

Considering Coloniality in South African Photography

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1. Introduction

This brief essay cannot hope to offer a comprehensive or deep enquiry into its subject. I have often described South Africa as a “post-Columbian” society: that is to say that it is one of many places on our planet whose “decisive moment”, one which still resonates, was the encounter between Europe and its “other” in the early age of exploratory capitalism. The categories, definitions and inflections of the “colonial” which arise from that encounter, will continue to be fathomed long into the new globalism which is gradually replacing the old circles of influence by which the contending powers of the Eurocentric West (and their new contestants in the East) dominate and manipulate the globe.

My concerns in this essay, then, are to offer a very basic sketch of ways in which the photographic imagery arising from South Africa may be thought of politically, and how this thinking may be enriched by maintaining a sense of what I have, admittedly awkwardly, called “coloniality”. The use of this word serves to make a distinction between the legal and material states of colonisation and the more shadowy conditions which operate around those differentials of power which have not arisen organically within a social group, but which involve relatively discrete groups separated by geography, race, or language.

In keeping with the wish to keep the social in the foreground, in this essay I will be looking at photographic imagery as a continuum; including the “popular”, the “serious”, the “amateur” and “professional” as part of a single discursive complex around how South Africa has been visually imagined. However, I will concentrate on photography which is conscious of its social purpose in contributing to a “necessary picture” of the country. And it is with the “picture”, the imaginary, that I am concerned, in the belief that this has (in Althusserian terms) a “relative autonomy” from material relations – an autonomy which can be a potent political force.

My use of “colonial” to apply to South Africa cannot, of course, be literal. After all, South Africa as a whole has never been a “colony” as were the Cape and Natal colonies before the great imperial adventure of the Anglo-Boer war and the formation of the Union in 1910. From thenceforth the country was a dominion with as much independence as Canada or Australia, before becoming a republic in 1961. Rather, the term describes states of “subalterneity” which are imbrications of the material, social and psychological and which form an ideological matrix, which may be ignored, resisted, or actively embraced, but which remains pervasive for all who are part of it.

These conditions have been extensively explored and theorised within the field of what has become “post-colonial studies”, and this essay will not contribute to that theory in any more sophisticated a way than to hold images and notions up against each other and see what resonances occur. In other words, I will be using the complex of ideas which impact around a common-sense idea of “colonial”, to ask questions about photographs, and using photographs to try and enrich that sense.

In the case of South Africa the state of coloniality is of course especially complex because it is not only a matter of relationships with a (materially or legally) sovereign European power, but an internal one. Indeed one of the hotly contested debates in the revolutionary left the 1980's was how and whether the official (though of course

unpublishable at that time) Communist party description of South Africa as a state of "colonialism of a special type", being a state of "internal colonialism" of blacks by whites, was appropriate. To describe it thus chimed with an "Africanist" position and justified the "two stage" approach to social transformation adhered to by the ANC, in which the first task was to overthrow racial subjugation in a nationalist struggle, before moving towards socialism, while the "workerist" tendency, to which many in the union movement adhered, was that such a strategy would only make capitalism more firmly entrenched. This appears, indeed, to have come to pass.

Beyond these fairly crude political terms, however, the colonial can, as I have indicated, be said to embrace a very wide range of social assumptions and subject positions. It is the construction, reinforcement, refinement, and contention or transcendence of these by means of photography, which I am particularly interested to explore in this essay. Naturally this will be a rather sketchy approach to a field of such size, but it will, I hope, honour the vitality of the questions.

Franz Fanon's masterful *The Wretched of the Earth*, set out the psychology of the colonial subject with great passion and eloquence, showing how feelings of rage and shame could be self-defeating and how aspirations to "progress" can be tickets to a game in which those who hold the trump cards also write the rules. With a more pragmatic focus, the Brazilian literacy teacher Paulo Freire showed in his *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* how the process of learning literacy might carry a freight of assumptions. This nexus of disempowerment has been a theme of feminist theory (as in Dale Spender's *Man Made Language*) and when applied to photography, should remind us that "aesthetics" and the "grammar" of imagery are no more neutral than their subject matter. Indeed Richard Dyer has suggested that "racism is imprinted into the technologies and lighting codes of western photography itself" (DYER 1997). It should also alert us to the psychic umbra of the colonial project in which gender and race have been overlapped as sites of attraction and horror. This relates in turn to the insights of Edward Said in his *Orientalism*, in which he shows how the complex construction of "otherness" is used to narrate the delicious danger of adventure into lands of promise and threat (The sexualisation of adventure, and the centrality of conquest to European "progress" are of course memorably figured in John Donne's Renaissance description of his mistress as "my America, my untamed land"). More recently, Homi K Bhabha has offered eloquent discussions on the "hybridity" characteristic of "post-colonial" conditions, in particular those arising from the South Asian diaspora and the growing process of globalisation. The idea of "hybridity" has in turn been problematised within discourses around the postmodern body, where the term "grafting" has been used (as in Jennifer Law's discussion in LAW 2002) to describe the uneasy prosthetic fit of contemporary identities. All of these conditions apply in South Africa, and manifest themselves in photographic output.

This essay will begin with a sketch of the historic terrain of South African photography, and move towards a consideration of its contemporary state. A hidden question which I make no pretensions to be able to answer, but for which there may be several possible pointers, is whether in the "post apartheid" era the conceptual paradigms of coloniality are wearing out their use.

2. Patriarchy, Pioneers, and Pastoral – early photography

The history of photography in South Africa is almost as old as the medium itself. Sir John Herschel, son of Sir William Herschel the discoverer of Uranus, and himself a famous astronomer, was the discoverer of the action of hyposulfates on silver. He spent several years in Cape Town in the 1830's and coined the term "photography" after his return to Europe in 1838. He had a camera obscura installed in Cape Town and made several sketches from its images. But the first known "photographic" image made in Southern Africa is a telling one - a daguerreotype by E. Thiesson of 1845 of "a native woman of Sofala-Moçambique."

This was the forerunner of legions of "ethnographic" studies by which the indigenous people were mapped, typed, measured, and otherwise physically described. It is striking that the first use of what was then a cumbersome and expensive process should have been thus - a quasi-scientific depiction of a depersonalised female figure whose possession by the camera (and we should remember that the daguerreotype with its pocket-book size and precious aura was very much a "possession") is a precise analogue of the wider process of conquest of which technology was an important platform. The power relations embedded in and reified by "the ethnographic gaze" have been the subjects of widespread critical discussion beyond the scope of this essay and venturing into areas of Lacanian theory (see the articles in Hartman, Sylvester, Hayes), but we can at least note how the pose of this "subject" woman held "objectified" in profile for our view, is more submissive than challenging, and how her extreme passivity is emphasised by her slump and downward look.

Karel Schoeman's insightful compilation of 19th century photographs from the South African library (where he was curator) shows a complex set of ideologies at work. It is interesting to note how strongly repetitive the tropes are (in psychological terms a "compulsion to repeat" is a sure sign of "defence" - i.e. what in political terms would be called ideology; a partial narrative used to contain material which threatens to irrupt or "return"). Among them are some key categories. The first category is by no means prominent but I have chosen to begin with it because it represents such key ideas relevant to this brief study.

The image of "trekkers"- people and wagons on the veld – is an obvious pioneer trope. This is an "outspan" a rest for draft animals (usually oxen but in this instance apparently mules) and travellers alike. When I was growing up we had both a coffee and a radio program named "outspan" (which was also the trademark of the South African oranges boycotted by British students in the 1970's). The "well-earned rest" is an encapsulation of the rewards of a project of domestication in the face of hardship, and the imagery here has roots not only in paintings by Thomas Baines and other explorer-artists, but in the pastoral of *The Haywain*. And as with other pastoral it stakes a claim to "belonging" and to a state of harmony with nature.

