



LESLEY LAWSON QUIET MOMENTS IN THE STRUGGLE

A SOUTH AFRICAN
PHOTO MEMOIR

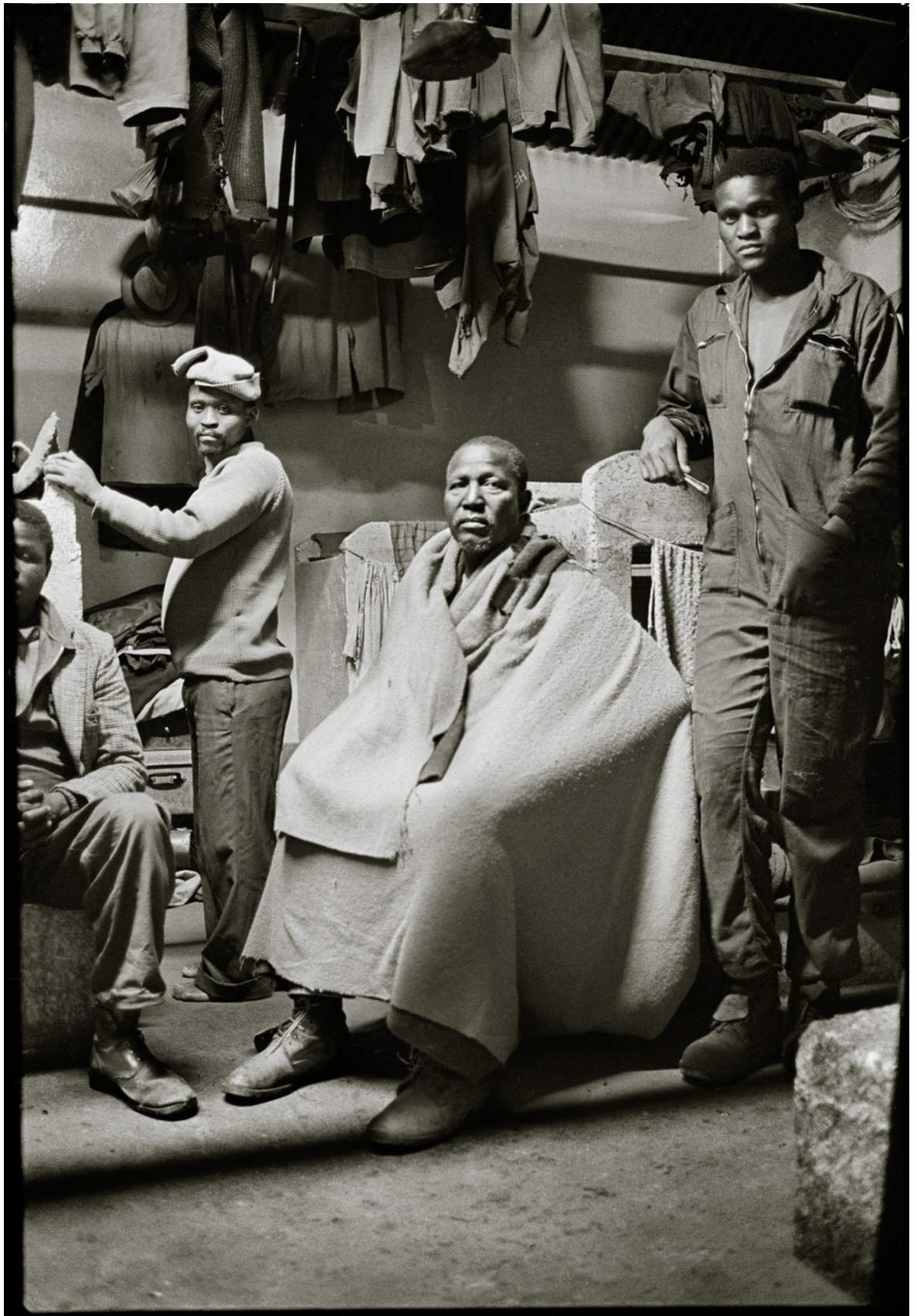
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ON THE EDGE OF THE WORLD, 1970

I AM SITTING ON MY LITTLE, RED SUITCASE on the back of an open truck bound for a youth camp at Phoenix Settlement on Natal's North Coast. Squashed in beside me are half a dozen girls from a mission school (black), a few university students, whom I vaguely recognise (white), and a much older man called Reuben (very black). Reuben is also very drunk and has no front teeth. He delights in the sway of the vehicle, which allows him to lurch into me, to breathe cheap wine into my face, and to flap his hands in the general direction of my breasts. "There are gaps in the world," he wheezes, "gaps in the sky, gaps between my teeth."

