

AFRAPIX
SOCIAL DOCUMENTARY PHOTOGRAPHY IN 1980s SOUTH AFRICA

Amy McConaghy



Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Paul Weinberg, Eric Miller, Don Edkins, Graham Goddard, Zubeida Vallie and Omar Badsha for taking the time to be interviewed and for all being so incredibly obliging, kind and helpful. I thoroughly enjoyed meeting all of you and listening to your incredible stories.

I would also like to express my gratitude to my supervisor, Sean Field, for his excellent guidance, support and patience throughout this thesis.

Abstract

This thesis examines the development of the Afrapix collective agency throughout the 1980s. It argues that despite often being confined within the context of ‘struggle photography,’ Afrapix produced a broad body of social documentary work that far exceeded the struggle. However, within the socio-political milieu photographers were working, there was limited space for a more nuanced and complex representation of South Africa. Resisting this narrow visual format, Afrapix photographers in the 1980s faced the challenge of documenting the struggle and an extended repertoire of social issues whilst expressing a nuanced and complex point of view that countered the predominant narrative.

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION	1
AFRAPIX IN CONTEXT	7
FISTS AND FLAGS PHOTOGRAPHY in the 1980s	14
EVERYDAY PHOTOGRAPHY in the 1980s	17
COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS AND REPRESENTING AGENCIES	24
PHOTOGRAPHIC ECONOMY	28
THE PHOTOGRAPHIC ESSAY	32
THE END OF AFRAPIX	42
SOCIAL DOCUMENTARY PHOTOGRAPHY, CONTRASTS AND CONTINUITIES in POST-APARTHEID	43
CONCLUSION	49

INTRODUCTION

Apartheid is Violence. Violence is used to subjugate and to deny basic rights to black people. But no matter how the policy of apartheid has been applied over the years, both black and white democrats have actively opposed it. It is in the struggle for justice that the gulf between artists, writers, and photographers has been narrowed.

- Omar Badsha, *South Africa: The Cordoned Heart*¹

According to Christopher Pinney, the power of photography lies in its ‘indexicality,’ a reference to the theory of Charles Peirce, who writes that an index is distinguishable by its ‘physical relationship of casual contiguity with its referent’². In the context of photography, the entrance of light through a lens suggests the transfer of reality onto a photograph, with the image produced therefore being of a ‘stern fidelity’³. In apartheid South Africa the indexicality of photography was used as a means to denounce the apartheid regime, counter state propaganda and stimulate political change in the country. Emerging in 1948, alongside the formation of the Apartheid state and the implementation of oppressive, overtly racist politics, social documentary photographers like Peter Magubane, Alf Khumalo and Eli Weinberg documented the political events of the time⁴. However, it was the 1980s that firmly established this approach, with a surge in political activism inspiring photographers to document and record South Africa as a means to expose the brutal nature of the apartheid regime. This concept proved to be the founding ethos of the Afrapix collective, a multi racial photographic agency formed in 1981 by Omar Badsha, Paul Weinberg, Leslie Lawson, Bidy Partridge and Mxolise Mayo. The collective brought together a group of likeminded photographers, unified by the intent to commit to the anti-apartheid resistance through the use of documentary photography. As Weinberg recalls:

‘Many of us came from diverse places and backgrounds and we shared a common position, we shared common viewpoints about

¹ *Cordoned heart*, p. xv

² Christopher Pinney, “The Prosthetic Eye: Photography as Cure and Poison”, *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, vol. 14 (2008), pp. 534

³ *ibid*, pp. 535

⁴ Ernest Cole, *House of Bondage* (New York: Random House, 1967); Peter Magubane, *Soweto* (Cape town: Dawn Lindberg, 1978); Eli Weinberg, (1981) *Portrait of a People: A personal photographic record of the South African liberation struggle*, (International Defence and Aid Fund for Southern Africa: London, 1981)

how photography could be, its role it could be playing in South Africa and the world⁵.’

The disparate group of social documentary photographers soon gained momentum, drawing in other members, and by the mid 80’s the full cohort of Afrapix photographers included Eric Miller, Zubeida Vallie, Graeme Goddard, Don Edkins, Steve Hilton-Barber, Guy Tillim, Chris Ledochowski, Santu Mofokeng, Jeeva Ragjopaul and Paul Grendon amongst numerous others. By the mid 1980s Afrapix photographers had become a constant presence on the apartheid’s political and social landscape; capturing strikes, riots, boycotts, festivities, church activity and the occurrences of everyday life under apartheid.

Focusing on Afrapix and the collective’s individual members, this thesis intends to uncover how documentary photographers’ perceptions of a changing South Africa intertwined with their photographic work. I relied primarily on oral history- a dialogue between the speaking interviewee and the questioning interviewer- for gaining information and exploring certain themes, shedding light on events as well as Afrapix photographer’s interpretations, motivations, memories and reflections of their work during and after apartheid South Africa. The interviews were semi-structured, which meant that whilst I had a general idea of the questions and themes that I wanted to address, the interviewees discussed various other aspects of their photographic approaches and interpretations of their work that veered away from the predominant narrative of ‘struggle photography’ that had been perpetuated in my research. This was significant in providing a more nuanced insight into social documentary that countered the predominant narrative structures around South African photography in the 1980s. Photographs were often used as a discussion point, with interviewees referring to their more outstanding images, the background behind them, and what was outside the frame of reference. This provided further insight into the contrasts and continuities of Afrapix photographers’ work and, according to Freund and Thompson, encouraged the interviewees to ‘make sense of their lives by weaving

⁵ Paul Weinberg, interviewed at the University of Cape Town, 12th April 2013

stories around and inscribing meaning into photographs in the situation of the interview⁶.’

Afrapix social documentary photographers are a rather atypical focus for the oral historian, whose attentions are usually on the experiences of ordinary people and how their lives were shaped by the social and political structures under which they lived. Afrapix photographers do not fit this category, providing insight into the representations, as opposed to first hand experiences, of ordinary people under apartheid. Photographing the human condition beneath the overarching strictures of apartheid, this group of photographers are most notable for documenting apartheid and the life of the oppressed within it, experiencing history unfold through the lens of a camera. Consequently, social documentary photographers can be seen as similar to the oral historian, both of whom are inspired by the intent to give a voice to the under-classes and challenge the predominant narrative. Therefore, alongside their own personal story, interviewees were able to construct a narrative around their role as social documentary photographers from a relatively retrospective, reflective and analytical position that was extremely significant is understanding the way in which South Africa and the oppressed have been represented and the way in which apartheid is remembered now.

What has further been emphasised in these interviews is that fact that to understand social documentary photography in the 1980s, it is necessary to take into account the diverse range of photographers in Afrapix. In talking with the six Afrapix members that I interviewed – Paul Weinberg, Omar Badsha, Eric Miller, Don Edkins, Graham Goddard and Zubedia Vallie - it is clear that Afrapix consisted of a variety of people, of different races and social and cultural backgrounds. Each had their own interests, aesthetic sensibilities, their own style and their own interpretations of their role as social documentary photographers within and outside of the struggle.

Founder Paul Weinberg grew up in Pietermaritzburg, moving to Johannesburg and teaching photography at the Open School to township youths after studying at photography Technicon University in Durban. Describing himself as a ‘reluctant war

⁶ Alexander Freund and Alistair Thomson, *Oral History and Photography*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 11

photographer,' Weinberg was more interested in working in a soft way, telling stories that veered away from news events⁷. Cofounder Omar Badsha grew up in a Gujurati Muslim family in Durban. Labeled 'coloured' under the apartheid regime, he was a self taught artist and trade unionist before his entry into photography⁸. Similarly to Weinberg, he veered away from news photography focusing primarily on straight social documentary. However, Afrapix also brought in more news driven photographers: Eric Miller, who joined in the mid 80s and was working in Johannesburg's corporate sector before discovering photography⁹; and Zubeida Vallie, who grew up in Cape Town in a Muslim family and became involved in documentary whilst studying photography at Pentec University¹⁰. Don Edkins, provided another dimension to the Afrapix agency, providing anti-apartheid resistance images from outside South Africa after going AWOL in 1976 in response to being drafted to the Angolan civil war¹¹. Finally, Graham Goddard, labeled 'coloured' under the apartheid regime, grew up in the Cape Flats. He enrolled in a part time photographic course at Ruth Prowse Art school and worked as a freelance photographer for social events before becoming involved in Afrapix, working with the agency as a photographic printer of black and white exhibition prints¹². Thus, Afrapix comprised of an incredibly diverse group of people. As a result, it seems rather simplistic to make sweeping statements about social documentary photography or Afrapix photography, as each photographer provided a new and different dimension that can only be accounted for through emphasis on individuals rather than the group.

Despite the variety and diversity of Afrapix, the collective has nevertheless been simplistically labeled solely as the leading advocates of 'struggle photography.' This label of 'struggle photographer,' was inspired by Afrapix's contribution to the culture of struggle photography, which provided a visual dimension to the anti-apartheid resistance movement and aimed to mobilize local and international response against

⁷ Paul Weinberg, interviewed at the University of Cape Town, 12th April 2013

⁸ Omar Badsha, interviewed at his home in Cape Town, 5th September 2013

⁹ Eric Miller, interviewed at his home in Cape Town, 3rd May 2013

¹⁰ Zubeida Vallie, interviewed at her office at Cape Town University of Technology, 30th August 2013

¹¹ Don Edkins, interviewed at his office in Cape Town, 28th May 2013

¹² Graham Goddard, interviewed at his office and Cape Peninsular University, 20th August 2013

oppression in South Africa. Subsequently, their images have primarily been associated with the production of a grand narrative of emotive, political sights: funerals, fists and banners, protests, camaraderie. This has resulted in various accounts that have formed a simplistic depiction of 1980s social documentary photography, generated by the belief that it can be reduced solely to spectacular instances of repression and suffering from the frontline. Consequently, it has come to be a common misconception that social documentary photography in the final decade of apartheid reduced the complexities of the South Africa experience to one of continual struggle, forming a one-dimensional and dehumanizing depiction of black life in South Africa. Svea Josephy, for example, affirms that ‘in the apartheid era the documentary image was typically over coded, reinforcing a didactic public message,¹³’ whilst photographer Zwelethu Mthethwa claimed that township subjects, were twice victimized, ‘once by the political and social oppression and again by their one dimensional representation in the media¹⁴.’ French philosopher and art historian, Georges Didi-Huberman has also adopted this perspective, arguing that in South Africa,

‘Documentary realism was always at the ready to link the iconic and the impoverished with little recourse to examining its spectral effects on social lives. Because of this, documentary realism generated an iconographic landscape that trafficked in simplifications, in which moral truths were posited without the benefit of proven ethical engagement¹⁵.’

Whilst this critique is directed more at South African social documentary in general, Afrapix were one of the groups unfairly caricatured in this critique of ‘struggle photography,’ placed within a similar category as the Bang Bang Club and their fellow news photographers¹⁶.

