create an alternative national archive - a repository for their own history.

South Africans of different racial groups have been cordoned off from one another longer than any living memory. As the country turns away from apartheid in hopes of creating a non-racial national identity, <sup>becomes</sup> ~~then~~ it crucial for South Africans to have a clearer sense of one another, to be able to see beyond the cordon and visualize their countrymen and women. South Africans and concerned outsiders need to know more about the real life of the country. *The Cordoned Heart* offers a thoughtful contribution to that effort.

Apartheid is being dismantled. Nelson Mandela is free; the ANC is legalized; political ~~exiles~~ <sup>prisoners are being released and</sup> are returning home. With these dramatic events behind us, the international media have already shifted their focus from South Africa to other crisis points around the world. South African photographers, however, continue to play a central role in national self-understanding, not only in recording the legacy of apartheid, but also in documenting the changeover of their own society.

The process of transformation that is taking place in South Africa today is one of the most remarkable undertakings by any society in history: an attempt to try and turn the world's symbol of racial segregation and oppression into <sup>one</sup> ~~an example~~ of racial integration and freedom. If South Africa can build a democratic, non-racial society, it will give hope to the entire world that other, seemingly intractable problems can be solved.

But before any nation can move to the future, it must first acknowledge the injustices of the past. In South Africa, the photographers of *The Cordoned Heart* provide a comprehensive portrait of those injustices: the cruel results of the apartheid system that must be seen and admitted before they can be fully forgiven. And the country's social and economic problems must be faced directly, as these South African photographers have faced them -- in all their

difficult particularity -- if the emerging order is  
to succeed.

Alex Harris & Bruce Payne 1991