This is 1970 and the country is beginning to stir from the deep slumber of the past decade, during which the banning of organisations opposing apartheid, and the exile or imprisonment of all their leaders has quelled all protest within the country. State vigilance is such that the very words "Nelson Mandela" and "African National Congress" have disappeared from the national discourse. But now the trade union movement is reviving and, under the influence of the American Civil Rights Movement and African post-colonial thinkers, black activism has been rebooted in the form of the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM). Thanks to the BCM's radical leader,

Steve Biko, and a political philosopher, Rick Turner, Durban University has become the epicentre of this reawakening.

Just a year before this, my mother had worked late into the nights to sew me a whole new range of frocks and suits: enough clothes, in fact, to provide me with a different outfit every day for a fortnight. As the first family member to enter university, I was getting the full treatment. But, in other more important ways, I was ill prepared. Like many white South Africans, my parents had always discouraged my siblings and me from reading the newspapers, and discussion of politics was all but forbidden in the house. Up until this time, the most liberal people I had known believed that Africans were like children, being brought up slowly by whites, as a big favour.

Thus, I arrived on the politically turbulent Durban campus with no clue about the country of my birth. Although the universities were racially segregated, the new energy of the times had stimulated political discourse on the white campus. In the safety of the university grounds, there were noisy protests against the detention without trial of political activists and I was both fascinated and terrified by the boldness of the student leaders; I half expected them to be bundled off to jail at any moment.

Eager to explore the forbidden, I threw myself into the heady tide of lifestyle politics, existential philosophy, Marxist thought and anti-apartheid activism. Old ideas and fashionable clothes were soon discarded and although I found it difficult to follow new concepts, such as universal human rights and the rule of law, three months into my first-year studies, I was one of the roughly one per cent of white South Africans who voted for the liberal Progressive Party in the general election.

Suddenly it was the long vacation and I found myself once again marooned in the suburban boredom of my childhood. One day, while hanging around on campus looking for someone to talk to, I met a friend who persuaded me to accompany him to a summer camp run by the Institute of Race Relations. My mother, thinking it was something Christian, encouraged me to go.

But now, as the truck leaves the familiar North Coast road, with its swathes of sugar cane and farmhouse mansions, I sense that I am heading

into uncharted terrain. We arrive at Phoenix Settlement as the sun goes down and members of a radical Indian theatre group are milling about the schoolyard. Their dark skins gleam in the evening light as they hum and strum on acoustic guitars. In their bright, print shirts and beaded headbands, they way surpass my notions of student cool.

The camp is run by a group of left-wing intellectuals, including Rick Turner, who has teamed up with the original inhabitants of the place—the great-grand family of Mahatma Gandhi. Together they have devised a Maoist scheme that employs a cunning mix of intellectual and manual labour, designed to turn us into the vanguard of the revolution. All morning we toil in the fields—which are actually the grounds of the school and clinic complex of the Gandhi settlement—and during the afternoon we attend educational talks on Black Consciousness, Nationalism and other such ideologies and inventions.

Never before had I imagined such people to exist: the bearded philosopher who questions the very ground on which I stand, the students who speak so eloquently about their black identity. I am thrilled by the richness of their voices, their accents, which I am accustomed to hearing only in mocking imitation. I am enticed by the new fragrance of cardamom and cumin permeating the night air, and the sight of lentil cakes drying in the sun.

After the evening meal the theatre group members take off their beaded headbands to perform their plays. This is the infancy of resistance theatre.

“Eli, eli lama sabachthani,”¹ Sam and Asha chant as they swing their glossy hair.

I come to understand that I was born into a long line of mass murderers, and that there are people filled with hatred for me and my kind. I am dazed by all this new knowledge and feel the ground slipping away beneath me. All my 18 years have become stones in my pockets, pebbles in my shoes.

Once home, for some reason, I think that my mother will be interested in my discoveries, but her only response is fear: fear that I have gone through some secret door into an alien world and am never coming back.

In my second year at university, I take Rick Turner's Politics class as an extra subject. He uses logic to duel with the demons of prejudice. He teaches us to think. "Now let's take this one word we all most fear: 'communism'. What does it actually mean?" he asks. "Who do you define as communists in the contemporary world? Put up your hands." Rick strides the dais in his green pullover; his freckled hands conduct a new dissonance from spellbound students. It is a wild dream of reason in an irrational world.