However, whilst Afrapix were working within a milieu epitomized by socio-political turmoil, documenting a country on the verge of civil war, the way in which the

¹³ Josephy, S in Grundlingh, G *The Cape Town Month of Photography 2005* p 6

¹⁴ Paul Weinberg, *The Past is in the Present: Mediating documentary photography and the archive in South Africa*

¹⁵ Prison Photography (2010), Zwelethu Mthethwa vs. Prison Photography, available at <http://prisonphotography.org/2010/07/16/zwelethu-mthethwa-vs-afro-pessimism/> (accessed: 24th October 2013)

¹⁶ See Greg Marinovich and Joao Silva, *The Bang Bang Club: Snapshots from a Hidden War*, (Arrow Books: London, 2001)

collective approached photography cannot be understood solely within a 'struggle' context. The two overarching objectives epitomizing the Afrapix collective were 'to be an agency and a picture library, and to stimulate documentary photography'¹⁷. Thus, beyond the context of apartheid and their political affiliations, the core approach of Afrapix's photographic work was simply social documentary, to use the camera as a means of recording society and create a platform for which to express themselves in relation to various issues. As Weinberg explains:

I come from a school that has looked at society and sees society as its kind of backdrop. This is what documentary photographers essentially do. They look at society and raise issues and they try to make a difference, they try bring about change, they try be advocates of new thinking¹⁸.

Thus, as social documentary photographers, Afrapix was not confined within a mode of photography that focused primarily on the struggle and many were compelled to explore a far broader range of issues surrounding the human condition and the various social issues at play in South Africa. Whilst apartheid and the intensifying resistance cast a discernible shadow over South Africa's social landscape that could not be overlooked, this was only one dimension of the country's history and one aspect of the collective's broader focus. Drawing on a synthesis of interviews and secondary sources, I will argue that although Afrapix's body of work far exceeded that of 'struggle photography,' producing a broad body of social documentary work, the socio-political milieu photographers were working within meant that there was limited space for a more nuanced and complex visual representation of South Africa. Resisting this narrow format, Afrapix photographers in the 1980s faced the challenge of documenting the struggle and an extended repertoire of social issues whilst expressing a nuanced and complex point of view that countered the predominant narrative.

¹⁷ Paul Weinberg, 'Beyond the Barricades,' *Full Frame*, vol 1 , no. 1 June, 1990 editorial

¹⁸ Paul Weinberg, interviewed at the University of Cape Town, 12th April 2013

AFRAPIX in CONTEXT

South Africa in the 1980s was characterized by a mood of defiance against the apartheid regime that was translated into the ideology of the Afrapix collective, with intensifying resistance drawing photographers and artists alike into the struggle. Consequently, the photography that emerged in the 1980s South Africa was considerably intertwined with the country's history and although it cannot be defined solely in terms of political and social context, neither can it be separated from it.

The growing tensions and strengthening of resistance in 1980s apartheid South Africa can be attributed to a number of issues. In the second half of the 1960s, resistance against apartheid had been quelled, with most of the anti-apartheid organisations banned and their leaders either in jail or exile. However, by the early 1970s, the resistance against apartheid was regaining momentum. The growing grievances amongst the majority of South Africans over the brutal nature of the apartheid regime came to a fore in the 1976 Soweto Uprising, an event famously characterized by Sam Nzima's iconic photograph of a dying Hector Pieterse being carried by another student after having been shot by police, while his sister runs by their side, her face contorted in horror and agony. The uprising was offset by the Apartheid government's attempt to implement an education policy that made Afrikaans the compulsory medium of interaction in black schools. However, whilst this move was the principal catalyst, the uprising was also generated by a number of other factors. The Black Consciousness Movement had emerged amongst a new generation of radical intellectuals and activists, propagated by Steve Biko, who was inspired by theories of Frantz Fanon, Aimé Césaire, Léopold Senghor and the Black power Movement in the United States¹⁹. The aim was to advocate a sense of black pride and an African self-awareness that counteracted apartheid's creation of an environment dominated by a sense of fear and inferiority amongst the oppressed²⁰. The 1968 European student revolts in Europe and the collapse of the Portuguese colonies in Angola and Mozambique in 1974 acted as further inspiration and encouragement for the movement. These were significant factors in stimulating the rousing discontent that led to the Soweto uprising, an event that came to signify the turning point in South

¹⁹ Andries Walter Olifant, *South African Photography 1950-2010* (Hatje Cantz 2010) p 79

²⁰ *ibid*, p. 79

Africa's history of resistance, escalating into a revolt against the apartheid system and its racist rule.

It was within this turbulent environment of resistance and social turmoil that the Afrapix photo agency emerged, reflecting the shift away from the individualist approach adopted by the likes of Ernest Cole, Eli Weinberg, Peter Magubane and David Goldblatt, towards a collective approach that came to epitomize the 1980s cultural movement. Most Afrapix members met through the *Staffrider*, the cultural magazine that 'legitimized photography as an art form and recognized it as being equal in expressive significance to prose, poetry and art²¹.' It was an important springboard for documentary photography at the time, providing support for a genre that was developing within a cultural context that offered minimal support to the production of social documentary images. This lack of support was primarily due to the oppressive nature of apartheid and the increasing restrictions placed upon the use of photography by the apartheid state, the government's reaction to the growing international condemnation that had been stimulated by images depicting the brutality of apartheid. Within this context, documentary photographers were increasingly constrained by the general media restrictions, denied the possibility of photographing in conflict situations and subject to police brutality on a regular basis.

Ironically it was this same context that stimulated social documentary photographers, providing inspiration to use the camera as a means of prevailing against the apartheid state's suppression of information and exposing the brutal reality of apartheid that had been obscured by the state propaganda apparatus which attempted to normalize its racist regime. Desmond Tutu once wrote:

'I believe that when the Germans were asked how they could possibly have permitted Hitler and the Nazis to perpetrate the horrors of the holocaust, they replied that they had not know that those things were happening. It is possible for many South Africans and others to plead a similar ignorance about the evil consequences of apartheid and the polices being applied against black people.'²²

²¹ Joyce Ozyński, *Ten Years of Staffrider 1978- 1988*, vol. 7 no. 3 and 4 p 163

²² Omar Badsha, *Imijondolo: A Photographic Essay on Forced Removals in the Inanda District of South Africa*, (Afrapix: Durban, 1985), p. 7

It is this analogy - highlighting the power of ignorance in the perpetration of evil- that Afrapix members have often referenced to when explaining what motivated them as documentary photographers in Apartheid²³. Recording the apartheid government's worst offences and bringing the realities of apartheid to the forefront of people's imaginations was therefore seen as a means of fighting against the larger system, with the hope that these images that could expose the unjust nature of the regime and encourage political pressure from within and outside South Africa.

With the aid of *Staffrider*, by the end of the 1970s 'a remarkable visual and graphic aesthetic engaged with the social actualities of South Africa had been established,²⁴' setting the scene for Afrapix and their unique style of social documentary photography in 1980s South Africa. This emergence of a politically aligned culture of resistance and collective photographic movement was cemented in the 1982 Culture and Resistance Festival in Botswana. Organised by Medu Art Ensemble and hosted by the Botswana National Museum, the conference drew in hundreds of participants from a variety of cultural activities²⁵. Many Afrapix members including Paul Weinberg, Omar Badsha and Peter Mckenzie were closely involved in the organizing of the Festival and the photographic compartment. It was here that the ideological concept of culture as a weapon in the liberation struggle was legitimized, supporting the belief that 'any person who stands behind a pen (or brush, camera, or saxophone for that matter!) must be just as effective as any person who stands behind a gun²⁶.' The aim was to raise awareness around issues such as the cultural boycott whilst simultaneously conscientising South Africa communities. Afrapix member Peter Mckenzie delivered a keynote paper on photography, subsequently published in *Staffrider*, where he called on photographers to set aside any romanticized notion of the individual artist and 'realize the undeniable responsibility of all photographers in South Africa to using the medium to establish a democratic Anzania²⁷.' He argued for a dual focus in 'struggle photography': firstly, it should show the conditions under

²³ Zubeida Vallie, interviewed at her office at Cape Town University of Technology, 30th August 2013; Eric Miller, interviewed at his home in Cape Town, 3rd May 2013

²⁴ Olifant A.W, *South African Photography 1950-2010* (Hatje Cantz 2010) p 79

²⁵ Newbury, D. *Defiant Images: Photography and Apartheid South Africa*. (Pretoria: University of South Africa Press, 2009), p. 238

²⁶ *ibid*, p. 238

²⁷ Peter Mckenzie, 'Bringing the Struggle into Focus,' *Staffrider*

which the oppressed were forced to live in South Africa, as a means to ‘awaken the sleeping consciences of those who haven’t realized their oppression and the danger of non commitment’; and secondly, social documentary photography must not be governed by negative portrayals of South Africa, but must also ‘show the hope and determination of all committed to freedom²⁸.’ His ideas reflected the socio-political climate and the subsequent vocabulary of the time, with the brutal political and social policies of apartheid inciting those to action through whatever means possible.

Consequently, a growing number of photographers and other artists were organised and mobilized for resistance alongside the broader liberation movement. Shaped by the ideological structures of the time, social documentary photography in the 1980s was increasingly inclined towards tackling the socio-political issues plaguing the country, taking a stand against system through the documentation of the apartheid environment and its associated evils. Subsequently, Afrapix photographers emerged as the ‘taking-sides’ generation, adopting an overtly political and transparently partisan approach in their photography that identified with the liberation movement and reflected its views. Their role as activists in the struggle preceded their individual work as a photographer and aesthetics and art were to be cast aside in the attempt to strategically document the country and expose the atrocities of the apartheid regime. This ethos is clearly justified in in a 1983 edition of *Staffrider* magazine, featuring Afrapix’s first exhibition *South Africa Through the Lens*, where photographers reflected upon the rationale behind the exhibition:

‘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 cant be divorced from the political, social and the economic issues that surround us daily²⁹.’

The traditional view of an objective and impartial journalistic stance, as supported by eminent South African photographer David Goldblatt, was overshadowed by the

²⁸ *ibid*

²⁹ “South Africa through the Lens,” *Staffrider Magazine*, 1983

impetus to denounce the apartheid system and stimulate change³⁰. Caught up in the social, political and economic issues of apartheid South Africa, photographers could no longer be objective, choosing to play a part in the way they made their statements. As Zubeida Vallie, a social documentary photographer who often supplied images to Afrapix, observed: '[photography] was very much contributing to the cause of politicizing people. Also not just politicizing but just generally informing about the atrocities. So I think that in itself tells you that it definitely was not from a mutual point.'

These sentiments are reflected by Eric Miller, who recalls:

“People used to say ‘you are a journalist, you are supposed to be objective, and I would say ‘its not about being blindly objective its about telling the truth, actually. And I choose to be on a particular side of this struggle...’”³¹

Along side this approach was the intention to train photographers, with the mantra ‘each one, teach one’ becoming a key phrase during this period. Training and supporting emerging artists was an important part of the photographer’s involvement in the struggle. As Omar Badsha recalls:

‘You are working in the political movement and in the underground, training people, talking to people, convincing them, empowering them, was a natural thing for us. Very natural.’