But why should this indicate "coloniality"? Apart from the obvious reference to pioneering, the point, I feel, is that the colonial conjuncture is always a contested one – indeed this is one of its defining characteristics. And in displacing the social context onto the geographical (or in fact overlapping them) the colonial imagination finds a way to both acknowledge the contest and seek reassurance. The "outspan", then, is not to be compared to a picnic, but is an altogether more serious affair.

Another key category in 19th century photography is images of “natives”. These are divided in a form of extreme binarism into images of “the native state” and “the civilised state”. In the former we see further divisions. On the one hand there is evidence of interest in a destitution which can come to stand for a “fallen” state.

This may be read as the consequence either of racial imperfection (as late as the 1960’s the Prime Minister Verwoerd was justifying Apartheid by referring to the old testament curse on the “sons of Ham”) or of the evils of contamination by civilisation, or (I feel instinctively this is far less likely) as exhortatory and admonitory along the lines of Jacob Riis. My own hunch suggests that it is the second of these possibilities which is most likely. In denial of its ubiquity, but in honour of its strictly coded and constrained nature, racial commingling has traditionally been associated in South African mythology with defilement, and myths of tribal purity and ferocity have been used to maintain and idealise racial distance.

A further category of “native” imagery is explicitly ethnographic. This is part of a wider project of “mapping” to which I have already referred and which included the massive and scientifically advanced project to taxonomise the flora and fauna of the sub-continent (advanced knowledge of plant and animal life is still a sign of high status among bourgeois white South Africans, for whom the ultimate decoration is a private game sanctuary.)

I have already referred to the “ethnographic gaze” and its use to (possibly unwittingly?) inscribe relations of observatory dominance. Certainly it has many variants and the “power of the look” may be exchanged in ways which reveal much about the dynamics of the moment of photographic exposure. What can be said, though is that my review of pictures for this essay revealed the massive reoccurrence of this genre of imagery up to the present day.

Schoeman’s collection contains several images of the “civilised” native. Among them are clear signs of an emerging cosmopolitan class of what has been called in other contexts a “comprador” bourgeoisie. These were the political class which argued (together with my ancestors) against the racial provisions of the post-war Union and prefigured the formation of the ANC in whose government my relatives now serve.

Discussions about the role of the “comprador” class within coloniality are beyond the scope of this essay, but have been the subject of a considerable body of writing, for example from the Caribbean philosopher CLR James, and remain germane as President Thabo Mbeki, himself brought up in England, calls for an “African renaissance” whose meaning and contours remain distinctly unclear.

As in other contexts, the key ideological site (or “apparatus” in Althusser’s terms) of the family, is naturally represented in early South African photographs. In my own family, letters have been kept since the time we settled in South Africa in 1800, and the bonds of kinship were especially strong in a context where people live far apart. In fact it can be said that the family replaced or at least displaced the idea of “home” and “country”. Certainly for most white South Africans there was no thought of returning to “the auld place”. Such imagery of course also helped (as Barthes has pointed out) to “preserve” memories and affections at a time of widespread, sudden and early mortality.

To read such images in the context of coloniality, needs only that we remember how remote many of these people dressed in appropriate and contemporary fashions were,

not only from the Europe from which the fashions came, but even from a town of any size. So the imagery is not only one of local connection but of bonding into a wider world community of the “civilised”. This has been, and remains, a fundamental platform for white South-African self-image.

A further subject for later 19th century photography was mining and the growth both of mining communities and the cities of Kimberley and Johannesburg. I have chosen one of these images depicting a group of men before the widespread importation of migrant labourers from the Rhodesias and Nyasaland.

What seems particularly interesting is how (in reproduction better than offered here!) it reveals the tenuous and uneasy nature of racial mixing among a group of workmen before the hardening of lines of division over the ensuing decades (“job reservation” which reserved the less dangerous and back-breaking trades for whites was only introduced after a massive strike in 1926).

A special category of images pertains to the Anglo-Boer war. As a nakedly imperial project on the part of Britain, the war which was aimed at the mineral wealth of the Transvaal republic, became the subject not only of newspaper cartoons but of numerous photographs and even carefully staged “documentary” films.

Rather than choosing an image from the substantial (and still growing) body of British jingoism, I have included one which shows how the Boers (from Hoopstad or “hope city” in the Northern Cape, to this day a mere smudge on the surrounding plains) used photography to reinforce a sense of identity using tropes (the wagon is perhaps the single central symbol in Afrikaner mythology) to which I have already alluded.

I have mentioned the importance of the depiction of the environment. One of the favourite uses of the camera was to record the trophies accrued through hunting. An early in my possession book (Radclyffe Dugmore 1910) is concerned precisely with the challenges of how to photograph what has since become the mass-tourist industry known as “wildlife”. One picture in the section on how to photograph lions at close quarters, is memorably captioned “The king is dead. The flash failed, so he had to be shot” (Radcluffe Dugmore p114). The lessons of safari photography were evidently well taken by my great-great uncle Fred Findlay, who used photographs to illustrate his own 1919 book on his hunting adventures. The representation of pristine nature is a relatively undiscussed field, and it continues to astonish me that the writings and pictures of Peter Beard in his *The End of the Game* have not excited more opprobrium. One can, at the very least, point out that the colonial dimensions of the project of “preservation” have of had notorious outcomes in the displacement of indigenous communities from “game reserves” into “native reserves”. R.W. “Cocky” Hahn, the renowned native commissioner in Ovamboland (northern Namibia) in the 1920’s and 1930’s, was an accomplished sportsman/hunter/photographer who used his camera with equal alacrity to depict his trophies and his native flock.

What seems striking about these images is their evident naïveté. In contrast to any claims made for the “objectivity” of the scopic regime of the pioneer photograph, they both betray the concerns of a lonely bachelor “in the veld” with striking transparency. The domestication of the hunt scene by the inclusion of the three terriers on the car, is particularly ingenuous.

3. Parallel worlds: Emerging modernity

A concern for “social reality” has of course not been absent in South African photography. It is interesting to consider its inflections. Images of poor whites are few but become notable because (and I would contend that this equally true in the case of the FSA photographs in which few blacks are visible) it is the fact that *white* people should be suffering deprivation and abjection, which is the admonitory subtext of the images. On the other hand images of the nobility and/or suffering of the natives abound. Is this because they challenge the stability of the colonial order, or offer it comfort? Certainly Martha Rosler’s injunctions against “victim photography” are pertinent.

Alfred Duggan Cronin was a mine official who began as a compound guard after emigrating to South Africa from Ireland in the early 1920’s, where he had dropped out of Jesuit seminary. During the next two decades he dressed up migrant workers in their “original” garb, and also undertook research trips around the country to capture “the native” before his (the generic pronoun is always masculinised) way of life changed. Like the coverage of “the poor white problem” (of which South Africa had its own version, bitterly compounded by the lingering aftermath of the Anglo Boer war and the scorching of the earth and mass internment employed by the British), this work was subsidised by grants from the Carnegie trust.

Michael Stevenson, the gallery proprietor who now sells several of these images, claims in his book *Surviving the Lens* that they transcend anthropological objectification. And it is true that at a time when the general white view of “natives” was one of indifference and contempt, the interest which sustained Duggan Cronin’s treks in search of his 8000 pictures might have been based at least on respect. But Duggan Cronin himself felt it necessary to defend his curiosity by declaring that he was “not a negrophile” (quote on the Kimberley museum website) like ES Curtis’s depictions of Native Americans, the pictures slot seamlessly into the library of the colonial grandee, alongside the stuffed heads of Kudu and other “proud” trophies.