But I remain a slightly discordant voice in Rick's choir. My mind is full of backchat—all these voices speaking in words, both false and true. Like fanagalo.² On the one hand, I know that I have lived in a world of hypocrisy, where doing the right thing, just for show, has always been more important than truth and goodness, and this must not go on. On the other hand, I cannot simply arrive in this new dispensation fully formed and pretend that everything makes perfect sense: this would just be swapping one belief system for another.

Rick is endlessly patient. One evening at his house we have a long discussion about universal franchise. I have embraced the Progressive Party's notion that franchise should be qualified by criteria of education and wealth. Rick draws his argument with the slow, steady pace of a praying mantis. "Does it mean that if you are poor, you are not rational? If you haven't been to high school, does it mean that you are untrustworthy?"

I am the flailing fly as he inches his way along the branch. When he gets to the end he asks: "Does this make sense to you now?"

"Yes," I say, "it is logical, but I'm still not sure if I believe it."

He nods and smiles, secure in the faith that, eventually, my intellect will lead me out into the fresh air where he breathes so free.

I have become friendly with one of the members of the Black Consciousness theatre group, who divides his energies between admiring my flesh and criticising my whiteness. When he brings his friends to visit, at my mother's house, they come around to the back door in mock servility saying:

"Morning Madam, can we come in?"

One bleached out, know-nothing Durban day, John³ and I meet between the statues at the City Gardens. A few angels are looking down their noses at us, but although we may be barefoot and sitting under a tree, at least we are not covered in bird shit.

Before long we attract the attention of a group of Afrikaans holidaymakers, who begin to shout at John to clear out of the park, which they maintain is for white people only. An elderly man in a dove-grey safari suit and blue-spotted cravat steps forward and at first, I think he has come to intervene on our behalf. But then I notice that he is bunching his fists and seems to be frothing slightly at the mouth. He swings at John who, in true passive resistance style, keeps his hands behind his back. The Afrikaans boys shout encouragement, but do not join in.

“Bloody Coolie Bastard!” The old man shouts this over and over as he punches.

The crowd forms a circle around John and the old man, as if this were a boxing match. I am in the front row, blabbering to the people nearest me, trying to explain that John is being attacked for no reason. By now he has a split lip and his eyes are puffy. The old man is unmarked. The crowd shifts several metres across the park, keeping the boxers in the centre of the ring. Nobody takes our side.

Now John is running through the streets of the city, followed by the old man in the dove-grey safari suit. He turns into a narrow arcade, and the moment before he is ambushed he throws out his arms and legs yelling:

“I am not afraid of any fucking white man!”

But John is held tight in the arms of an African worker, who believes he has caught a thief.

Eventually the police arrive and break up the row. Surprisingly, they seem not to believe the old man’s tale—that we were kissing in the park. They tell him to go and I persuade John to walk home with me to my mother’s house. I am ashamed of my timid behaviour and hope to redeem myself.

Some way out of the city centre, a large car with two matching occupants pulls up. The men get out and question us. “What are you two doing walking together here?”

John and I look at each other. "It's not illegal," I say.

"We aren't answerable to the likes of you!" says John.

"Oh yes you are." The larger man pulls out his Security Police identification. "Now get lost," they say to John. "There's Indian town that-a-way. So scoot."

John walks off towards Grey Street. He is hunched with humiliation. They insist that I get into the car and they drive me home in silence.

Later that night I relate this story to my mother and she thinks I am making it up. Eventually she says: "I told you that you'd get into trouble. Mixing with blacks."

Later that month I accompany John to a meeting, where student leaders from the black campus are planning a major protest against deaths in detention. There are dozens of people crowded into a tiny Grey Street flat. When the presence of a white intruder is detected, they are furious and throw me out. Now it is John's turn to cringe.

I feel as if I have just discovered that the world is flat, and I am at the edge, falling off. That which I had always believed to be my personality is really just a row of beads on a piece of string, and the thread is about to break. I am reading Antonin Artaud, who tells me that life is "a burning-up of questions" and I identify so much with his madness that I am obliged to hide the book on top of my mother's wardrobe, as if it is a box of chocolates.

I walk the streets in a dream. I am adrift, I am floating...I stare at passers-by. They are all guilty, until proven innocent. The eyes, the eyes are everywhere.

1 "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matthew 27: 46).