Afrapix’s involvement in the struggle was further intensified on June 14th, 1983, when the United Democratic Front (UDF) was launched, arising in reaction to the minimalist reforms introduced by the Apartheid government’s suggestion of a tri-cameral system that aimed to co-opt people of mixed descent, classified as ‘coloureds’ or ‘Indians,’ that were not accommodated in the homelands dispensation. Parliamentary representation was extended to these communities, although power remained in the hands of the white minority whilst the black majority was excluded all together, treated as subjects of the autonomous and semi-autonomous homelands that were situated in South Africa’s rural areas. The UDF responded to this haphazard attempt of inclusion by galvanizing civic, trade union, church, women’s, conscious

³⁰ Newbury, p. 238

³¹ Eric Miller, interviewed at his home in Cape Town, 3rd May 2013

objectors and sport and cultural organisations into a popular front aimed at exerting that final force to dismantle the apartheid government. From 1983 onwards, South Africa was in the heat of resistance, with boycotts, labour strikes, mass demonstrations and student revolts maintaining a constant presence of South Africa's political scene.

The government responded to the growing resistance by declaring a partial State of Emergency in 1985, with cameras banned from emergency areas, intensifying the already oppressive conditions under which photographers were working. In 1986, they were tightened even more so in a further attempt to control the flow of information and rising global denunciations of apartheid.

It declared:

4. (1) No person shall without the prior consent of the Commissioner or a member of a security force serving as a commissioned officer in that force take any photograph or make or produce any television recording, film recording, drawing or other depiction (a) of any unrest or security action or of any incident occurring in the course thereof, including the damaging or destruction of property or the injuring or killing of persons, or (b) of any damaged or destroyed property or injured or dead persons or other visible signs of violence at the scene where unrest or security action is taking place or had taken place or of any injuries sustained by any person in or during unrest or security action (from the Government Gazette of the Republic of South Africa, Vol. 276, no. 11342)³²

Paul Weinberg recalls the consequent effects:

'Every time you went into a township you could be fined, or your film could be confiscated. Or if you went into a situation that was deemed part

³² Hill, I.T. & Harris, A. *Beyond the Barricades: Popular resistance in South Africa in the 1980' s.* (London: Kliptown Books, 1989), p. 7

of the State of Emergency and it was proclaimed, you were also there illegally.’³³

Working within this progressively militarized, segregated South Africa, documentary photographers found themselves in an environment where they felt ‘quite threatened and embattled’³⁴.

Despite these constraints the Afrapix collective developed an expansive network, becoming a significant resource for socially concerned groups, the local alternative media, and the international media. This was aided by their link with Khotso House, the headquarters the South African Council of Churches (SACC), where their office was based. Bernard Spong, head of the media division at SACC, agreed that Afrapix could use the space in the building and receive some form of administrative assistance, and in return they would supply the SACC with images for their distribution³⁵. The Afrapix agency were also involved with a number of NGO’s, many of which were also run in Khotso House. A symbiotic relationship and sense of mutual support formed between Afrapix and these NGO’s, with Afrapix meeting the photographic requirements of the organisations whilst in turn being taken along by NGOs to document issues and their daily endeavors³⁶. Most notably, Afrapix supplied the media demands of the UDF. As the only archive of images, Afrapix was the perfect source for the organisation’s media requests, photographing their rallies and meetings as well as the poverty and repression of South Africa³⁷. These images were also fed into the anti-apartheid movement on an international level, most notably through the publicity section of the International Defence and Aid Fund (IDAF) in London, whose aim was ‘to keep the conscience of the world alive to the issues at stake’ in South Africa³⁸.’ Furthermore, Afrapix photographs of South Africa’s political situation were supplied to a number of publications in support of the anti-apartheid movement, including *Sechaba*, *ANC News*, *Anti-Apartheid News*, *Morning*

³³ Paul Weinberg, interviewed at the University of Cape Town, 12th April 2013

³⁴ *ibid*

³⁵ Omar Badsha, interviewed at his home in Cape Town, 5th September 2013

³⁶ *ibid*

³⁷ Newbury, p. 241

³⁸ *ibid*, p. 241

Star, *South Magazine*, *The Guardian* and *Tribune* as well as international mainstream media outlets such as Reuters, Agence France Presse and Associated Press.³⁹

Consequently, as Weinberg recalls, Afrapix were incredibly involved in providing a visual dimension to the resistance:

‘Afrapix was very vibrant, we were feeding into the anti apartheid struggle within the country, outside the country, churches, human rights organisations. So we were right inside the artery of political consciousness⁴⁰.’

‘FISTS AND FLAGS’ PHOTOGRAPHY in the 1980s

Within this context of apartheid, repression, resistance and conflict, the South African scene one of chaos and dramatic events, overshadowing the more innocuous aspects of society. In his article, *The Present is in the Past*, Weinberg quotes Professor Njabula Ndebele, writer, cultural activist and academic, who states:

Everything in South Africa has been mind boggedly spectacular: the monstrous war machine developed over the years; the random pass raids; mass shootings and killings; mass economic exploitation, the ultimate symbol of which is the mining industry; the mass removals of people; the spate of draconian laws passed with the spectacle of parliamentary promulgations; the luxurious life style of whites, servants, all encompassing privilege, swimming pools, and high commodity consumption; the sprawling monotony of African locations, which are the very picture of poverty and oppression. The symbols are all over: the quintessence of obscene exhibitionism⁴¹.

It was this spectacular environment that formed the predominant narrative of South Africa and as the country verged on civil war, the various dynamics of the conflict held a primary position in the lens of the social documentary photographer. Casting a dark shadow over South African society, it was a dimension that could not be ignored, and provided a focus that was very much in line with the photographer’s role as a

³⁹ *ibid*, p. 241

⁴⁰ Paul Weinberg, interviewed at the University of Cape Town, 12th April 2013

⁴¹ Paul Weinberg, *The Past is in the Present: Mediating documentary photography and the archive in South Africa*

cultural worker. Consequently, on one level, Afrapix photography was shaped around a narrative of resistance that is most commonly associated with ‘struggle photography’ and the collective’s position as the ‘taking sides’ generation, adopting a ‘fists and banners’ approach that produced images from the front line.



Figure 1: Jeeva Rajgopaul

Comrades from Lamontville at the memorial service for Dabi Sookoo, 1981

Thus there emerged a body of overtly political imagery that exposed the harsh, dehumanizing effects of poverty and oppression imposed by apartheid onto the lives of South Africans, conveyed a clear anti-apartheid message. Accordingly, topics were predominantly centered on forced removals, marches, meetings, rallies and as the struggle intensified, funerals. Funerals were particularly central to the iconographic emblems of the anti-apartheid struggle, representing an environment that stimulated radical opposition to the struggle. Another significant trope of the struggle imagery was the protest sign, significant in shaping the meaning of the image and the audience’s response to apartheid. As Okwui Enwezwor explains, the protest sign

‘enunciated the boundary between presence and absence, visibility and invisibility⁴².’ Documenting forms of popular resistance against the injustice propagated through apartheid as well as the violent state responses to this challenge, this approach produced some of the most iconic imagery of the time.



Figure 2: Cedric Nunn
Funeral of two comrade youth abducted and killed in the “Natal War,” 1987

Afrapix’s close affiliation with the left wing movements and anti-apartheid organisations meant that they were also able to look beyond the basic news stories and record the meetings, discussions and the general goings-on of the resistance movement and local avenues of change that were generally regarded as more innocuous. For many, these smaller proceedings were just as significant as the bigger, mainstream news events. Vallie, in 1990, stated:

⁴² Okwui Enwezor and Rory Bester, *Rise and Fall of Apartheid: Photography and the Bureaucracy of Everyday Life*, (International Centre of Photography: New York, 2013), p.37

‘It’s very important documenting things, just the ordinary union meeting. Like the weekend it would be women’s festival and to some people its like small events but its important because it brings people together and by having the photos, documenting them, will surely be of historical value⁴³.’

This approach, motivated by attempts to rouse support in favor of the oppressed and document the unfolding history of South Africa, was founded on Manichaeian stereotypes, creating a dichotomy between the ‘good guys’ and the ‘bad guys,’ black and white, in South Africa. Weinberg recalls:

‘Looking back, retrospectively and with hindsight, I do think it is quite crude. You know, to judge people just in terms of are you with us or are you against us, are you a comrade or not a comrade⁴⁴.’

However, given the times, it was a necessary position to take. As Graham Goddard, darkroom specialist for Afrapix, recalls:

‘They were fighting a war, they were on the front line with many other people fighting a battle and pushing against the apartheid regime in their way and contributing because of what they believed in.’

Given the socio-political turmoil of the time and spurred on by the injustice of apartheid and the impetus to stimulate change through the use of the camera, this approach was deemed a necessary one to take.

EVERYDAY PHOTOGRAPHY in the 1980s

However, South African social documentary photography was not limited to the front lines. Along side the spectacular nature of apartheid and the struggle, people continued to live out their everyday lives, going through the universal rhythms of life irrespective of the chaos around them. This environment was one that Afrapix members, as South Africans growing up and living within the everyday, were deeply connected with. Resisting the prevalence of the spectacular in South Africa’s visual narrative perpetuated by the media and liberation struggle, a number of Afrapix photographers explored a more personal approach, documenting the everyday and life

⁴³ *Images in Struggle*, DVD and VHS, B. Feinberg, IDAF:UK, 1990

⁴⁴ Paul Weinberg, interviewed at the University of Cape Town, 12th April 2013

in between the cracks. Drawing on their daily experiences, many photographers moved away from the front line to document the ordinary, representing the everyday realities of their communities and the way in which people constructed life out of difficult situations. As Santu Mofokeng stated:

‘In terms of the idiosyncrasies of life in the eighties whereby we want to show that apartheid is bad, I’m making pictures of ordinary life. Football, shebeen, daily life... When the world becomes tired of seeing... sjamboks or whatever, they come to you they start to ask what is daily life like⁴⁵?’

As a result, 1980’s social documentary also saw the emergence of lyrical, nuanced work that went against the more iconic ‘fists and banners’ approach, celebrating the ordinary within the context of the spectacular.

Perhaps this incentive to use the camera as a means to document the everyday was partly stimulated by the emotional stress of documenting the violence and grief that was characteristic of photography on the front lines. Weinberg recalls:

“There would be a funeral and then you would go and photograph the funeral and then people would go and protest and resist and dance and run through the township and then the police would shoot again and then there would be another funeral. And so it was this cycle of funeral and resistance and funerals and you know, just never stopped. And you got to a point where you just thought ‘I cant do another funeral, I cant do this any more⁴⁶.’”

Constantly working within such a repressive environment was cause for fatigue and burn out amongst many photographers. Thus, several Afrapix members sought to break away from the ideological constraints that they had placed upon themselves that were centered on the incentive to participate in the struggle and ‘make a statement against this awful system called apartheid⁴⁷.’