In the relatively settled periods of the 1930’s and 1950’s respectively (settled only because resistance had been brutally buried) gentlemanly pictorialism flourished among amateurs. As with camera club imagery elsewhere it often featured landscapes. The most prominent practitioner in the earlier period was van Outdshoorn and in the latter Dr David Bensusan, historian of African photography and founder of the first South African museum of photography, named after himself. The imagery produced in this tradition remains the dominant mode of amateur photography in South Africa, as elsewhere in the world, and its tropes can be seen on a thousand tourist brochures.

This of course invites us to relate the “tourist gaze” to its social and political context, and to see the scopic regime on which it relies as another form of colonisation. I will say more about this in considering the representation of landscape later in this essay.

A fascinating inheritor of these many influences was the Pretoria-based photographer Constance Stuart. Her images of African people derive as much from the idealising but nevertheless “straight” pictorialism of the American West Coast school, as from ethnographic roots. Technically her pictures are supremely accomplished (at least in the same league as Weston or Strand although she worked with a Rolleiflex) and their formal elegance shows the consciousness of a world of “photography” far more sophisticated

than the soggy stuff of the salon. In terms of concerns around coloniality, her image of the Ndebele woman child is, in my mind, a particularly significant one.

The African madonna has been enduring trope in popular imagery. Indeed it remains so, not only in the souvenir statuary to be bought at airports, but in the imagery of the aid industry. This is congruent with the feminisation of “Africa”, the “mother continent” asking for our beneficent embrace. But Stuart's rendering shows a mother who is active rather than characteristically passive, imbued with dynamism and strength rather than resignation. Her relationship both with the frame through which she seems to be bursting, and the towering cloudscape behind her, both suggest an authority and possession still strikingly absent from the majority of representations of African people. I have no doubt this is not an accident. Stuart's other images, both of people and of their dwellings and the land, show consistently acute and attentive delight and are a beacon of the possible.

After the interlude of the second world war, characterised by imperial effluvia and culminating in the visit of the Royal Family in 1948, the next significant platform in South African photography was *Drum* magazine, published throughout the 1950's and reaching its most complete and coherent form in the latter half of the decade. The magazine marks a defining plateau in the depiction of urban (Johannesburg) black culture. *Drum* was owned by Jim Bailey, staffed by a mix of white and (mostly) black writers and photographers including Peter Magubane, Bob Gosani and later Ian Berry, directed exclusively at “non-whites” and with a recurring theme encouraging solidarity between Indians, “coloureds” and blacks. It was at one time edited by Tom Hopkinson after his constructive dismissal from *Picture Post* (it was he who took on Ian Berry, latterly of Magnum). While the National party had been elected on their hard apartheid platform in 1948 (“soft” and not-so-soft apartheid had existed in one form or another since the 1650's of course) the ghettoising of urban blacks and the crushing of oppositional culture and politics had yet to gather full momentum. At a time of relative prosperity, *Drum* marked a bold progressive project to include Africans into the world of post-war progress, even as the growing hedge of Apartheid laws was being cultivated to keep them out. *Drum's* visual stock in trade was the sort of bouncy imagery which had served well at *Picture Post* in its declining years. Jazz singers and “sharp” characters enjoying night-life were familiar subjects in this organ for a culture of celebrity without power, and fun without freedom.

The ambivalences around the images of women in *Drum* are noteworthy in a context where it has been customary to speak of the “triple oppression” of women by class, race and gender, and invite complex consideration around the role of women in the African community and political project. (The shifting and contested role-image of Winnie Mandela is at least as pregnant in this context as that of Diana Spencer in another). Importantly, *Drum's* was urban imagery, influenced by film noir and bebop, rather than the irredentist and nostalgia-tinged “negritude” propounded by Leopold Senghor, the poet who would later become the first prime minister of “post colonial” Senegal.

African nostalgia would come later to black South Africa, after the American TV series *Roots* took the townships by storm. But *Drum* already showed that black urbanites were looking to their “brothers” in the United States for role models, and so a secondary subsidiarity was developing among the oppressed.

Growing out of *Drum* as the political temperature rose towards 1960, was more explicitly anti-apartheid photography, notably of Ian Berry and Ernest Cole. Their work was preceded and paralleled by the record-making of Eli Weinberg. Weinberg's pictures are photographically primitive and even at times inept. But they testify to a spirit of documentation which persisted in seeing the importance of the struggles of those whom the authorities and complacent world opinion were all too keen to dismiss as mere "cheeky kaffirs".

The Congress of the People was where the African National Congress, together with its affiliates the Natal Indian Congress and the (white) Congress of Democrats, drew up their Freedom Charter which would become the basis for the constitution of the country decades and thousands of deaths later. Again in terms of this discussion (one is reminded of Sembene Ousmane's groundbreaking film *Xala*), it is the imagery which is significant, speaking of the association of "respectability and seriousness" with the suits, hats, flags and poses of a European political movement. This was far from the spontaneous "Toyitoyi" conga dances and ululations of the political movements which would erupt in the 1980's, and finally bring down the regime.

4. Towards the Mountain – the late apartheid years

The Sharpeville massacre (68 pass-law protestors shot dead by the police on 21 March 1960), marked the first show of such naked white force since the crushing of the Africans in the 19th century wars. Ian Berry's images of the day marked a moment of crisis in the apartheid project, which sparked economic crisis and a wave of emigration by liberal whites who would form the backbone of the anti-apartheid movement in Britain. They also marked the beginning of a language of photojournalism in South Africa in which the tropes of vertiginous and violent movement would dominate for decades

This was the beginning of a new phase both visually and politically, in which the outside world became hungry for images of South Africa, spurred by an either morbid or hopeful curiosity (depending on viewpoint and vested interests) as to (in RW Johnson's phrase) "how long can South Africa survive?" For the newly detached audience in Europe and primarily Britain, from whose commonwealth South Africa had been expelled on becoming a republic, this marked a "post-colonialism", or more properly "neo-colonialism" in which the former dominion became a site of spectacle. The operation of the economy of the spectacular is a topic to which I will return.

A few years later the young black photographer Ernest Cole, a protégé of Bob Gosani at *Drum*, smuggled himself and his thousands of negatives out of the country, to show black life in terms presumably too depressing for *Drum* and too raw for the government.

In fact, however, what a review of the images reveals, is not some sensational world of squalor and deprivation. Rather Cole's pictures show ordinary working class people struggling with ordinary urban lives at school, at work, in hospitals and at home, under conditions not markedly worse than those experienced by their counterparts elsewhere. Seen from this distance, the relative stability the images exude shows how very much worse circumstances have become for the majority of South Africans in the intervening four decades.

After the crisis of Sharpeville, and the imprisonment or exile of the entire leadership of the now-banned ANC, the domestic climate rapidly steadied under a pincer of economic progress and systematic repression, and the project of "separate development" proceeded apace. An important force in the late 1960's as apartheid reached its apogee, was what one might call the aesthetics of triumph. The dominant organ for this, which lay in every dentist's waiting room, was the government-sponsored glossy magazine *South African Panorama*. The imagery associated with this draws on bold colours, often the orange of the land and the blue of the sky in which a tower of white cumulus would neatly create the colours of the "oranje, blanje, blauw" of the national flag. This was an era of science, progress, and building – huge irrigation dams, a nuclear reactor, vast townships of matchbox houses. *Panorama* used imagery which, like the engineering programmes themselves, echoed the optimism of the New Deal or the Five Year Plan, and whose dynamism and cleanliness was reminiscent of Rodchenko and Bourke-White. It presented a country of golden beaches, glowing sunsets, and plump shining natives with perfect smiles. I do not have copies or access to images from this, but when I typed "South African panorama" into Google, hits came up for South African airways and other tourism-related sites. The imagery of the "good life" remains essentially unchanged.