2 A language of instruction, invented on the South African mines, that incorporates several African languages.

3 Not his real name.

LIVING IN THE BUFFER ZONE, 1976

WHEN WE FIRST DISCOVER THE PLACE, it is redolent with a century of wisteria. Dew shines in the slanty, early morning light and guinea fowl run in the long grass. The original gold mine is in its senescence and the headgear has ceased to turn. All around are abandoned villages and fields, scattered with the rusting carcasses of mine machinery. Our village, Langlaagte Deep, consists of six rows of brick and iron cottages that had been built for skilled Cornish miners in the early twentieth century. These now stand largely uninhabited, except for a handful of unemployed Afrikaans miners. Surrounded by unused land and flat-topped mine dumps covered in pampas grass, this is the so-called “buffer zone” that separates the township of Soweto from white Johannesburg.

We had somehow got to hear about it, my old friend Mark and I, and had managed to procure a lease from the mine company’s housing manager. He had been wary of letting the cottages to outsiders, but the promise of rental income from empty property overcame his qualms. At the time Mark had long hair that hung in a mass down his back, as well as a bushy beard and moustache. “I hope you are not going to start a Manson commune down there,” says the mine manager as he hands us the keys.

A few days after our move, it is my 25th birthday and I issue an informal supper invitation to a couple of friends. They arrive in expectation of a celebratory feast, but it's Mark's turn to cook and he serves up tinned vegetable curry with wheat rice, washed down by a flagon of Tassenberg.⁴ Although we have choices unavailable to the majority of South Africans, we are not keen on exercising them in a conspicuous way and are proud of the poverty of our material desires.

When we first move in, we delight in exploring the area and picnicking on the dumps, despite the desolation of the landscape and the itchiness of the toxic mine sand, whipping against our skins. We always take visitors to the abandoned lavatory block where decades of black miners have sat on open seats and crapped, side-by-side and back-to-back.

I have recently returned from studying for an MSc in Manchester, to a country trembling in the aftermath of the 1976 Soweto uprising. In this context, academic life is out of the question and within weeks I have found a job at SACHED, a non-governmental organisation, writing the health section of a weekly educational newspaper. People's College provides educational support for young people in the burning townships, where the schools are still closed. I work with doctors at Baragwanath Hospital, the largest hospital in Africa, and visit there regularly. This is my first encounter with Soweto, albeit the outskirts of the township. It means a lot to me, this work—it combines my interest in health and nutrition and contact with people in what I think of as “the real world”.

I share an office with a social historian and a young graduate, who is fresh from the plains of student activism. Sipho⁵ regales us with tales of the torture he endured during his detention, such as the “the helicopter”—a form of torture in which you are trussed, turned upside down, hung on a pole and spun around. When he was begging for water, the cops smashed salty potato crisps into his bleeding mouth.

Luli Callinicos is writing her first book, *Gold and Workers*, which is history told from the perspective of the mineworkers. It opens my eyes

to the daily realities of black South Africans and whets my interest in documenting working lives.

Just down the road from our village is the single-sex hostel that accommodates black mineworkers who are employed in nearby mines that are still functioning. These are rural men, working on year-long contracts that prevent them from living normal family lives—except for the two-week break over the Christmas period. Appalled at its prison-like appearance, I timidly sneak a few snapshots of the men standing guard at the entrance to the compound.

Months after we move in, the compound is demolished and I return with my camera. The outer skin of the building has peeled away, revealing little concrete bunks that burrow deep into the thick, stone walls, like so many mortuary drawers. Apparently, these had been built for the Chinese miners recruited in the 1920s—men of shorter stature than the Africans who have more recently bedded here.

As the last white miners move out of our village, it fills up with like-minded people and begins to take on the character of a liberated zone, free from apartheid's many laws. Activists of all kinds set up home in the 200-odd houses: people working in non-governmental organisations (NGOs), trade unionists, educationists and artists live alongside students and young families. In time we begin colonising the surrounding mine villages that make up the Crown Mines complex and a whole new community is born: a reef of dissent on the southern edge of Johannesburg.

Around this time, Mark decides to leave the country to avoid army conscription and I am falling in love with an unsuitable person. Not that there is anything wrong with Malcolm per se, but even though he moves in with me, he is clearly not in the business of settling down.

In the aftermath of the Soweto uprising there is a standing population of activists being detained under the Terrorism Act, which permits the state to hold them without charge for 90 days on the judgement of a senior police officer. My colleagues and I have agreed to support a group of women detainees in Hillbrow's notorious Fort. We take turns to cook food

and deliver it every week, an event that I come to dread, as the sadistic wardress takes pleasure in slamming and locking the door behind us while we sign the register.