As Lesley Lawson, one of the founding members of Afrapix recalls:

There were very strict ideological principles that governed people. We were all struggling for meaning and for political relevance and so an aesthetic of fists and flags developed, which is fine, it was

⁴⁵ Patricia Hayes, “Santu Mofokeng, photographs: ‘The violence is in the knowing,’” *History and Theory*, No. 48, 2009, p. 34-51

⁴⁶ Paul Weinberg, interviewed at the University of Cape Town, 12th April 2013

⁴⁷ *ibid*

important and it was needed but it became an overwhelming, dominating thing⁴⁸.

By photographing the ordinary photographers were able to escape from the pressures associated with their involvement in the anti-apartheid resistance, documenting the aspects of everyday life that, whilst innocuous, were not removed from the overarching context of apartheid.

However, the documentation of the ordinary was also of central interest to a number of Afrapix photographers even prior to their involvement in the struggle, reflecting a core aspect of social documentary photography. For many, the allure of the documenting the everyday was the fact that it provided a means to explore the world around them. Young and inquisitive, many Afrapix photographers have described the camera as a 'passport' that allowed them to cross the boundaries structured by apartheid and gain greater understanding of different environments and societies in their country. As Nunn recalls, 'I had a natural curiosity and photography allowed me to exercise that curiosity through using photography as a passport to enter into various different scenarios and societies⁴⁹.' Similarly, Weinberg was 'simply exploring the world around me, using the camera as an open book.' As he recalls:

'Weekends and afternoons I would just walk around the suburbs of Johannesburg and take photographs and meet people and have a beer, a cup of tea. And they weren't particularly threatened by me and I wasn't threatened by them because I was sort of a fellow traveller.'

Thus, for many photographers, the camera was a means to gain insight into the complexity of life in South Africa in a variety of communities, particularly amongst the oppressed. As Badsha explains:

'As a photographer you're also entering into any territory and you are photographing everything with a sense of wonderment. Because you also walk into communities and you don't know what those signs and rituals mean sometimes, or everyday events mean. You don't know the class differences or caste differences. They all might look alike but there are differences, until you begin to interrogate

⁴⁸ *Images in Struggle*, DVD and VHS, B. Feinberg, IDAF:UK, 1990

⁴⁹ The Road to Then and Now, Interview

but and then you photograph accordingly and you start exploring those⁵⁰.’

This inquisitiveness of the everyday reflected the more individual interests of social documentary photographers, outside their professional and political responsibilities. Consequently, Afrapix’s body of work also incorporated more personal projects that provided in-depth insight into communities, shifting away from the ‘fists and banners’ imagery. Focusing on the ordinary nuances of society, this approach transformed the way in which South Africa and the oppressed communities were perceived, questioning the predominant stereotypes perpetuated by the media and liberation groups. As Mofokeng said:

‘You look at the photos of people in a township that have been made. They are poor, they are angry, they are not normal, they are not people in a sense, they are victims. [sync] If I take photographs that show a certain section of the people, maybe the oppressed, in a way that makes them human, makes them normal, it might convince the other section which is maybe more right wing. If they look at that photograph and see they are just people like us, they want the same things we do⁵¹.’

Therefore, this focus on the everyday was in part a reaction to the popular representation of the oppressed as ‘victims,’ a representation that often obscured the humanity of the photographer’s subjects. Through the documentation of the everyday, the intention amongst photographers was to encourage empathy towards the oppressed by narrowing the divide between the subject and the audience, illustrating the fact that people are simply people, fundamentally and empathically universal and deserving of equal dignity and respect. As Badsha said:

‘For us, the every day was a way of affirming the very human side of life. In one way, we are saying we are no different from you. We have our good days our bad days, we have our rituals, whatever. From birds to debts, why are you treating us differently⁵²?’

⁵⁰ Omar Badsha, interviewed at his home in Cape Town, 5th September 2013

⁵¹ *Images in Struggle*, DVD and VHS, B. Feinberg, IDAF:UK, 1990

⁵² Omar Badsha, interviewed at his home in Cape Town, 5th September 2013

Thus there emerged a number of projects the reasserted the humanity of the oppressed through everyday imagery. In Mofokeng's *Train Church* series, for example, he captured the prayer and church activities in commuter trains from Soweto to Johannesburg, drawing from everyday urban life and the routine of commuting alongside the prevalence of spirituality. This was incredibly unusual given the fact that it was produced at the height of the political struggle.



Commotion, Johannesburg - Soweto Line / 1986 silverprint edition 5

Figure 3: Santu Mofokeng
Train Church, 1986

The everyday was further documented by Mofokeng and Weinberg in a joint photo-essay called *Going Home*⁵³. The photo-essay juxtapositions life in the white suburbs with life in black townships, by exploring the worlds of Paul from Pietermaritzburg, and Santu from Soweto. As Mofokeng described it, 'This means that the worlds which lie beyond the routine of going home had to be looked at in an honest and exploring fashion⁵⁴.' Delving into ordinary life in South Africa, the project was a concerted attempt steer away from the black-white images perpetuated by the media,

⁵³ *Full Frame* vol 1 , no. 1 June, 1990 editorial

⁵⁴ *ibid*, p.

and created a personalized depiction of their understanding of the world that drew attention to a number of great divisions in apartheid that had not been explored.

Omar Badsha has also produced powerful work centered on the everyday. *Letter to Farzanah*⁵⁵, for example, documents the lives of black and white South African children, illustrate the ordinary lives of children under apartheid whilst exposing the more universal issue of disparity and racial divides through the juxtaposition of wealthy children with those living in squatter camps. Badsha's later publication, *Imijondolo*⁵⁶, is another example, documenting the everyday lives of the impoverished Inanda residents, representing the subjects with dignity whilst exposing the harsh effects of apartheid on the community.



Figure 4: Omar Badsha
Plastering home with Mud in Inanda, 1982

⁵⁵ Omar Badsha, *Letter to Farzanah*, (Institute for Black Research, 1979)

⁵⁶ Badsha, *Imijondolo*, 1985

Further works centered on everyday life can be seen in Cedric Nunn's *Blood Relatives*⁵⁷, in which he explored his identity as a South African with mixed origins, classified by the apartheid regime as 'coloured'; Don Edkins' *Gold Widows*⁵⁸, which documented life in the frontline state of Lesotho, exploring the destructive effects of migrant labour on the family structure; and Chris Ledochowski's long-term project, beginning in the late 1970s, that documented the life of Petros Mulaudzi, a migrant worker and close friend employed by his parents⁵⁹.

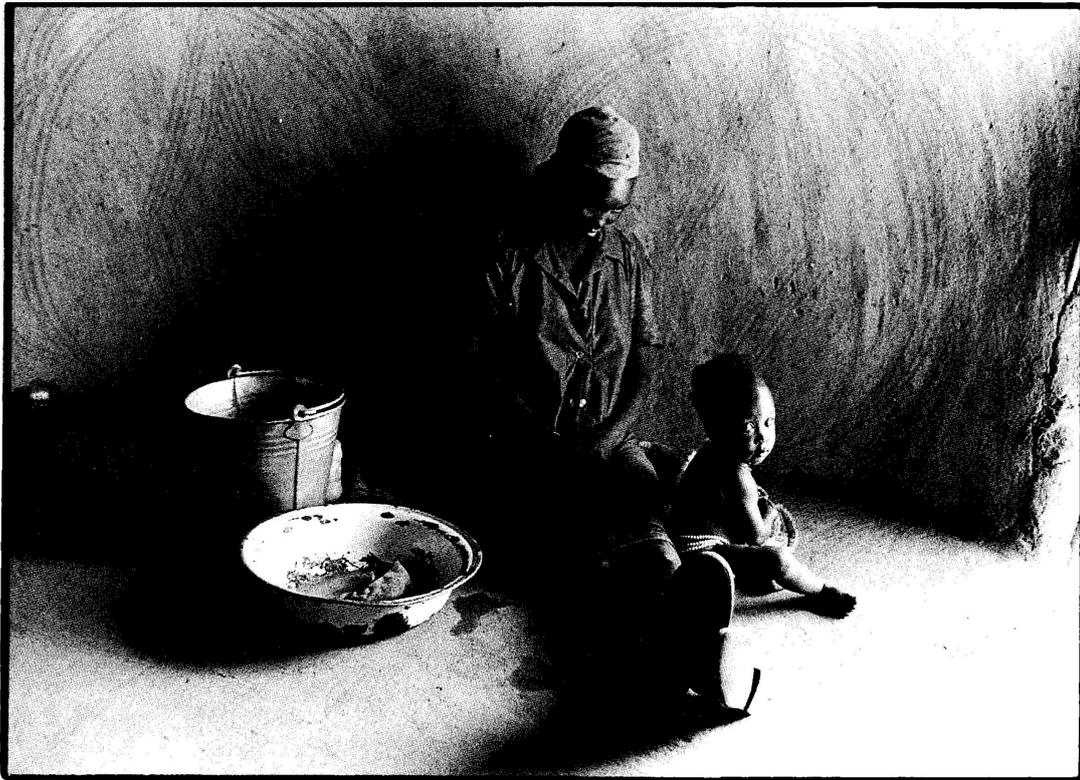


Figure 5: Don Edkins
Gold Widow, 1988

These are just a few examples from the large body of work produced by Afrapix members in the 1980s that explored the everyday effects of oppression, providing a

⁵⁷ Cedric Nunn, *Blood Relatives*, <http://www.cedricnunn.co.za/> (accessed 24th October 2013)

⁵⁸ Ganter, E and Edkins, D. *Marotholi: Theatre for Another Development* (Lesotho: The Village of Information Service Christian Council of Lesotho, 1988)

⁵⁹ South African History Online, Chris Ledochowski, *Petros Mulaudzi of Nthabalala Village*, <http://www.sahistory.org.za/category/image-galleries/exhibitions/bonani-africa/2010/chris-ledochowski/petros-mulaudzi-nthabalala>, (accessed: 24th October 2013)

dimension to Afrapix's body of work that was intrinsic to creating a more lyrical, complex depiction of South Africa. Today many photographers, when questioned about their work in the eighties, show the most pride in these images, veering away from the sensational and reflecting a more nuanced and intimate vision of the everyday that highlights the dignity of ordinary life.

COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS, REPRESENTING AGENCIES

Afrapix found themselves straddled between two worlds: the turbulent world of resistance, protest and violence and the ordinary world, in which they lived out their day-to-day lives. The collective's body of work subsequently oscillated between the struggle imagery and the imagery of the everyday, the sensational and the ordinary, the intense and the intimate, the professional and the personal. Whilst ostensibly different, these two photographic focuses both reflected life in South Africa at the time, the everyday (as seen through the exploration of the ordinary) and the explosion of forces that had accumulated in the everyday (as seen through resistance and protest). As South Africans, whose everyday experiences were the very ones that they were documenting, Afrapix photographers' consequent work was produced from a very personal perspective. As Zubeida Vallie recalls:

'I was doing hard news but from a completely personal angle... you are part of the community. You are not coming in fresh—you are not just coming in to do a story. The things that were happening, it was people that I grew up with, schooling, childhood, grew up, with connected with, neighbors, familiar of the neighborhood⁶⁰.'