In my teenage years we were bombarded with a radio jingle which celebrated "Bravleis, rugby, sunny skies and Chevrolet" (braaivlies, or barbecue, was the suburban hangover of that pastoral idyll, the outspan). This was the normalisation of white South African lifestyles on quasi-American models. But the 1960's also marked the triumph of Afrikanerdom, and the return from second-class status to which the Afrikaners had been consigned after the Boer war. Under a new republic the old wounds between "die volk" and "die rooinekke" (the red-necks i.e. English speakers) were supposed to dissolve as we made "our" South Africa together while the Africans had "their" patchwork homelands. An Obie Oberholzer image, albeit shot decades later, suggests something of the sensibility.

I include this image because a singular aspect of the "coloniality" of latter-day South Africa has been the fact of white denial. The "good life" of high apartheid was achieved by a process of systematic exclusion of people of colour, except in strictly structured roles of servitude which seemed to naturalise obliviousness to essential connections. Is this an analogue of current global conditions in which (apart from the sunshine and the physiques) the revellers pictured by Oberholzer might be any group of sales reps on an office outing?

Throughout the 1960's and 1970's, however, David Goldblatt, more or less unsupported and barely tolerated domestically, though profitably admired and employed by his international clients, had been working on the "in-between" spaces of the Apartheid project. His first monograph *Some Afrikaners Photographed* (1975), came from his own concerns. As he explained to me "I wanted to understand the character of the people who could produce a policeman who would sjambok (bullwhip) a black child one day, only to dive into a raging stream to save his life the next" (conversation with Goldblatt: September 1999). In the context of concerns over coloniality, his choice of subject, while arising professionally from playing to the international curiosity which I have mentioned, seems to me to be quite visionary. As the complexities of the South African situation become ever clearer it is the Afrikaners, that "white tribe" who called themselves Africans, who lie close to its most intractable and contradictory issues. As recently as 2001, the poet Antjie Krog has written in her magnificent book on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, *Country of My Skull* (2001), about the defensive shame felt by herself and her Afrikaner family as the atrocities of apartheid were laid bare. At the same time, however, she writes of a sense of connection to ancestral lands which is a source of fierce pride. Even as someone who grew up in a family of thoroughly anglicised Afrikaners, this is something with which I can identify. I mention these feelings because they are perhaps not dissimilar to the mixture of shame and pride felt by other Africans as they face serial condescension and humiliation at the hands of the "developed" world.

Two images from the Goldblatt book must suffice to give a sense of its address to the contradictions it contains. Both are famous and require little further commentary. Goldblatt himself has explained the tragedy (this is very much the proper word) involved in the progression from childhood affection to adult suspicion. The justly famous image of the boy with his nanny (about which Mark Durden wrote in his review of the recent Goldblatt retrospective in Oxford) is perhaps a key to the anger and bewilderment felt by Afrikaners at what they have collectively wrought.

A contributing factor to the power of Goldblatt's imagery is, like Constance Stuart's, delight in the tactile and visual quality of things. Beyond cliché he shows a world

ineluctably complex, reminding me of WB Yeats' description in lapis Lazuli of the artist's "Gaiety transfiguring all that dread" or of Paul Strand's injunction that the first avenue to photographic value is to "love one's own country". For South Africans that is a challenge indeed.

A second venture into a similar "proximate" area of documentation (and we need to remember that this was itself radical at a time when for the most part documentary meant "big stories" "out there"), Goldblatt's *In Boksburg* showed the banality and ugly absurdity of the white South African suburban "lifestyle" which had become the official religion. Goldblatt's photographic language in this project is stripped of all residues of softness and has become almost brutal in its directness and renunciation of pictorial nicety. Considering the time in which it was made, and the isolation in which he was working, this is in itself a profound act of courage. It pays no heed to "accessibility" but demands that the images be read with all one's faculties. For me this project feels almost unbearably "how it really was", and reminds me that Goldblatt continues to assert that his pictures are made to be understood by other South Africans, and not to pander to a world market. This is a gesture of defiance not only in the face of the specious normalisation of white culture at the time but of temptations to represent South Africa in clichés of "otherness" for world consumption. This makes it, for me, not merely an "anti-colonial" project, but perhaps uniquely for a South African photographer, a "non-colonial" one. That is to say that local and national particularity has for Goldblatt become, as his friend Nadine Gordimer said of apartheid – "not my theme, but my life!" It is a certain total immersion in the particular, and a dedication to give its due to the last gram without inflection or prettification, that allows these artists to move towards universality.

However, if this implies a claim to saintly purism on Goldblatt's part, it is it is worth remembering that many of the images in *Afrikaners* were made for the *Tatler* magazine and that, according to Michael Godby in his essay in Goldblatt's recent retrospective book, "David Goldblatt had long regarded London as the effective cultural capital of South Africa and, at the beginning of his professional career, he continued to submit work to English publications". (Goldblatt 2001, p411). This observation invites a subtler consideration of the coloniality of Goldblatt's work and non-tribal South African culture in general. Is he distinguished merely because he has more successfully mastered the currency and sensibilities of international perspectives? Is this a way out of the colonial vice, by "passing for internationality" much as a mulatto "passes for white"? Or is it merely an indication of the facticity of the limiting terms of nation and identity and the essential communality of culture, especially as we race toward globalisation? The same might be asked of the new generation of South African photographers (whom I will mention later) who have become such regular winners of prestigious international awards.

A possible further inflection is that Goldblatt is a white South African of Jewish descent. So is Gordimer, with whom he collaborated on their book *On the Mines*. I have not asked Goldblatt about whether "Jewishness", as a member of an "other" group, played a part in his tangential relationship with white South African values. In a BBC radio interview Gordimer denied that it was material to her and those in her circle. (BBC Radio 3: 18 October 1998) But I suspect that the consciousness of being descendents of a subject people and a vast diaspora, and consequently accidental survivors of a European cataclysm, must somewhere give them a sense of "belonging" which is different from those (like me) brought up on myths of ancestral and aristocratic bonding with "my

country". In this respect they are in fact precursors of the current "postmodern" and "post-colonial" diaspora, but without its characteristic cynicism and aporia.

Another important voice at this time was the renowned photographer Peter Magubane. Magubane's book *Soweto* (1978) was the first comprehensive "insider" view of black life since Ernest Cole, and his pictures of life among the oppressed communities provide a vital historical record.

Indeed Magubane has said "History has always inspired and motivated me. I want to leave history to the people. Documentation is Important". ("Magubane: a legend in his time" – www.saphoto.co.za/pages/magubane/html). Notable is that while he speaks of "the people" he does not do so in racial terms. In fact he pays tribute to the photographers from whom he learned at *Drum* and cites 'The Family of Man' exhibition as an important inspiration. This is worth mentioning because of course the process of encounter which occurs across national and cultural borders calls into question some of the rigidities and negative associations of coloniality, and shows how progressive and liberating that encounter can be. (V.G Kiernan's study on Imperialism shows how it has often been a progressive historical force).

5. The forge of the struggle: photojournalism on the frontline

As the next (and finally unstoppable) anti-apartheid struggle grew from its beginnings in the Durban strikes in 1973 and the Soweto school riots of 1976, photojournalism again seized the high ground. In 1982, the agency Afrapix was formed to send images of the struggle around the world. This was perhaps the first true indigenous collective of “concerned photographers” who brought to their work more sophisticated political sensibilities than the average newshound. The collective played a leading role in shaping the social documentary photography tradition and in documenting the popular struggle’s of the 1980’s, and was, perhaps the single truly “anti-colonial” body of photographers the country has seen.