On 12 September 1977, we hear of the death of Steve Biko, the founder of the Black Consciousness Movement. He had been detained the month before and at first it was said that he had been on a hunger strike, then that he had run headfirst into the wall of his cell. Justice Minister Jimmy Kruger's comment on this news was, "It leaves me cold."

On his return from Biko's funeral in the Eastern Cape, Malcolm announces that he can no longer live in South Africa. It seems that there is a job awaiting him in the anti-apartheid movement abroad. But I am still paying back my student loan and cannot go. In any case, I am not invited.

The following month all of the many organisations of the Black Consciousness Movement are banned, along with their leaders. This includes many senior staff at SACHED and our newspaper project. We start a new educational paper to replace People's College, but soon that, too, is banned. Despite the ruination of both my home and working lives, when I am redeployed in SACHED's audio-visual department, I receive my first photography training and a new door opens.

The telephone rings at dawn on Sunday, 8 January 1979, with the news that Rick Turner has been assassinated at his Durban home. During the night, Rick heard a noise at the front door and when he went to investigate, he was shot at close range through the window. He had died in the arms of his thirteen-year-old daughter Jann. It is just a few weeks before his five-year banning order is to expire.

On Friday after work, Durban friends and I travel overnight to the funeral. Jann Turner reads parts of Martin Luther King's 'I-have-a-dream' speech to a stunned crowd. I am trying so hard not to cry that I do not hear the rest.

It was Rick's intellect that had burned through my childish ignorance and I just cannot comprehend how that flame has died.

Rick is lying in an open coffin at the front of the hall. Perhaps I am hallucinating in the heat and stress of emotion, but there seems to be glitter

on his face and his mouth appears to be set in a snarl of anguish. Afterwards we pray in the mosque, the most appropriate spiritual venue, as Rick had converted to Islam on his marriage to Foszia. The fans are turning and the silence smothers our grief. The next day we visit the house where the old blue carpet has shrunk from the wall with the washing away of the blood.

The Crown Mines community provides something of a safe haven in a hostile world. Communal life includes shared meals, a vegetable-buying co-op and, at various times, bread baking, women's groups, Capital reading groups and many more besides. On most weekends there are parties, large and small. Front doors stand open, and children and dogs roam the village streets without fear.

The gardens consist of small patches of lawn and flowerbeds and, like most backyards in the village, mine is also blessed with a small brick room in traditional South African design—a window just large enough to let in sufficient air for the domestic worker's continued survival, but too high for him or her to be able to see into "the master's" garden. In the alley behind the houses are communal toilets and washrooms for the domestic worker community—corrugated-iron structures of dubious integrity. Across the village, these hutches are occupied by (formerly) homeless people, but mine has been converted into a darkroom.

After Malcolm leaves, I focus my energies on learning photography, and join a workshop at The Open School run by the country's best-known documentary photographer, David Goldblatt. I attend the first meeting, fascinated to meet this famous person who is dressed simply in battered jeans and an old white T-shirt.

We sit on the floor surrounded by our photographs and David singles out several images, asking the photographer to speak about his or her intentions. We are a rough bunch, mostly very pleased with our own artistic endeavours. One man shows a photograph of a shop-window dummy, which I admire for its sharpness, but it does not receive critical acclaim. My photograph of an old woman in the restaurant at Bath is praised for its mystery, and I am thrilled. Under the influence of the Left Bank, I have even

named this image 'Last Year at Marienbad', but, fortunately, I do not share this with the group. As I later discover, there are few things that raise David's ire more than photographs with pretentious titles.

David invites each one of us in turn to his house for a meal and a darkroom lesson. He shows me how to print to the black of the image, and, to my disappointment, I discover that the Marienbad photograph is underexposed.

Goldblatt sets up projects every week, starting with the self-portrait. I photograph myself sitting at my Crown Mines kitchen table, and this is the first in a long series of images of village life.

In time, the workshop folds, but for several years a small group continues to meet at my house in Crown Mines, and later at the Goldblatts'. Several of us, already friends, are also meeting separately to share our work. It is an ongoing struggle to finance this obsession and all my spare time is spent on this silver-hungry pursuit.

By now, against all my wishes, my backyard room has an occupant. This is how it happened: from the time I moved the darkroom from the dusty backyard shack into the kitchen, and the kitchen onto the back veranda, I have had this problem. Every week a different homeless person knocks on my open door and asks to have the empty room at the bottom of the garden.

I say: "Sorry, it's too small, and it does not have a proper window."

I feel bad, but the room is not habitable, I cannot afford to fix it and that is that.

Then one day a friend comes around and says, in a moralistic tone of voice, "So your backyard room is still empty?"