A similar sentiment is reflected in a statement by Badsha, who recalls: 'we were inside those communities, so we began to photograph them as people that you knew and people that you interacted with.' Afrapix photography therefore expressed a personal connection to local communities that encouraged a much more sensitized and subjective understanding of issues around them, an insight that was consequently translated into their imagery.

This personal connection with South Africa and its communities suggests the factors such as race, class or gender did not restrict photographers in creating a successful

⁶⁰ Zubeida Vallie, interviewed at her office at Cape Town University of Technology, 30th August 2013

representation of the communities other than their own. As Peter Magubane said, 'irrespective of colour, the good photographer will succeed and the bad one will fail. Its like with any other artist who represents what he sees, to the best of his ability.'⁶¹ Living and experiencing the nuances and complexities of daily life under apartheid, Afrapix photographers had an insider's view of South Africa and apartheid that helped overcome the distance between the photographer and the subject, encouraged by their sensitivity towards the problems and needs of the various communities. Thus, breaking down the insider-outsider division that is often associated with photography, Afrapix photographers effectively represented what it was they saw, expressing an in depth understanding of the country and its people that captured the complex scenarios South Africans lived through. This personal connection is a significant thread that runs throughout Afrapix's work, representing humanity and the specific realities of the human condition through the documentation of the political struggle and the everyday struggle of apartheid. This is where the power of Afrapix's imagery lay, with Afrapix's personal insight into South Africa encouraging a representation of the oppressed that reinforced the human agency, inspiring mobilization and defiance against the regime. Afrapix images conveyed this on two levels: Political agency and personal agency

Images of defiance were particularly significant in portraying the concept of political agency. Perceived as a means to motivate those with a sleeping conscience by portraying the subjects as active agents, working against the apartheid state and the oppressive system. They were presented not only as victims of history, but also as the makers of it. As Badsha observes:

'...you see those people in meetings, you see them in discussions, they are engaging with each other, they are building organisations, they are fighting in the streets. They are going on strike, these are acts of defiance in that period, major acts. And each one of those acts grows in and becomes a movement'⁶².

By exposing images of meetings, rallies and protests that showed the oppressed fighting against the apartheid regime, the black communities are shown not just as

⁶¹ Andrew Walter Oliphant, Quest for Appropriate Representation, Two Tone: South Africa's First Jazz Magazine, pg 8

⁶² Omar Badsha, interviewed at his home in Cape Town, 5th September 2013

victims but also as active agents, people who are shaping the way in which history unfolds. These images aimed to inspire others to act, encouraging them to believe that they had the power to stimulate change. This was particularly significant at the time as censorship and the oppression of apartheid suppressed memories of the struggle and revolutionary politics. Images of Mandela or the ANC flag, for example, could not be published. Thus Afrapix's images of defiance were significant in reviving the memories of the resistance and instilling a sense of political agency that had been quelled by apartheid censorship.



*Figure 6: Omar Badsha
Students marching to funeral of COSAS member, 1981*

On another level, the exploration of the everyday in photography exposed the power of personal agency within apartheid, emphasizing human autonomy and individualism. By documenting the nuances and complexities of daily life, Afrapix illustrated the different ways in which the oppressed communities constructed their own narratives within the overarching context of apartheid in which they lived. Thus, Afrapix formed a visual representation of the oppressed that affirmed the dignity and self-possession of black communities despite being confined within a framework of inequality and oppression. As Goddard explains:

“There’s more than just victims, people weren’t just lying around like ‘ah we’re suffering.’ People are living, they’re partying, they’re having a good time, they’re procreating and whatever it is, getting on with their lives... no matter how bad the situation is, you can not say people are not going to laugh...⁶³”

It was this sentiment that shaped the way in which Afrapix documented apartheid and its communities, highlighting a sense of personal agency amongst the oppressed population, as conveyed through their daily endeavors. This further encouraged a shift away from the stereotypical association of the black communities solely as victims of apartheid, to show that the oppressed were not confined within the structure of apartheid. As Badsha said: ‘you want to try and move away from that we are just victims. To say that we are, each one has dignity and must be approached with dignity and photographed with dignity⁶⁴.’



Figure 7: Paul Weinberg
Pageview, Johannesburg, at the time of apartheid removals, June 1982.

Thus, Afrapix provided a representation of the oppressed that reinforced their various agencies, reacting against the popular cliché depicting the black oppressed as victims

⁶³ Graham Goddard, interviewed at his office and Cape Peninsular University, 20th August 2013

⁶⁴ Omar Badsha, interviewed at his home in Cape Town, 5th September 2013

of history. This was significant in countering the predominant depiction of South Africa, and the African continent in general, as a country plagued by constant conflict and calamity. The issue has been addressed by Okwui Enwezor, who refers the misrepresentation of Africa by the West in a phenomenon that he terms ‘afro-pessimism⁶⁵.’ He observes the paradox of the mainstream media and its depiction of Africa, epitomized by images such as Kevin Carter’s iconic photograph of an emaciated child in Sudan: whilst directing international attention to serious discrepancies surrounding the issues of human survival in Africa, it simultaneously appears incapable of depicting a type of situation outside the realms of despair and suffering, with a constant focus on the negative⁶⁶. Afrapix’s personal connections with the country and its people reconciled this paradox, providing an intimate insight into the various dimensions of South African politics and society, emphasizing the humanity and dignity of the oppressed and consequently encouraging mobilization through positive enforcement.

PHOTOGRAPHIC ECONOMY

However, whilst Afrapix produced a multi-dimensional, personal body of work that went beyond the simple confines of ‘struggle photography’, the context in which they were working was considerably restricting. South Africa in the 1980s was at the pinnacle of socio-political change and the scene was dominated by mass resistance movements and the accompanying conflict, violence and funerals meaning that there was limited room for the nuanced, complex images of the everyday. As resistance intensified, photographers found themselves moving away from the backstreets and everyday and thrust into popular meetings and township violence. For photographers such as David Goldblatt, who argued for a dispassionate form of photography that was detached from one’s political beliefs, this socio-political context was a hard one to adapt to. As Weinberg recalls:

“David Goldblatt was picture editor of *Leadership* magazine, and it was just like mayhem every day and funerals and unrest and he said to me, ‘I don’t know if there is place for me as a

⁶⁵ O. Enwezor, ‘The Uses of Afro-Pessimism’, in *In/Sight: African Photographers 1940 to the Present*, ed. C. Bell et al (New York: Guggenheim Museum, 1996), 20

⁶⁶ O. Enwezor, ‘The Uses of Afro-Pessimism’, in *In/Sight: African Photographers 1940 to the Present*, ed. C. Bell et al (New York: Guggenheim Museum, 1996), 18

photographer now.’ He just felt very disempowered, he didn’t feel he was making much of a contribution in that context⁶⁷.”

As professed cultural workers in the liberation movement, as the struggle heightened Afrapix photographers felt a growing sense of pressure to produce images of political relevance. This was further intensified by their close connections with a number of NGOs and the growing demand from anti-apartheid organisations to provide images that could be used in the anti-apartheid campaign. Nunn recalls,

“At Afrapix, because we had positioned ourselves in a public place, we had people coming in and saying, ‘Do you have a pictures of the protest that took place last week?’ And if we didn’t, we knew we had better be at the next protest⁶⁸.”

This was enhanced by the growing international media interest, which allowed considerable room for the narrow, stereotypical view of South Africa whilst simultaneously providing limited room for a more straight form of social documentary that could create a more nuanced and personal insight into South Africa.

By the mid-1980s, South Africa had developed into a prevalent story on the international media circuit, providing the perfect economy for South African photographers to sell their images to worldwide news organisations. As Guy Tillim recalls: “South Africa was ‘top of the pops’, everyday we made headlines all over the world. So there was a huge demand for images all over the place⁶⁹.” As a result, images for the struggle developed into valuable commodities, particularly given the tight restrictions on foreign media. The international media were ‘hungry for almost anything,’ meaning South Africa photographers had a ready outlet for their work⁷⁰. Many Afrapix photographers turned to photojournalism alongside their dedication to the struggle as a means to make a living and support themselves as well as Afrapix. This was essential because, as Badsha stated, ‘we took a decision in the first year that we would not take funding from outside funders, international funders, we will fund

⁶⁷ Paul Weinberg, interviewed at the University of Cape Town, 12th April 2013

⁶⁸ Cedric Nunn, ‘The Bright Light of the Maelstrom: Okwui Enwezor Interviews Cedric Nunn’ in *Cedric Nunn: Call and Response*, (Fourthwall Books, Johannesburg, 2011), p.

⁶⁹ Road to Then and Now interview

⁷⁰ Eric Miller, interviewed at his home in Cape Town, 3rd May 2013

Afrapix from our own sales from the agency side of things.’ Thus, it was necessary to sell images as a means to continue producing and whilst not all Afrapix photographers took on the role of photojournalist, it was a role adopted by a significant proportion of the collective.

However, as photojournalists, Afrapix photographers experience even more pressure to produce didactic photographs that represented South Africa in a ‘simplistic,’ one-dimensional manner. As Okwui Enwezor argues, photographers were particularly restricted in their roles as photojournalists as the images were required to convey information with direct emotional content, restricting any form of complexity or nuance that gave indigenous documentary its depth⁷¹. This resulted in a high demand for images depicting the violent and brutal nature of apartheid, forming a common conception of South Africa in the press as a country in constant struggle. Paddy Donnelly, who worked for IDAF in the late 1980s, preparing images for circulation, describes the predisposition for images depicting the violence and brutality of apartheid:

‘You’d have people coming in looking for blood. They were looking for hard, hard-assed pictures... And there was a lot of appalling state violence that was happening and those basically were pictures that people were fixed on. And they certainly were the pictures that people could organize a picket around or get a meeting around. You needed that sort of imagery⁷².’

For the news-orientated members of the Afrapix group, there was little reservation about producing images that were equated with this grand narrative. As Eric Miller, who worked predominantly as a photojournalist, stated:

‘I wasn’t worried that that was the main narrative because it was the main narrative and in my world it certainly was the main narrative, somebody else might have argued that and over a period of time that may have changed. But certainly for a chunk of years the state

⁷¹ Okwui Enwezor and Rory Bester, *Rise and Fall of Apartheid: Photography and the Bureaucracy of Everyday Life*, (International Centre of Photography: New York, 2013), p.31

⁷² Patricia Hayes, ‘Power, Secrecy, Proximity: A Short History of South African Photography’, *Kronos Journal of Cape History*, No. 33, 2007, p. 139-162

violence being perpetrated on relatively helpless communities was the main narrative⁷³.