Especially significant among their number was the agency’s co-founder Omar Badsha. Badsha’s political activism began in the early sixties while at high school. He was in the forefront of all the major anti-apartheid campaigns in Natal and the Western Cape for close on 38 years and underwent periods of detainment, harassment and was denied of a passport for close on 25 years after the banning of one of his books.

In the early 1970’s, he was one of the small but influential group of activists instrumental in reviving the progressive trade union movement. He was involved in the establishment of the Trade Union Advisory and Co-ordinating Council (TUACC), which was the forerunner of COSATU. He was also responsible for organising chemical workers and served as the first secretary of the Chemical Workers Industrial Union in 1974.

Badsha moved to Cape Town in 1987 to establish the Center of Documentary Photography at the University of Cape Town. In the Cape, he was one of the founding members and chairperson of the Cultural Workers Congress, an affiliate of the United Democratic Front (UDF). After the unbanning of the ANC, Badsha served in a number of capacities in the ANC and was a head of the ANC Western Cape Department of Arts & Culture. He is now head of the NGO, SAhistory.

In the 1980’s Badsha headed the photographic unit of the Second Carnegie Inquiry into Poverty and Development in Southern Africa and he then edited a catalogue to accompany the exhibition *South Africa: The Cordoned Heart*. In 1984 Badsha’s book *Imijondolo* on life in the massive informal settlements of Inanda, outside Durban, was published. More recently he has published *Imperial Ghetto*, a book of photographs of the Indian community in the Durban area. As the title implies, coloniality is very much the explicit concern of the book.

I cite Badsha’s biography in some detail (the facts come from www.sahistory.org.za/pages/people/badsha-o2.htm) because he stands in many ways as an example of the socially committed intellectual of a kind whom we do not generally encounter in Britain. He is a singular “anti-colonial” photogrpaher/activist who, by all accounts, would not see that the time for the passing away of that stance has yet come.

Badsha’s collection *Imijondolo* explores the life of the shantytowns which were beginning to encircle South African cities, and shows a sensibility far removed from the cosy ethnography of dignified or indigent natives.

Like *Imojondolo*, *Imperial Ghetto* uses a photographic language of restrained sophistication, maintaining a reserve and distance from its subjects and concentrating on the

accumulation of detail. These are contemplative pictures and ask to be met in a similar spirit.

While these images show the interstices of South African life beyond the world of the headlines, it is worth remembering that throughout the "struggle years" popular magazines purveyed images of the desirable life. With television becoming as much a national addiction as in other countries, *Dallas* became a narrative paradigm, and the progressive Americanisation of culture accelerated among all sectors of the population (but among whites especially). A market survey at the height of the anti apartheid struggle in 1987 revealed that most urban black South Africans rated as their primary need, above education and well before "liberation", "a house with a concrete fence".

Superficially, what Magubane's image shows is of course a coloniality of the spirit, a submissive moment in the consumerist war for hearts and minds (in J.F. Kennedy's famous phrase). But compared to the difficulty of even imagining alternatives, who could begrudge those who "bought in" to it? What makes the image especially poignant for me, is both the lyricism of the landscape rising behind the young woman and her "people's car" (incidentally the run-away favourite model among the white-collar Afrikaner right wing at the time), and the fence which separates her from it.

In the later period of the 1980's and early 1990's photojournalism assumed unprecedented dominance. Ken Oosterbroek, who was killed in 1994 when photographing a gunfight between poorly trained troops and revolutionary thugs in the township of Katlehong, was an example of a new breed of photojournalist who "went after" pictures which fetched unprecedented sums on an international market spellbound by the tightrope-walk of apartheid's end.

Among this cohort were Greg Marinovitch and Joao da Silva, who co-authored a successful book about the period, *The Bang Bang Club*, and Kevin Carter who committed suicide after winning a Pulitzer prize for his picture of a dying Somali child attended by a waiting vulture. As incidental as these events and deaths may seem, they are also inescapably part of a global news economy which uses the sufferings of "other" worlds for the delectation of readers and viewers in the rich enclaves of the globe. In this sense they can be seen as consequences of an undeclared and perhaps unrealised specular, and spectacular, "neo-colonialism" to which I have alluded. Another side of this coin, however was the leverage afforded by the fact that the internationalisation of imagery through the media meant that young township activists could be sure of a world-wide audience for their petrol bombs or sufferings.

6. Alterities and ambiguities: photographic genres and their potential meanings within the South African context

In considering the imagery of the past decade, I would like to briefly address three "typical" photographic categories; landscape, portraiture, and reportage.

Landscape

As JM Coetzee has shown in the title article of his collection *White Writing*, early representations of the South African landscape were concerned with how the rough, abrasive, resistant land could be accommodated into the seigniorial tropes of the European picturesque with their emphasis on leading lines of perspective and the positioning of the proprietorial viewer. This "untamed" zone under flat harsh light, could if at all be more easily associated with the tradition of the sublime, with its sense of unfathomable mystery (my grandfather, a friend of Colonel Stevenson Hamilton who founded the Kruger park, used to say of the bush "this is my church"), but it would have to be a zen-like sublime.

The difficulty of developing an adequate visual language (especially photographic) to account for the hard light and flat planes of the South African environment may account for the fact that landscape is so surprisingly under-represented in "serious" South African photography. As a consequence, the discourses around it have not evolved much beyond the ubiquitous postcard, which has continued to reign unopposed. The genre was dominated by amateur pictorialism, notably AR van Outdshoorn in the 1920's and Will Till in the 1930's, with Dr Bensusan contributing in the 1950s, at which time there was also a notable society of Chinese (South African) photographers in Johannesburg, working in a more graphic urban style. Dr Bensusan's history of African photography published in 1966, mentions the importnace of this group without any sense of the oddness of its racialised nature. (Bensusan 1966, p96)

Again, as in so many other areas , it was David Goldblatt who began to explore the landscape more subtly as a site of potential social meaning. His inclusion of landscapes in *Some Afrikaners Photographed* engaged with the pathetic fallacy enabled by depictions redolent of forces both within and surrounding the inhabitants. An example is the image of a shadowed wall on a Karoo farm. Stalked by shadows, both enclosing and forbidding, the wall skirts laterally across a zone as a gesture of ultimately futile but nevertheless implacable control. Seen thus, the image becomes in itself a visionary and prescient comment on the nature of a people who remain uneasy and tenuous settlers, however grimly they assert their belonging.

An interesting exception to the neglect of landscape as a "respectable" subject in South African photography, is a coffee-table project produced by the aerial photographer Johan Potgieter. Potgieter made his trade photographing aircraft (he was killed when the Swiss Pilatus plane he was travelling in on its delivery flight to South Africa, ploughed into Mount Kenya). His book has an introduction by the eminence of claims to entitlement, the famous 1820-settler descendent and poet of place professor Guy Butler. It shows a corporeal land devoid of any but the picturesque markings of mechanised agriculture, and with a very few exceptions (a couple of throbbing industrial views) the only signs of actual human presence are lonely homesteads or other symbols of a hardy pioneering spirit. This is again a form of very selective inscription, as selective as the apartheid

system which so cleverly hid the vast majority of the population from the immediate view of a minority which could swoop about the carefully placed highways in manufactured ignorance. (Unfortunately the images are too large for me to scan for illustration in this essay)

More recently Obie Oberholzer has produced a series of highly coloured travel books in which a surrealist sensibility invites his readers to see the “funny-peculiar” or “happy-sad” side of the African condition.