"It is not habitable, and that it that," I say.

"Well, you know, Mam' Lydia's cousin is sleeping under a table in an identical room in the bottom road, along with three other people. Your room can hardly be less habitable than that," she says.

The following week, Christina⁶ moves in and has been here ever since. She has no papers to be in town and her 'illegal' status means an ever-present possibility of jail for her, and heavy fines for me.

4 The cheapest blended red wine on the market.

5 Not his real name.

6 Not her real name.

JOURNEYS IN WONDERLAND, 1980

THE JACARANDA TREE IS DROPPING ITS MAUVE, scented flowers on Christina's washing. She is telling stories, waving her arms about in the soft light, making me laugh at her exploits with her "young one".

Christina has taken up with a devilishly good-looking Mozambican mineworker, half her age, claiming it is simply a diet strategy:

"You know Les, if you want to get thin, just tell him to come two extra nights a week, and 'pomp pomp', that will do it," she says.

It is clear to me, and to anyone else who has seen the two of them together, that she is totally in love with him. Ernesto,⁷ who has a wife and family back home, has not made his long-term intentions obvious.

I, too, have taken up with a student who is many years my junior. My interest in him relates to his beauty and sensual ease, but it is not clear why he has chosen me, when he has a queue of young women, with bodies taut as fitted sheets, begging him for sex every single day.

It is 1980 and I have left my job at SACHED to freelance as a writer-photographer, but my new career gets off to a bit of a wobbly start, when all my equipment is stolen from the house, driving me into debt before I have even begun.

I aspire to use words and images to tell the world about South Africa—and get paid in the process. But apart from the legions of NGOs and trade unions that borrow prints and reproduce them on bog-roll standard paper, there are few takers. I start doing stories “on spec” with the hope of selling them to commercial magazines, but I soon discover that there is no readership for the sort of features that I consider worthwhile.

So far most of my understanding of my homeland has been limited to book learning or second-hand accounts, so for me, this work is also overdue research.

One of the first of these ventures is a trip to Elim, a mission hospital in the far north of the country, on the invitation of a friend who works there as a physiotherapist.

There is poverty here that I have never seen: so many children with swollen bellies from kwashiorkor and adults dying of treatable diseases. I meet Tenyiko, a toddler who is being brought up in the TB ward by nurses after his mother had died there and nobody came to claim him.

The scourge of the area is an eye disease called trachoma, caused by a water-borne parasite that infects the eyelids, which then become scarred and scratch the cornea beyond repair. Once the infection takes root, it is passed from hand to eye—the tender touch of a mother, a lover, resulting in blindness.

The hospital has trained a group of local women to educate their peers in the villages. Care Group members learn the basics of common diseases and their prevention, and turn them into performance art—singing and dancing their way into the hearts of the villagers. The hospital’s ophthalmologist, Dr Erica Sutter, tells me that they established the project in the 1970s, when they realised that it was ordinary people who made the best educators. “At first I was afraid,” she says, “but I saw they could do it as well as me.”

Because the root causes of many local health problems are structural features of rural life—unemployment, poverty, land hunger—the Care Group’s good work has limited effect. Trachoma, for example, is best prevented by cleanliness, but when the nearest water pump is several

kilometres away, frequent hand washing is impossible. Some Care Groups operate in villages with no water supply at all. In this context, preventing trachoma is a very long walk from a very muddy river.

I am working regularly for NGOs, trade unions and left-wing publications. A sociologist friend contracts me to produce a set of photographs on the foundries of the East Rand and I arrive in this hellfire environment in a long cotton skirt and sandals. Undeterred by flying sparks and molten metal, I document this fascinating and horrible process.

This feeds a growing interest in understanding working lives and I go with a trade unionist friend to meet foundry men after hours to listen to their tales. Nehemiah Mbathe, who has burn scars on his legs and hands, tells us: “They treat us just like animals. Except for boots and gloves and something for our eyes, we have to wear our own clothes. My trousers are full of holes from burning metal.”

I start to work on a feature that attempts to untangle the intricacies of the influx-control system: a maze of laws and regulations that are geared towards keeping black people out of white areas. The Nationalists have this lunatic idea that if they can confine black people to the Bantustans (or “homelands”), which have notional independence, then South Africa will remain a white country, thus justifying apartheid.

This system of influx control embodies the structural violence of apartheid in the way in which it is shaping cultures and destroying lives and family units. I spend time at the Johannesburg office of the Black Sash, which specialises in advising people on how to deal with the whole range of obstacles that the apartheid government has thrown in the path of an ordinary and decent life. Rights that are denied: the right to live in an urban area, the right to live at home with one’s family, the right to a decent home, the right to be a citizen of the country in which one was born ...