However there was also a sense of frustration that accompanied this route, with many photographers feeling restricted by the photographic economy and the associated pressure to produce certain images. The media demands tended to be one-dimensional, founded on a certain stereotype and presumptions about the apartheid regime that limited the expression of South African photographers. Weinberg discusses the preconceptions about South Africa that the mainstream media expected to be perpetuated in photographic images:

‘With regard to white people, they generally wanted to see white people as baddies, opulent, rich or gun toting Afrikaner, Boer fascists, right? So if you broke those stereotypes or those biopics, it wasn’t comfortable for them, they had a particular way of seeing things. In the same way they wanted to see blacks in a particular way. There is kind of cliché often in showing how black South Africans were: down out, depressed or in resistance. So any nuance of that would have definitely been difficult.’⁷⁴

Consequently, given the limited photographic economy, Afrapix members were often required to produce work that provided a superficial interpretation of South Africa that overlooked the many layers of nuance and complexity in South African society. Photographic portrayals of sectors of South Africa society that veered away from the stereotypical depiction of black people and victims and white people as oppressors were often met considerably controversy. For example, Kim Gray’s snapshots of black prostitutes, exhibited in 1987 at the Market Gallery museum, was condemned by the public for supposedly suggesting all prostitutes are black and that all black women are prostitutes⁷⁵. Two years later, there was another outcry over Gideon

⁷³ Eric Miller, interviewed at his home in Cape Town, 3rd May 2013

⁷⁴ Paul Weinberg, interviewed at the University of Cape Town, 12th April 2013

⁷⁵ Andries Oliphant, *Two Tone: South Africa’s First Jazz Magazine*, (1992) p. 9

Mendel's colour pictures of the Groot Trek commemoration festivities, which were criticized by black people for glorifying the right wing Afrikaner Nationalism⁷⁶.

This was a considerable source of frustration for a number of Afrapix photographers and many felt trapped by the visual format demanded by news outlets and the demands of the socio-political context. Santu Mofokeng, who left Afrapix in the late 1980's, stating: 'I was unhappy with the propaganda images, which reduced life in the townships to one of perpetual struggle, because I felt this representation was incomplete⁷⁷.' A similar sentiment is expressed by Paul Weinberg, who said: 'As I got into news and as the sort of stereotypes of what the world wanted and how apartheid played itself out became more and more apparent, I sort of found myself trapped in a kind of visual format⁷⁸.'

Thus, whilst many Afrapix photographers were inclined to explore the back streets and nuances of the country away from the front lines, as the struggle intensified and the world media directed their attention towards South Africa, there was increasingly limited space to express this more personal work.

THE PHOTOGRAPHIC ESSAY

However, whilst the context restricted the expression of a more nuanced, complex representation of South Africa, Afrapix photographers resisted being drawn into the one-dimensional over coded narrative that is commonly associated with the international media's portrayal of South Africa and synonymous with a general lack of understanding. They were therefore faced with the challenge of covering the struggle and social issues whilst creating a body of work that expressed a nuanced viewpoint, portraying oppression and human emotions to the socio-political environment in a way that reiterated the humanity and individuality of their subjects. Finding a successful balance between these various dynamics was a struggle, as Badsha said:

You struggle with that, because you don't want your photographs to look like the whites that came and photographed us and published in their books for magazines, for exhibitions and stuff. Smiling blacks and happy

⁷⁶ *ibid*, p. 9

⁷⁷ Santu Mofokeng, 'Trajectory of a Street Photographer', p. 269.

⁷⁸ Interview *The Road to Then and Now* (film 2007)

clappy, you know what I mean? Or down trodden and totally— yes, totally downtrodden⁷⁹.’

Afrapix addressed this challenge by framing their more nuanced, ‘ordinary’ images within a broader discourse that addressed issues of racism, encouraging the audience to view Afrapix photography through the lens of the anti-apartheid resistance. This enabled Afrapix to present a more intimate view of South African that emphasised the dignity and humanity of the oppressed whilst simultaneously exerting an anti-apartheid message, illustrating the fact that, as Badsha said, “racism is not just a sign saying ‘blacks only.’ It’s the way people looked at us or represented us⁸⁰.” This was primarily achieved through the use of photographic essays, which allowed photographers to develop a set of ideas from frame to frame, forming a narrative that encouraged the audience to perceive the images in a certain way. The ability to convey their own messages through the use of photo narratives was where the collective’s own sense of agency lay. As Weinberg recalls:

‘We had our own real agency, our real library and we made our own selections, we could say this series of images is a very nice exhibition and this could be a nice photo-essay, could be part of a project that makes you think about that or a slide show, we were making those kind of interventions and we weren’t just lost in this mass media game. We were determining our own sense of history⁸¹.’

Often complex and nuanced images of the everyday were placed along ‘fists and banners’ imagery, political agency alongside personal agency, that enforced an anti-apartheid statement without sacrificing the sense of humanity and individualism in the photographers’ subjects. Taken out of this framework and placed elsewhere the image could read entirely differently, holding little political or social significance. However within a broader framework of other images it could be an incredibly powerful anti-apartheid statement. Thus, the construction of images in relation to one another was often intrinsic to the photographers’ intent. As Badsha says: ‘So, you’re a writer, you

⁷⁹ Omar Badsha, interviewed at his home in Cape Town, 5th September 2013

⁸⁰ *ibid*

⁸¹ Paul Weinberg, interviewed at the University of Cape Town, 12th April 2013

construct with words, a narrative, likewise a photographer. And in the process of construction is a whole history that informs it⁸².’

Photo-essays were often accompanied by captions or full text essays that were further influenced the politicization of an image. Badsha refers to the use of wording in helping shape the audience’s perception of the work, a strategy adopted as an artist, before he had even become a photographer: ‘You used different strategies to put across ideas. Not just the drawing. You might use a title. And in the title is embedded a code, an idea⁸³.’ Whilst he may be talking about art in this particular case, the concept transcends art and can just as easily be applied to photography. As Goddard observed, ‘photographs are open to a whole lot of things happening,’ thus it was often necessary to include photographs alongside text or a caption, providing the context through which to view and understand the photographs. Furthermore, given the prominent focus on South Africa in the international media and cultural associations, there was a familiarity with apartheid and South Africa that often added an entirely new dimension to a seemingly ‘ordinary’ image and the way in which it was perceived. Therefore, although the ‘everyday’ images lacked an overtly political message, they still remained a powerful indictment of apartheid. Effectively conveying the harsh and brutal nature of apartheid on the lives of everyday South Africans. ‘It might be subtle it might be overt. It doesn’t have to be in your face news image... Subtle images and news images can be as impactful⁸⁴.’ Thus although the more nuanced, everyday images often lacked a clear political statement, through the arrangement of an extended, deliberately structured number of images alongside text or a caption, the audience were lead to understand seemingly innocuous imagery within the context of apartheid and racism.

This photo-essay form was adopted in Afrapix’s magazine, *Full Frame*⁸⁵, which focused on straight social documentary photography, helping combat the predominant visual narrative perpetuated in mainstream media. It was here that Afrapix were able to exhibit their more nuanced, complex work that celebrated the ordinary, including projects such as Weinberg and Mofokeng’s *Going Home*, George Hallet’s *A View*

⁸² Omar Badsha, interviewed at his home in Cape Town, 5th September 2013

⁸³ Omar Badsha, interviewed at his home in Cape Town, 5th September 2013

⁸⁴ Paul Weinberg, interviewed at the University of Cape Town, 12th April 2013

⁸⁵ *Full Frame* vol 1 , no. 1 June, 1990 editorial

From Exile, and David Goldblatt's *Structures*. In its first editorial, editors Guy Tillim, Paul Grendon and Chris Ledochowski wrote,

'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 established photographer recently lamented that as much as 90% of his work has never been seen....To fulfill this gap Full Frame aims to provide photographers with both an exhibition space and meeting point⁸⁶.'

This more straight form of social documentary work as conveyed through the photographic essay was also presented through the alternative press, most notably Staffrider, as well as through their own exhibitions and publications. However, Afrapix's use of the photo-essay can most effectively be illustrated by two of the collective's most significant publications, *South Africa: The Cordoned Heart* and *Beyond the Barricades: Popular Resistance in South Africa*, travelling exhibitions that were significant in drawing attention to the anti-apartheid struggle.

South Africa: The Cordoned Heart, was published in 1986 in conjunction with a travelling exhibitions of the photographs in the United States, South Africa, and Europe, established as a result of the Carnegie Inquiry into Poverty and Development in South Africa⁸⁷. It documented the structural dimensions of poverty under apartheid, in rural and urban areas as well as Lesotho. Weinberg recalls the process:

'Many of us took these sort of journeys into the hinterland to try and tell the story, a little like the American Farm Security Project which was very famous in the 1930s in America. I mean, we didn't have the same funding or anything like that but the sentiment was the same⁸⁸.'

As made clear in the foreword by Desmond Tutu as well as Omar Badsha's preface, the photographers dismissed the 'neutral' stance supported by journalist and were in clear support of the anti-apartheid struggle⁸⁹. However, the images constructing the narrative were primarily a reflection of the more nuanced, complex photography of the ordinary as opposed to overtly political 'struggle photography.' Exploring various

⁸⁶ *ibid*, p. 1

⁸⁷ Newbury, p. 243

⁸⁸ Paul Weinberg, interviewed at the University of Cape Town, 12th April 2013

⁸⁹ *Cordoned Heart*

themes such as resettlement, migrant labour and squatter life, *Cordoned Heart* provided a personal insight into everyday life of the oppressed under apartheid, shifting away from the one-dimensional, stereotypical images projected by the media⁹⁰. In an 1986 review, Mary Warner Marien observes the effects of the photographic humanism in the *Cordoned Heart*, stating:

Political terror communicates best in the cumulative physical and psychological degradations of the individual. *The Diary of Anne Frank*, George Orwell's *1984*, Arthur Koestler's *Darkness at Noon*, and Alexander Solzhenitsyn's *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* gather their strength by focusing on one person's experience. Similarly, *The Cordoned Heart* defines the ordeal of the mostly black and Colored poor in southern Africa by visualizing the everyday life of individuals⁹¹.



Figure 8: Omar Badsha
Teacher with class of 80 pupils, 1982

⁹⁰ ibid

⁹¹ Mary Warner Marien, Daily Life Under Apartheid in *The Christian Science Monitor*, September 5, 1968

However, by the end of *Cordoned Heart* there is a shift away from the layered, humanist documentary towards more conflict orientated photography, an intentional decision to show ‘that these people who are making history, not just being victims of history. They are active agents.’⁹² As Francis Wilson concluded in his essay: ‘this book must not leave readers overwhelmed with hopelessness or defeat. Strategies that those enduring poverty adopt in order to survive are also acts of resistance, as one can see from the faces of the people in these photographs’⁹³.



Figure 9: Omar Badsha
Commemoration meeting inn Merebank for ANC members killed in military
raid. 1982

Thus, the more nuanced, complex images of the everyday, whilst not overtly political, are allocated a greater sense of political expression when placed within a larger photographic narrative alongside images of defiance. This was enhanced by the use of captions and essays, which addressed the brutal nature of apartheid, reminding the audience that these images are not simply a metaphor for the human condition and in fact represent snapshots taken from real life, of real people.