The satirical nature of these images suggests that under post apartheid the effort to naturalise the relationship with the land which has occupied white South Africans since the time of settlement, is gradually being abandoned, and what is appearing instead is a cultivation of an “expat” sensibility, in which the comforts of home and compound are bases from which to enjoy a specular relationship with the absurd, touching, and peculiar (urban or rural) “jungle out there”. The corollary of environment-as-spectacle (think of adventure programming on TV) is that the viewer is invited to imagine a “home” subtended in a polar elsewhere. Perhaps for white South Africans today this within the heavily alarmed walled communities with names lifted from the British home counties, in which so many now live.

Portraiture

If land can be a site of highly selective rendering and inscription (and the primary zone of claims to belonging) current debates around the “post-modern body” have shown that portraiture, once assumed to offer a window on the unified soul and subject, is equally a zone of ambivalence and uncertainty, marked and interpolated by vectors of social and technological power. Robert Sobieszek's *The Ghost in the Shell* explores portraiture, beginning with ethnography (and including Thiessen's *Native Woman*) and concluding with Warhol, Cindy Sherman, and the performance artist Orlan (who submits herself to successive plastic surgery), in quest of the persistence of belief in the power of the human face to reveal meanings.

And certainly this belief does persist. I remember the shock of discovery when I first opened a Durban reference-library copy of the book *The Kafirs Illustrated* (1849) by the early 19th century explorer George French Angas and saw, in his studies of “Hottentots”, the very faces I had come to know working in the timber plantations of the Southern Cape. But the meanings revealed to me were not ones of character, but history. My school books had told me that the “Cape Coloureds” were the descendents of Malay slaves and racial mixing between early settlers and blacks. Of the further fate of the “Hottentots” (otherwise known as the Khoi Khoi – is an “academic” name less offensive than the onomatopoeia of a settler label based on their click-based language?) whom the Dutch had encountered when they settled the Cape in the 17th century, nothing was said. And yet here they were before me, the people I worked with and whose ignorance of their own past was even more profound than mine! An entire sense of historic entitlement lay between the difference between a “bastard nation” (in the phrase of president de Klerk's wife Marike) and the ur-people of the region, millennial precursors of negro and European alike, and I began to understand something of the power of persistent narrative. So at its most basic the portrait can be a statement of presence – like graffiti it proclaims “I was here”.

On the other hand, of course, it can be a means to subjection under “the gaze” of the camera/viewer. Angas no doubt intended the latter. Indeed S. Klopper has claimed that

“The wide-spread tendency to accept the accuracy of Angas' lithographs for *The Kafirs Illustrated* is predicated on his meticulous attention to detail in the depiction of exotic materials and artefacts. Yet no attempt has been made to verify these images either through an examination of the internal evidence afforded by *The Kafirs Illustrated*, or with reference to other documents of the period. Using this evidence, and comparing one of Angas' final compositions with two carefully annotated sketches made in the field, the author demonstrates that his lithographs of the Zulu often distort the material reality of their lives. Thus, although many of the inaccuracies in his works can be ascribed to aesthetic considerations, the changes introduced in his finished compositions are not as innocent as they may seem at first sight. Coupled with Angas' reliance on various conventions of representation, they point to the fact that *The Kafirs Illustrated* was a commercial venture, produced with the intention of revealing the barbaric 'otherness' of the Zulu, while conforming to the moral and therefore aesthetic restraints placed on artists working in England in the mid-nineteenth century. In the final analysis, Angas' images for *The Kafirs Illustrated* are thus a more reliable record of the aesthetic concerns, cultural assumptions and imperialist aspirations of his own society, than they are a document of the people they purport to depict.” (abstract of paper on <http://sunsite.wits.ac.za/saaah/abstract.htm#geo>)

As I have mentioned, Duggan Cronin's portraits are broadly in the same tradition. More recent portraiture of South Africans shows how politically inflected the genre is, and how complex this inflection can be.

Paul Alberts is and was a highly respected "progressive" photographer whose *The Borders of Apartheid* offers a moving, tough, unsentimental, complex, and aesthetically rich portrayal of the absurd and tragic "homeland" of Bophutatswana. In *Camera*, Alberts' book on (mostly Afrikaner, mostly white) artists and intellectuals is "excellent" photography, showing, as no doubt did the subjects, a confident sense of Eurocentric culture and iconography. This shows the "cultured" Afrikaners themselves to be a "comprador" community, deriving their touchstones from the classical canon (classical learning was much prized among Afrikaner intellectuals and served as a claim to heritage and cultural lineage).

Notable among this collection is the air of melancholia which pervades these supposedly "successful" people. One must remember that enlightened Afrikaners abjured the folly, and predicted the end, of apartheid for many years. One is reminded again of the danger of interpretation and the fluidity of representational meaning.

More ordinarily, portraiture which appeared in the popular media presented a strictly racialised aesthetic. This has not dissipated. The single exception was *Drum* magazine, which while it showed exclusively black subjects to a black readership, did so in a pictorial language which played directly against comfortable notions of "difference". But categories endure. Ten years after the assumption of power by the ANC, the April 2003 wedding picture of "Heidi and Sean", which I viewed on the website of Durban wedding photographer Aidan Jameson, shows that within the gated suburbs of white South Africa, post-colonial "hybridity" may be further away than imagined, and the imaginary power of the eurocentric "classical" undimmed.

A significant publication for photography, with David Goldblatt at one time its picture editor, was *Leadership*. Founded by Hugh Murray, who brokered the first meeting of big business with the ANC in the early 1980's, it was a shrewd though finally impractical attempt to appeal to the self-interest of the corporate mindset in contributing first to the

abolition of apartheid and then to the building of a viable (for capitalism) new South Africa. Murray explained his strategy to me very much in terms of the creation of charismatic images, and portraiture was central to the project. This no doubt astutely acknowledged the motive of vanity, which sustains many of “the successful”. More tellingly, the iconography in the magazine shows a shift in the locus of image authority away from Europe to America – within this community the American corporate brochure had become the template of achievement, just as the Harvard business school had displaced Oxbridge as the entry card of preference.

The masculinism of this culture is amply demonstrated in the preferred style of portraiture. But the sense of a changing climate into which Leadership tapped, is exemplified by Antonij Rupert, scion of what is now a global tobacco and drinks empire, who as early as 1983 pleaded in vain with the “great crocodile” as PW Botha was known, to formally renounce apartheid.

Again, however, it is David Goldblatt who provides portraits which are both intensely and consciously political and which attend to some of the sophistications, complexities, and wider potentials of the genre.

For me, young Matjee with his broken arms is at least as important and iconic a symbol of the apartheid struggle as Walker Evans’ “Mrs Gudger” (Ellie Mae Burrows) or Lange’s Migrant Mother are of the depression.

More recently, portraiture has been used by Jillian Edelstein in her treatment of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Edelstein began working as a press photographer in Johannesburg before emigrating to London in 1985. She has worked as a freelance photographer since 1986, and has received a number of awards including the Visa d’Or at the International Festival of Photojournalism in Perpignan in 1997. As an antidote to representations in a “photojournalism” mode, she used a 4x5 camera to make portraits of those appearing before the hearings, either in testimony to wrongs suffered or in search of amnesty for those committed.

Edelstein’s portraits, I feel, are particularly illuminating of the tensions of the moment and the fragile relations between people and one another, and people and their own sense of self, which still prevail. In this respect, the lack of ingratiation or anxiety evident in several of the portraits suggests both a new moment in the picturing of Africans by white people, and a welcome realisation of more fluid figurations of power.

Jackie Nickerson, an American fashion photographer, merits inclusion in this study because of the way she has chosen to use the portrait as her primary documentary vehicle in Southern Africa. Her imagery emphasises the “dignity” of the indigent farmworkers she pictures, whose rags and makeshift coverings are turned into fashion items. The images are bleached and selectively colour printed so as to look hand tinted.

Is this post-modern, post-colonial, or merely imperial? (And why does the book contain no mention that the tea-plantation workers earn an average of fifty pounds per year?)