The women who run and work in the office are dedicated to their task. Sheena Duncan, the Advice Office director, joined the Black Sash in 1963. “I had a very strong feeling that if you do live here, you’ve got to try and

do something,” she says. “You can’t just passively enjoy life as a white northern suburbs housewife, with a clear conscience.”

Duncan finds the work both rewarding and depressing. “There are so many people now that you can’t do anything for,” she says.

I look out at the crowded waiting room, at the anxious hands clutching at plastic bags bulging with documents. Any scrap of paper that may prove a right to live and work in the city is carefully saved—birth certificates, lodger’s permits, church letters. “It’s like the Dead Sea Scrolls,” says Advice Office worker Beulah Rollnick, as she carefully unfolds a tattered letter. In between tending the phone and answering the queries of colleagues, Rollnick is drafting an affidavit for the woman sitting patiently at her side.

Xoliswa’s story is typical. She was born in her mother’s backyard room in Johannesburg and was sent to live with her grandparents on a farm. When she was 19 years old, her grandparents died and she returned to live in the city, where she has been ever since. Now she is struggling to prove that she has a right to live and work in Johannesburg, and as she has always worked “illegally”, the authorities will not give her the Section 10(1)(c) stamp in her reference book (pass or dompass) that will regularise her position. When she tried to get one, Xoliswa was “endorsed out” by the authorities, her application stamped with the words, “You are warned to take immediate steps to leave Johannesburg within 72 hours”.

In Soweto, Xoliswa has a home and two children. She also has a job, and although shifting coal at R3⁸ a day is not much of a job, she wants to keep it.

The authorities say that she must leave immediately, but she has nowhere to go. Her connections with the farms are long gone and she has never been to the KwaZulu homeland, to which the authorities expect her to move. Xoliswa resolves to stay in Johannesburg illegally and risk arrest and imprisonment rather than move to a resettlement village in KwaZulu, where she has no hope of a job.

Twenty per cent of Advice Office clients are rural people who have jobs in town, but are not legally able to work there. “These cases are really the

worst,” says Duncan. “You know its no good saying to them ‘establish yourself back home, start to plough’, because they haven’t got land. There is actually no way out for them, unless they stay illegally. If they’ve got real initiative, they’ll become prostitutes or they will brew, or they will turn to crime, and they will somehow physically survive.”

It’s impossible for ordinary people to understand the complexity of the law, and this robs many people of their rights. A misspelled surname on a child’s birth certificate can mean loss of citizenship; a legal marriage to a Lesotho national may condemn the offspring to lives as contract workers on the mines or farms.

“People are never told ‘you should have this or the other document’, or ‘if you bring me a letter like this, you will get your Section 10(1)(b) qualification’,” says Duncan. “They are never told. It’s a deliberate attempt to keep them ignorant.”

This ignorance is shared by the majority of employers, and, indeed, by the white community at large. Duncan says that although many employers are motivated by a genuine desire to help, they often seem more concerned about the smooth running of the kitchen than the domestic worker’s life chances.

“My pet hate is the employer who says, ‘I have a good girl and the authorities won’t register her,’” says Duncan. “They never say ‘my domestic worker is a widow with six children and was born in Johannesburg’. They actually don’t know anything at all about the person. If every employer made a point of driving their domestic worker home once, just once, on their annual leave and seeing where they live, a lot of things might change.”

I write up the Black Sash story and submit it, with photographs, to a women’s magazine, but it is rejected on the grounds of unsuitable subject matter.

During the early 1980s, the banned African National Congress (ANC) begins to gain more traction in the country and there are all sorts of meetings and events in which “the movement” is the sub-text. I am

content for it to remain so in my life, but am inevitably caught up in its swell. One of my first paid assignments is to make an audio-visual programme on the history of resistance to apartheid for a local NGO. The material for the six episodes of the programme is purloined shamelessly from archives and banned books, and the end result, euphemistically named “Black History”, is sent around to small meetings in town and township.

Towards the end of 1980 I am invited to join Afrika, a newly established magazine funded by left-wing church money. Afrika sees itself as inheriting the tradition of the banned ANC newspapers of the 1950s and 1960s. We interview political leaders on the left, cover strikes and boycotts, which are largely ignored by the mainstream press, and write about the lives of ordinary people.