⁹² Omar Badsha, interviewed at his home in Cape Town, 5th September 2013

⁹³ *Cordoned heart*, p. xviii

Whilst *Cordoned Heart* celebrated the ordinary, Afrapix's next major exhibition, the *Hidden Camera*, which later evolved into *Beyond the Barricades*, took of a more explicitly political approach. In comparison the *Cordoned Heart*, the images from *Beyond the Barricades* were direct representations of the struggle, documenting political demonstrations and meetings, violent clashes between demonstrators and police, and the effects of industrial action and vigilante violence⁹⁴. This portrayal, articulating a greater sense of urgency, is addressed in the introduction:

'The period covered by this book represents a period of untold brutality, misery, suffering, pain and even death. The photographs and text tabulate and bring to life the extent of this misery. Endless funerals and victims of attacks are portrayed. The reader experiences the full impact of the state's increased militarization and its brutal response to the people's determination that change must come⁹⁵.'

Unlike *Cordoned Heart*, the identity of the individual photographers was left obscured, an indication of the increasing restrictions placed on journalists and photographers who aimed to document the political turmoil in South Africa. The introduction informs readers that all the photographers had been subject to state harassment, detained without trial and had their film confiscated. At that time, the existing regulations made the taking of many images in *Beyond the Barricades* illegal.

This more overtly political approach was in part a product of the time. Weinberg recalls:

'When we photographed the Cordoned Heart we were looking at showing black poverty and development and searching for those kind of answers and exploring those areas. But by 1984, when the book was coming out, South Africa was aflame. There was so much social and political disruption and resistance, it had taken another life. So we then felt that it was really important to tell the story as well⁹⁶.'

⁹⁴ *Beyond the Barricades: Popular resistance in South Africa in the 1980's*

⁹⁵ *ibid*, p. xvii

⁹⁶ Paul Weinberg, interviewed at the University of Cape Town, 12th April 2013



Figure 10: Paul Weinberg
Lone Women protests as soldiers occupy her township, 1985

Beyond the Barricades therefore reflected the turbulent social-political environment and growing resistance to apartheid, constructing a narrative around defiance, resistance and the violence that often accompanied it. However, images of political meetings, mass demonstrations and violent confrontation are punctuated with a number of poignant, reflective images that depict the more personal moments of grief or tragedy: A mother, covered by a blanket in a scantily furnished room, mourning the death of her two sons; a father sitting in the back of an open truck along side his sons' coffin; a woman holding a young child, whose husband and daughter had been killed by vigilantes⁹⁷. These images capture not only the pain and grief of apartheid but also the spirit of resistance amongst people in the face of oppression.

⁹⁷ Hill, I.T. & Harris, A. *Beyond the Barricades*



Figure 11: Cedric Nunn, 1987

Therefore, although there is a clear shift away from the more humanist documentary of the everyday, these are not the one-dimensional, stereotyped images propagated by the mainstream media. Whilst television news was in favour of the large gatherings, defiance and violent confrontation that many of these images capture, the complexity of the South African situation, as represented through the photographic essay, was not sacrificed in the process. The personal involvement and commitment of Afrapix photographers within the struggle was significant in the way they shaped the way they visually represented South Africa and apartheid through the compilation of imagery. As Graham Goddard observed,

‘When *Beyond the Barricades* came out it was a completely different view of South Africa from the inside. So these were people connected directly to what was happening around them. It was not a foreign guy coming in with great technique, well known, taking pictures, going off, showing horrendous scenes⁹⁸.’

Thus, whilst some pictures were more explicit than others in showing the evil of apartheid, what remained constant throughout the wide range of imagery was a sense of subtlety and humanity, that showed a great deal of empathy between the subject and the photographer.

⁹⁸ Graham Goddard, interviewed at his office and Cape Peninsula University, 20th August 2013

The work presented in *Cordoned Heart* and *Beyond Barricades* provides excellent insight the role of the photographic essay in asserting an anti-apartheid stance whilst maintaining the humanity and dignity of the oppressed. Significantly, both publications gained global exposure, drawing attention to the horrors of the apartheid regime on an international level whilst asserting the political and personal agency of the oppressed, contributing towards the larger resistance message that encouraged increasing pressure against Apartheid South Africa. As Weinberg recalls:

‘Cordoned Heart travelled throughout the world and was seen. It took us from off the radar to main stage. It was shown at ICP in New York and it got other spaces throughout the world. I think it did have an impact at the time. People in the world were also very hungry to see what was going on in South Africa. The cultural boycott was in place and it wasn’t very easy for journalists and photographers to come out here. So I think it was an important marker during those times, as was *Beyond the Barricades*.’⁹⁹

THE END OF AFRAPIX

However, whilst publications such as *Cordoned Heart* and *Beyond the Barricades* provided clear examples of how Afrapix effectively balanced the professional ‘struggle’ photography with the more nuanced, personal imagery, this heterogeneous nature of the Afrapix collective was also a cause of its fragility. This was most clearly articulated by the struggle to reconcile a professional, career driven photographic approach with a personal, activist one. As Weinberg stated,

‘You have to draw the line between professional and personal. And some work was to survive and make money and some were about understanding things around you and the world around you and family and things like that¹⁰⁰.’

⁹⁹ Paul Weinberg, interviewed at the University of Cape Town, 12th April 2013

¹⁰⁰ *ibid*

A professional approach was particularly significant for Afrapix because Afrapix members chose to fund the collective from the agency's own sales¹⁰¹. Thus, many photographers were pressured to produce the fists and banners imagery that would easily be absorbed into the photographic economy as a means for Afrapix to remain financially dependent. This meant the more nuanced, complex images of the everyday had to be sidelined in the process. However, this generated tension in the group as professional photography was not prioritized by everyone. Unlike a number of members who were making money off their images and thus contributing to the financial support of Afrapix, Badsha, as he recalls, 'wasn't selling that much at all. I was doing some work but it was very difficult to get work in Durban in the newspapers.' This division between personal and professional came to a fore at 1989 annual meeting, when Omar Badsha was unanimously voted out of Afrapix, a decision primarily associated with the fact that he was not contributing to the funding of the organisation. As Miller recalled:

'The fundamental thing was that he wasn't producing anything and we had made it clear that people had to produce so the organisation could survive without foreign funding¹⁰².'

Along side this issue were Badsha's political ambitions, which many felt were not in accordance with Afrapix's ethos. As Weinberg stated:

'He was essentially trying to push Afrapix into being a political organisation, kind of a photographic association trade union. And he had been pushing that for three years and it was really against the grain because most of the photographers were independent, individual photographers who just, they worked through Afrapix, and they didn't really want to have this very close alignment of being political¹⁰³.'

Three years later, the issue of funding was raised again, this time resulting in the disbanding of Afrapix entirely. The collective was divided between those who wanted to rely on funding and run workshops and those who wanted to professionalize and

¹⁰¹ Omar Badsha, interviewed at his home in Cape Town, 5th September 2013

¹⁰² Eric Miller, interviewed at his home in Cape Town, 3rd May 2013

¹⁰³ Paul Weinberg, interviewed at the University of Cape Town, 12th April 2013

were rather uncomfortable with the idea of funding, particularly given the previous issues with Badsha. What occurred was ‘a huge debate, irresolvable debate, between those who wanted to be professionals and those who wanted funding¹⁰⁴.’ Thus, whilst previously the ideological differences between the professional and the personal had not been an overriding issue, by 1990 the collective had collapsed.

SOCIAL DOCUMENTARY PHOTOGRAPHY, CONTRASTS AND CONTINUITIES OF POST APARTHEID



Figure 12: Graeme Willaims, 1990

The collapse of Afrapix was also a reflection of the changing nature of the political landscape, loosening the ideological foundations on which Afrapix was based. On the second of February 1990, F.W. De Klerk announced the unbanning of all liberation movements and the release of political prisoners. Nine days later, on the 11th of February, Mandela was released from prison. Within this environment, exiled leaders returned to Cape Town and open negotiations began on the 4th of May 1990, with the

¹⁰⁴ Paul Weinberg, interviewed at the University of Cape Town, 12th April 2013

signing of the Groote Schuur Minute. It reflected the commitment of the ANC and NP to work together in bringing the violence to an end and removing any barriers in the negotiation process. Although negotiations started off unsteady ground, an interim constitution, setting the dates of elections, was signed by leaders of the negotiating parties on the 18th of November 1993. On the 27th of April 1994, South Africans assembled all over the country to vote in South Africa's first non-racial democratic elections. Nelson Mandela was voted in as President, with De Klerk and Thabo Mbeki as deputies, in a government of national unity. On the 10th of May, 1994, Mandela was inaugurated in Pretoria, signaling an end to the long lasting struggle against the apartheid regime.

Most photographers have made a clear distinction between pre and post apartheid, reflected by publications such as *Then and Now: Eight South African Photographers*¹⁰⁵, which examines the two distinct periods of South Africa's history and how their work has changed and developed over the decades¹⁰⁶. Social documentary photographers found themselves in rapidly changing social and political context. With the transition to democracy came the loss of their central subject matter and photographers found themselves working in an environment where there was no longer the clear distinctions of apartheid¹⁰⁷. As Weinberg observed:

In those days it was defined for us. The good guys, the bad guys, win, loose. There was a clear sense of purpose that the camera could play and photography could play. Now its much more complex and its requires more personal questions about what is important, how do you make a difference¹⁰⁸.

However, the end of apartheid also heralded a shift in the photographic economy that introduced a new world of photographic opportunity, allowing photographers to take a more personal and artistic direction that had been sidelined in apartheid. Images of the ordinary found a commercial market overseas, with demands growing for

¹⁰⁵ Paul Weinberg, *Then and Now: Eight South African Photographers*. (London: Highveld Press, 2009)

¹⁰⁶ Paul Weinberg. *Then and Now: Eight South African Photographers*. (London: Highveld Press, 2009)

¹⁰⁷ *ibid*, p. 8

¹⁰⁸ Paul Weinberg, interviewed at the University of Cape Town, 12th April 2013

photographs of everyday life as a weariness of explicitly political news images descended over the international media realm¹⁰⁹. As Weinberg recalls:

‘We had more freedom to do that, we weren’t restrained, we weren’t driven by the need to tell the world what was going on. Photographers could finally move away ‘from the socio-political, very serious framework... which had entrapped me and I had entrapped myself.’¹¹⁰

Therefore, outside the context of the anti apartheid struggle and the consequent media demands, there was a release from the pressure to produce overtly political photography and a greater sense of freedom to be personally expressive in their photographic interpretations of the world. Weinberg recalls this sense of autonomy with the transition to democracy:

‘From a very early age in my photography I was always looking at the human spirit of people. I wanted to try and show them as much as I could and this gave me a chance to try and explore that in depth and try and define that more.’¹¹¹

Thus whilst the more personal projects of the 1980s, that explored issues such as the everyday and added a nuanced dimension to the Afrapix’s body of work, were often sidelined by the pressure to produce politically relevant images, photographers had a greater sense of freedom to explore this side of social documentary in the post-apartheid era.