The most significant practitioner working more or less exclusively in documentary portraiture in South Africa at present is another American, Roger Ballen. Ballen, whose mother worked for Magnum in New York where he also studied photography, has been settled in South Africa (he is a geologist) for over two decades. His work has evolved from pictures of small towns (*Dorps* 1986) via Arbus-like portraits of the grotesque

underclass of rural Afrikanerdom (*Platteland* 1995) to staged portraits of the same class of people, often with animals and/or domestic companions (*Outland* 2001).

Ballen's imagery has provoked heated debate but is widely admired, and will be the subject of a forthcoming photopoche from the illustrious Robert Delpire. Is his disavowal of the sanctimonious and embrace of the grotesque a celebration of the new freedoms possible in South Africa, or a commentary on the vanity of all human endeavour?

Reportage

The final category I wish briefly to discuss is reportage. In considering the place and nature of photojournalism in recent and contemporary South African photography, it becomes clear that the social and political conditions of the past two decades have been a breeding ground for an extraordinary cadre of photographers. Among them are Jodi Bieber, Gideon Mendel, Jill Edelstein, Juhan Kuus, David Lurie, Paul Weinberg, Andrew Tshabangu, Santu Mofokeng, Guy Tillim, and many others.

One of the most successful is Jodi Bieber. She has lived in Johannesburg for the past 35 years, and studied photography at the Market Theatre photographic workshop, a non-profit organisation founded by David Goldblatt. Her career began in September 1993 as a darkroom assistant at the Star Newspaper under the guidance of Ken Oosterbroek, and Bieber freelanced for that newspaper until 1996. She covered the historical period leading up to and during the first democratic elections in South Africa winning numerous South African Press Awards. In 1996 she began freelancing for foreign magazines and newspapers, and for the past 8 years has worked on a various personal projects in South Africa. Most of her projects are based in Africa however her assignment to Pakistan encouraged a long-term interest in that country.

She has been awarded 7 World Press Photographic Awards including four 1st Prizes. Images from Bieber's portfolio show her compatibility with international visual modes.

Apart from an intensity and closeness of participation there is nothing within her photographic style to indicate a particular local or national sensibility, or to situate her work anywhere but within accepted forms of gritty photojournalism. But the engagement and courage with which she has covered stories on youth gangs, illegal migrants, and other marginal groups, shows that she is fully adapted to the post-apartheid climate and finds its many dramas at least as compelling as “the struggle” was for her elders.

Guy Tillim is another notable photographer, working within the field of photojournalism without losing a very particular and personal approach, which has crossed over into the more esoteric realms of fine art. For example the South African National Gallery commissioned him to produce a portfolio of photographs on the Transkei region, and his work on Cuito, Angola debuted at the Gallery in April 2001, and then travelled to Paris. Tillim has recently photographed child soldiers in Sierra Leone for South African History Online. The photographs, taken in July 2001, are both penetrating and intimate, and display Tillim's distinctive aesthetic, which is characterised by obliquity and a demand that the reader bring active consideration to bear.

Not only the pan-African nature of Tillim's concerns but the nature of his images and patronage all speak of a climate unimaginable before the end of apartheid when he was an active member of Afrapix.

Gideon Mendel, a documentary photographer whose groundbreaking work on social issues such as AIDS has received extensive international recognition, has recently signed a representation agreement with Corbis. He has been based in London since the mid 1990's and has earned six World Press Awards, the POY Canon Photo Essay Award, The Eugene Smith Award for Humanistic Photography, and others.

His book entitled 'A Broken Landscape-HIV and AIDS in Africa' has recently been published in conjunction with Action Aid. Mendel's images remain strong but show how the nature of the international marketplace creates a "talent drain", especially as more young photographers enter the market and none can develop the relationships of exclusivity with clients once enjoyed by David Goldblatt. In this sense he is a genuinely "post-colonial" photographer, like so many others from subordinate nations around the world.

David Lurie, a former lecturer in economics, began doing documentary projects on a part time basis in 1990, and full time in 1995 following the publication of his book *Life in the Liberated Zone*. His images of post-apartheid Cape Town challenge cosy notions of would-be expats looking at colour supplement images and reading about low house prices. Lurie reminds us that for the vast majority of South Africans, apartheid has ended in name only.

The above are of course only a very few of a large number of active photojournalists. What the examples show, I hope, is that for this area of photography the pressures and conditions which led to its flowering in the 1980's have not been missed. The traditions of concern and engagement remain strong, and as Africa and the rest of the world open to South Africans, the passions which drove them to take up photography continue to burn.

7. Towards the “postcolonial” - issues, opportunities, and false dawns

If the foregoing rather arbitrary set of thumbnail portraits suggests that the imagery of contemporary South Africa is dominated by avant garde photojournalism, this is not so. In the first place it is worth remembering that representations of the physical environment continue by “lifestyle” magazines which offer for the most part a carefully de-nationalised promise of aspiration. Again it is David Goldblatt who has most presciently addressed the materiality of culture and the way structures reveal the mindsets of their builders. His *The Structures of Things Then* takes the objectivity of the new topographics (via the Dusseldorf school) and applies it to public and vernacular structures. The result is revelatory and troubling.

What these images show is that the complex of encounters, ideas, feelings and beliefs which gave rise to the South African predicament and to apartheid in particular, have by no means become “old news”. Much still needs to be explained and the land is rich in revelatory potential.

Indeed an important shift in the photographic landscape has been the opening up of categories. I have alluded to the imbrications of gender and race, and indeed landscape, in the colonial imaginary. The contradictions, ambivalences, and obliquities experienced by white as members of a subordinate group within a (still) dominant racial order, are a rich field for passionate enquiry. Little wonder that the relations between gender and other forms of social and political construction have been the subject of extensive practice within South African art schools, and that several notable figures make use of photography.

Among them, for example, Penny Siopis, who is primarily a painter (and a professor at the University of Witwatersrand) uses photography to explore issues around feminisation and the ambiguities of the female body.

Jean Brundrit has explicitly linked gender and sexuality to other forms of social formation and her lesbian imagery makes direct connections between patriarchy and other forms of surveillance. As the image below shows, her concerns are aligned to contemporary concerns with the “postmodern body” and have little obvious direct connection with a national context. However the relation between the physical and geographic corporealities of the colonial context, make Brundrit’s work closely engaged with concerns alluded to earlier in this essay about the mapping of the female/conquered, and the possibilities for self- or counter-inscription.

Jane Alexander, a renowned sculptor, has also worked extensively in photography. Her images are montages which can be classed within what Jennifer Law has called “new surrealism” (Law 2002). Like her sculptures they offer richly disturbing and oblique meditations on the forces driving South African history, and emphasise the factitious and overlaid nature of its culture.

Alexander’s conjunction of Steve Biko, a symbol of martyrdom, with lines of power vanishing across an empty landscape, a billboard with the doubled image of a woman who seems as though she is advertising soap or prayer, and two indifferent figures (the blind leading the blind?) could simply not have been attempted in the “for or against” oppositional climate of the struggle. Like the work of Brundrit and Siopis, it suggests that

far from descending into complacency, (white) female artists are using photography in the “new South Africa” to explore the complexities of their conjuncture with unprecedented subtlety.

In the “post colonial” context of the “New” South Africa more conventional photographers, freed from the ANC inspired “cultural boycott” and (for whites) disdain or (for blacks) condescending pity, have been able to explore a wide range of approaches and to place themselves in a newly favourable international market. While for some (such as Jodi Bieber) this has led to an exponential growth of potential, for others it has meant loss of focus, opportunity, or both. For example, Paul Weinberg, who was an important co-founder of Afrapix together with Omar Badsha, has remained in Durban and has had to resort to soft photojournalism for the lifestyle press, and corporate work. In fact it may be the very “accessibility” of his images which has led him down this route, as much as his undeniable commitment to the land and locality. This is a sort of bonding which harks back to the themes raised in the early part of this essay – and the perhaps essentially nostalgic nature of a certain kind of patriotism.