¹⁰⁹ Mofokeng, S. ‘Trajectory of a Street Photographer’, in Revue Noire (ed.) *Anthology of African and Indian Ocean Photography*, (Paris: Revue Noire, 1999) pp. 260

¹¹⁰ Paul Weinberg, interviewed at the University of Cape Town, 12th April 2013

¹¹¹ *ibid*

Although this illustrates the contrasts between the ‘then and now’ of social documentary photography in South African history, it also emphasises the fact that despite the rapidly changing socio-political context, the human condition has remained a perpetual issue for the social documentary photographer. A continuous thread in the work of photographers, this focus on people, as expressed primarily through ‘everyday’ images, is apparent in various projects such as Cedric Nunn’s long term family history *Blood Relatives*¹¹², Weinberg’s work with the San¹¹³, and Chris Ledochowski’s work in the Cape Flats¹¹⁴, all of which have traversed the two distinct periods of South African history.



Figure 11 and 12: Paul Weinberg, *Back to the Land*, 1995
‘I just felt such liberation by taking that photograph and telling a story that was just so different and capturing another equality if you like.’

¹¹² Cedric Nunn, *Blood Relatives*, <http://www.cedricnunn.co.za/> (accessed 24th October 2013)

¹¹³ Paul Weinberg, *In Search of the San*, http://paulweinberg.co.za/?page_id=38 (accessed 24th October 2013)

¹¹⁴ Ledochowski, C. (2003) *Cape Flats Detail: Life and Culture in the Townships of Cape Town*. Pretoria: South Africa History Online & UNISA Press.

Another factor of apartheid that transcends the distinction between pre and post apartheid is the continuation of the role of social documentary photography as a socio-political commentator, documenting those on the receiving end of history. Talking of his work in the post apartheid era, Badsha recalls photographing his family and friends at a recent party, stating:

‘It’s the everyday but its now how would I create, out of all of that, a narrative about this community or my friends or different people and how they function in those sort of situations. I’m attracted to that. I see it as an important statement. I can now create a political statement or a cultural discourse around that¹¹⁵.’

Thus although the circumstances have shifted and there is no longer the central impetus of apartheid, the concept of raising various issues around the political and social environment has remained a central quality of the South African social documentary genre. For some, this was encouraged by the fact that, despite the collapse of apartheid, social and political injustice has continued to exist in South Africa and on a global scale, with new issues arising daily. As Edkins notes:

‘...you get rid of apartheid but that doesn’t mean that you have achieved the next step, which is a real, free democratic society where there are no human rights violations. Because the violence continues to exist, the inequality continues to exist, there is still poverty, there is xenophobia, all these things that we still need to change in society. We have changed, we have become a democratic country, but we haven’t got rid of all the social injustices.’¹¹⁶

¹¹⁵ Omar Badsha, interviewed at his home in Cape Town, 5th September 2013

¹¹⁶ Don Edkins, interviewed at his office in Cape Town, 28th May 2013

Today, Edkins attempts to address these matters by working in documentary film, dealing with issues such as poverty and democracy in South Africa and on a global scale. Miller also continued to concentrate on social and political issues in his work. After 1994, he travelled around Africa documenting human injustice in countries including Rwanda, Sudan, Liberia and Sierra Leone¹¹⁷.



Figure 13: Eric Miller
Acem Atem Kiel, who lost two of her children during
an attack on her village in South Sudan, 1996

Nowadays, his focus has shifted away from the violence and he is working on an oral history project with Grandmothers¹¹⁸. However, the power of social documentary in conveying political and social issues has remained a constant force, traversing the two distinct periods of South African history. As Miller reflects:

‘What underpins what and why I do what I do? It’s about holding human rights issues up in the foreground so that people can look at things happening to other

¹¹⁷ Eric Miller, interviewed at his home in Cape Town, 3rd May 2013

¹¹⁸ *ibid*

people and be aware of it. And I guess that's always what it's been about.'¹¹⁹

Thus, despite the rapidly changing context and social and political transformations in South Africa during the 1980s and 1990s, Afrapix and apartheid social documentary photography instilled an approach that has remained consistent throughout the decades, centered on the simple intention to tell stories and raise important issues about society.

CONCLUSION

In 1990 Albie Sachs, a prominent ANC activist, challenged the 1980s assertion that culture and art should be used as a weapon in the struggle against apartheid. He observed:

'In the case of a real instrument of struggle, there is no room for ambiguity: a gun is a gun is a gun, and if it were full of contradictions, it would fire in all sorts of directions and be useless for its purpose. But the power of art lies precisely in its capacity to expose contradictions and reveal hidden tensions'¹²⁰.

Whilst Afrapix's ideology was structured around the concept of the camera as a weapon in the struggle, this power, as identified by Albie Sachs, was never lost. Beyond the role of Afrapix members as 'cultural workers' in the struggle, what has come across in interviews with this group of photographers' is their ability to approach South Africa with a personal connection and understanding of the people and the various problems that they faced under apartheid. It allowed them to create a multi-dimensional, in-depth depiction of their country and the human condition that stretched the boundaries between the requirements of the photographic economy and media, creating a form of socially relevant social documentary that drew attention to critical issues whilst forming a nuanced view of South Africa that lay emphasis on the humanity and dignity of the oppressed.

¹¹⁹ *ibid*

¹²⁰ Albie Sachs, 'Preparing ourselves for freedom. In *Spring is Rebellious*, ed. Ingrid de Kok and Karen Press, Cape Town: Buchu Boks 1990, 21-22

Given the time period, as South Africa verged on the brink of civil war and the struggle intensified throughout the 1980s, Afrapix was driven to present their imagery within the context of the liberation struggle, conscientising their audience and raising awareness of the brutality of apartheid. With the spotlight on apartheid South Africa and growing condemnation of the apartheid regime, these images added a noteworthy dimension to the broader mobilizing movement. As Badsha said: ‘Our timing, our moment and the milieu that we were in and the net works that we were in, informed people’s sense of being able to change things.’

However, almost twenty years since the collapse of apartheid these images have not lost their value. Recording the 1980s socio-political landscape, with history unfolding in front of their lens, Afrapix’s images have shaped the way apartheid South Africa is remembered today. As humans we are a rather visual kind and the way we remember, understand and analyse history is very much interlinked with photography. The Soweto Uprising, for example, has been characterized by Sam Nzima’s image of Hector Pieterse, the Vietnam War will always be associated with Nick Ut’s image of the little girl running down the road after a napalm attack. In a similar way, the memories of 1980s South Africa have been constructed around the numerous images produced by the media and liberation groups of this period. Personally, this is where I feel Afrapix’s true power and agency has been. By countering the predominant narrative, centered on the spectacular and stereotype, Afrapix formed a humanistic representation of South Africa that illustrated the specialness of the ordinary, shaping the way 1980s apartheid is represented in history and keeping alive the memories of events, stories and people that would have otherwise have disappeared.

Given Afrapix’s incredibly complex history, its wide variety of members with a wide variety of opinions and photographic approaches, it seems appropriate to conclude with a remark made by Omar Badsha that seems to bring together these various dimensions:

‘At the end of the day, notwithstanding differences or perceived differences, it was the most incredible experience and experiment in this country’s history in photography. And it produced a huge body of work

and it gave birth to some incredibly talented people who went and continued to produce beautiful work.'

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Andries Oliphant, *Two Tone: South Africa's First Jazz Magazine*, (1992)
- Badsha, O, 1978, *Letter to Farzanah*
- Badsha, O. 1984, *Imijondolo*
- Christopher Pinney, "The Prosthetic Eye: Photography as Cure and Poison", *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, vol. 14 (2008)
- Don Edkins, interviewed at his office in Cape Town, 28th May 2013
- Eric Miller, interviewed at his home in Cape Town, 3rd May 2013
- Freund, A and Thomson, A, *Oral History and Photography*, (London: Palgrave Macmillian, 2012)
- *Full Frame* vol 1 , no. 1 June, 1990 editorial
- Ganter, E and Edkins, D. *Marotholi: Theatre for Another Development* (Lesotho: The Village of Information Service Christian Council of Lesotho, 1988)
- Graham Goddard, interviewed at his office and Cape Peninsula University, 20th August 2013
- Greg Marinovich and Joao Silva, *The Bang Bang Club: Snapshots from a Hidden War*, (Arrow Books: London, 2001)
- Grundlingh, K. The development of photography in South Africa. *Revue Noire* (Ed) *Anthology of African and Indian Ocean Photography*, (Paris: Revue Noire, 1999). pp. 243-253
- Hill, I.T. & Harris, A. *Beyond the Barricades: Popular resistance in South Africa in the 1980's*. (London: Kliptown Books, 1989)
- *Images in Struggle*, DVD and VHS, B. Feinberg, IDAF:UK, 1990
- Josephy, S in Grundlingh, G *The Cape Town Month of Photography 2005* p 7
- Krantz, D. "Politics and Photography in Apartheid South Africa." *History of Photography* 32.4 (Winter 2008), 290-300
- Mary Warner Marien, Daily Life Under Apartheid in *The Christian Science Monitor*, September 5, 1968
- Mofokeng, S. 'Trajectory of a Street Photographer', in *Revue Noire* (ed.) *Anthology of African and Indian Ocean Photography*, (Paris: Revue Noire, 1999) pp. 253-64.

- Newbury, D. *Defiant Images: Photography and Apartheid South Africa*. (Pretoria: University of South Africa Press, 2009)
- Nunn, C. *Cedric Nunn: Call and Response*, ()
- O. Enwezor, 'The Uses of Afro-Pessimism', in *In/Sight: African Photographers 1940 to the Present*, ed. C. Bell et al (New York: Guggenheim Museum, 1996), 20
- Omar Badsha, *Imijondolo: A Photographic Essay on Forced Removals in the Inanda District of South Africa*, (Afrapix: Durban, 1985)
- Omar Badsha, interviewed at his home in Cape Town, 5th September 2013
- Omar Badsha, *Letter to Farzanah*, (Institute for Black Research, 1979)
- Ozynski, J *Ten Years of Staffrider 1978- 1988*, vol. 7 no. 3 and 4 p 163
- Patricia Hayes, 'Power, Secrecy, Proximity: A Short History of South African Photography', *Kronos Journal of Cape History*, No. 33, 2007, p. 139-162
- Paul Weinberg, interviewed at the University of Cape Town, 12th April 2013
- Peffer, J. *Art and the End of Apartheid*, (London: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 258
- Saayman Hattingh, H and Gaede, R. 'Photographer Autonomy and Images of Resistance: The Case of South Africa during the 1980s,' *Visual Communication* (2011)
- Sanner, P.L. (1999) 'Comrades and Cameras', in *Revue Noire* (ed.) *Anthology of African and Indian Ocean Photography*, (Paris: Revue Noire, 1999). pp. 253–64.
- "South Africa through the Lens," *Staffrider Magazine*, 1983
- The Road to Then and Now
- Weinberg 'Apartheid- a vigilant witness: A reflection on photography" in Willem Campschreur and Joost Divendal (eds.) *Culture in Another South Africa*. (London: Zed Books, 1989) p, 166-99
- Weinberg, P. *Then and Now: Eight South African Photographers*. (London: Highveld Press, 2009)
- Weinberg, P. *Travelling Light*, (South Africa: University of Kwazulu Natal Press, 2004)

- Weinberg, The Present is in the Past
- Zubeida Vallie, interviewed at her office at Cape Town University of Technology, 30th August 2013