One of the direct consequences of post-apartheid South Africa’s re-incorporation into the international community after decades of pariahship has been its rapid ascendancy in the global art market. One of the beneficiaries has been Zwelethu Mthethwa. Mthethwa has exhibited in South Africa; the USA (Los Angeles, Chicago, New York, Houston, Miami, Washington DC, Tuscon and Santa Fe); Italy (San Sebastiano, Rome, Venice, Torino, and Milan); Spain (Madrid and Barcelona); Germany (Koln, Hamburg, Ottobrunn, and Dusseldorf); France (Paris, Nice, Lille, and Dijon); Switzerland (Basel, Davos, Geneva, Zurich, and Bern); the UK (London); Singapore; Slovak Republic (Bratslava); Ivory Coast (Abidjan); Norway (Oslo); Sweden (Stockholm and Goteborg); Senegal (Dakar); Japan (Tokyo); Netherlands (Rotterdam and Apeldoorn); Belgium (Brussels and Camouflage); Luxembourg; Ghana (Accra); Australia (Perth, Sydney); Brazil (Sao Paulo); Korea (Seoul, Pusan); and Iceland (Reykjavik).

His portraits of shanty-dwellers inside their houses are only one arm of his work (he also paints and draws) but are included here because they show the subtle appreciation of how people make their lives from the hand-me-downs of commercial culture, in a way which is quite unselfconsciously post-modern.

A photographer who comes more from the tradition of photojournalism, Santu Mofokeng, once a member of Afrapix and now represented by Southphotos, has moved on from his early studies of township life and religious rituals, to work mainly in an area of gnomic landscape, with mysteriously bleak and beautiful prints exhibited at Documenta in September 2002, and offered for sale in places such as the Kathe Kollwitz gallery. On the face of it with their restrained formality there is nothing particularly South African, let alone “black” about these images and they blend seamlessly into the reserved and straight-laced world of prestigious European art.

If this implies loss of identity, Mofokeng might be said to have become “post colonial” in both a positive and negative sense. But when one discovers that the images in question address the holocaust and that Mofokeng is concerned with the way that genocidal tendencies parallel the South African experience both under apartheid and before that, during the British internment of Boer women and children, one realises that what is in fact happening is a process not of “assimilation” but of maturation. Becoming a member of a world community is enabling Mofokeng to enrich his understanding of his own national past, and to share that enriched vision.

In a different but not less interesting way, Graeme Williams has moved away from photojournalism to explore the more metaphoric potential of photography in *The Inner City*. This is a body of work concerned again primarily with landscape, but this time the urban back yards and streets of Johannesburg.

On the other hand Peter Magubane's *African Renaissance* shows some of the problems which can occur when the hated object of one's passion disappears. Although Nadine Gordimer heatedly denies that "post apartheid" has robbed her of her themes, and avers that there is still just as much to write about as before, Magubane seems suddenly to have become a pander to African-American led sentimentality about the "auld country" and is in fact part of a process of true post-colonial reversion. His images are now firmly part of a portmanteau of *National Geographic* style sentimentality. His introduction on the *Cultures on the Edge* website (which is styled very much as an ethnographic museum) reads: "With political, social and economic changes transforming South Africa, the age-old ways of life bound to ethnic cultures of the region are slowly fading. These images reveal the ways of the indigenous groups, recording the roots of South African Cultural Identity. Tribes featured include the Ndebele, Ntwana, Xhosa and Zulu."

This betrays a reification of tribal identity which few South Africans experience except as part of an internal culture of recuperation. Like roast beef or maypole dancing, it is heritage culture. The interesting questions, then, concern its ideological functions. Magubane himself says "Africa has been fully documented by outsiders, but I felt that South Africa should be documented by South Africans and not foreigners, and I am glad to be able to do it. I really enjoy documenting cultures. Traditional life is a different world; there is happiness, love, beauty, open space, and a slow tempo. It is different from just walking in and 'clicking' away as you would do in the city - this kind of work requires introductions, speaking to the people, and entering their lives. In my entire career, it is this work - and the people I'm dealing with now - that stands out the most." (Magubane website). But as Sam Radithlalo has asked "At what point, therefore, are we to talk of African Renaissance when the camera can now re-colonise the African?" (Radithlalo 2002 p10)

In fact the picture I have chosen is even more complex. Without wanting to question Magubane's sincerity (and he has after all paid his dues in solitary confinement and buckshot wounds, as well as a vast body of seminal imagery) The picture is titled "Zulu tribe" but it in fact shows the minister of the interior and head of the Inkatha Freedom Party Gatsha Mangosuthu Buthelezi (centre) flanked by King Goodwill Zwelethini on his left. The last (and only) time I met and interviewed Buthelezi in early 1988, he was the chief minister of the Kwazulu "homeland", wearing a pin-striped suit and a University of Cape Town tie, and describing as "bullshit" suggestions that Inkatha was behind the factional violence directed against the UDF and Cosatu who were spearheading the struggle against apartheid in Pietermaritzburg. The signature above mine in his visitors' book in the oak-panelled boardroom of the Kwazulu "parliament" was that of brigadier Jac Buchner, the notorious head of the security police in the region, who was later revealed as the instigator of the murder of some of my comrades. Suffice to say that "Zuluness" was even then a foil for patriarchal traditionalism shoring up a class of state-funded hereditary chiefs in the apartheid "homeland", and these tendencies have if anything intensified in the uncertainties of the "post colonial" conjuncture. King Goodwill has meanwhile become known for the number of accidents suffered by his fleet of Mercedes cars.

But if the grosser forms of tourist kitsch have now overtaken the imagery of the new South Africa destined for world consumption, post-modernity and the induction into the global imaginary have shown themselves in other, perhaps less pernicious, ways.

Wendy Ewald's extensive projects with children making their own images has included young South Africans. And it is from among them that one sees both the residue of old attitudes, and their genuine transcendence.

Santu Mofokeng has conducted a substantial project of recuperation in bringing into view the family albums of black South Africans, and this image from Ewald's project is a sign that photography has been, and may increasingly become, not merely the alienating means of surveillance and narrative from "above" but, at least for an emerging urban middle class, the everyday vehicle for personal and particular affections, memories, and bonds.

Another welcome manifestation was the Cape Town Month of Photography held in 2002 under the leadership of Geoffrey Grundlingh, who lectures in the University of Cape Town's school of art, and Michael Godby who is professor of art history. (Grundlingh's wife Kathleen is curator of photographs at the National Gallery in Cape Town). This festival marks a moment of increasing "sophistication" and self-consciousness in South African photography. Ten years after the release of Mandela, it is the project of a firmly globalised academic regime. The aesthetics of internationalism mean that most of the images could as easily have emerged from Latin America or elsewhere, as from South Africa, and this is of course both a promise and a threat. But among them are an abundance of highly sophisticated images, which show an awareness of the medium and the technical means to exercise it. Certainly the catalogue (which admittedly contains many highly established photographers alongside those less known) presents a sense of "photography" on an altogether superior plane of sophistication, not to mention vitality, to the usual collective show (student, amateur or professional) in this country.

Meanwhile debate in South Africa around photography, and indeed around the topic of coloniality, has become sophisticated and fully "worldly". Whether such openness to the self-referential and often cynically narcissistic "wider world" of culture and practice will produce a body of work as fascinating and moving as that engendered by the bitter years (or should that be centuries?), remains to be seen.

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