On 26 November 1980, my colleague Jo Anne and I set off for Pretoria to cover the final day of the Silverton trial. Earlier in the year, ANC cadres had held civilians hostage in a bank: their demand—not ready cash, but freedom for Nelson Mandela. All three men and two hostages were killed when the police raided the bank. Now it is their comrades, who were not even present in the bank, who are on trial for their lives on grounds of “common purpose”.

There are huge crowds of relatives and black supporters inside and outside the court, singing protest songs. Naively, I try to take my camera into the courtroom and am obliged to give it up at the door. (I had not had the foresight to bring a loaf of bread in which to hide it—like my hero photographer Peter Magubane, during the great Treason Trial of the 1960s.)

When the judge delivers the death sentence it reverberates through the court as a base note that I feel in my body. Relatives of the accused scream and faint onto the wooden floor, while the public gallery erupts in wailing and in mournful hymns. This is the first time I have had to think about the death sentence and I am not prepared. As I push my way through the crowd to retrieve my cameras, it becomes clear that protest photography is not my metier. There are lengths to which my timid soul will not be pushed.

Afrika is not long for this world. Internal disputes see the publication closed down four days before Christmas of 1980. I take a temporary job as a printer in a commercial darkroom and get into all sorts of trouble. The floor of the lab is uneven and after falling several times in the dark, I complain to the management, who put in extra duckboards. Now the other printers, dark men who have spent their working lives stepping up and down quietly in the dark, are tripping and falling over an even floor, and they hate me with a passion. The fact that I, a young white girl, am given all the high-end jobs, which they covet, adds fuel to their fire. One day I scratch a Goldblatt negative and I cannot bring myself to phone him until I am home with a stiff whisky. Fortunately, it's the neighbour of the frame he had selected, and he is kind. After a few months of this I resign and now I am now truly in the freelance dance.

In 1981, the Nationalists are celebrating the 20th anniversary of the declaration of the South African Republic. My friends in Crown Mines are busy organising protests on a grand scale. I find it difficult to relate to the ceremony of the occasion—to me the patriotic fervour of The Struggle is a shadow response to Afrikaner Nationalism—but I knuckle under and do my share of editing leaflets and attending meetings. What I do not realise at the time is that this is planned as a big Welcome Home party for the ANC. In Crown Mines we even have a May Day gathering in the Scout Hall where, along with the lentil salad and the booze, we are taught the proper rendition of the banned national anthem, *Nkosi Sikelel i'Africa*.

By now relationships on the mine have become a little scratchy as some of us rub up against the many unwritten rules and moral dictates. Our local scribe is in trouble for writing indiscreetly in her newsletter—an informal flyer distributed within the community—that certain residents are going into exile to avoid army conscription. Although we are all politically committed there is a certain inevitability about the presence of police spies among us.

My end of the road has come to be known as “The Establishment” because my next-door neighbours are married, and I have the temerity to

have paid work and to live alone in a two-bedroomed house. Our detractors live at the other end of the road, where they reuse their teabags, and ruminate on our bourgeois individualism. They take delight in coming down to the Establishment to sneer over the contents of our fridges, and the fact that we drink a superior brand of instant coffee.

But as the political climate hardens, there is less energy for petty squabbles and village life settles down. This year, the moralists have even managed a smile at fresh graffiti on the wall of the village hall, which reads: 'SHUT UP AND DANCE'.

There is a definite feeling of danger in the air. Two of my neighbours begin sleeping at my house—dragging their double mattress through the back alley and installing themselves on my living-room floor every night. Their household fears a security police raid and their anxiety is all the greater as they are breaking the Immorality Act.⁹

One September morning, we wake to the sound of vehicles and I look out the window to see a fleet of heavily aerialled cars, which can mean only one thing: the cops are here. I force myself to go down to Jo Anne and Gavin's house to find out what is going on, but I am stopped at the door by two security policemen standing in the living room. When I ask to see my friends, the policemen suggest that they have gone to a place where nobody will ever find them again.

Some time later, these two same men rap loudly on my door and when I open it, they are standing there, with Gavin between them, his hands cuffed behind his back.

"I am going away for awhile," he says. "Will you look after the cats?"

That night there had been police raids in houses across Johannesburg and Soweto, and many people were detained, both black and white. The security legislation of the day means that they can be held without charge, and without access to lawyers or family members.

Support groups for the friends and relatives of detainees are started, and rosters are drawn up for taking food and clothes to the jails. Rich and poor, suburban and township parents, sit around the table confronting their humanity for the first time. Mums in linen suits make cups of tea for

mums in kitchen overalls. I help Jo Anne's father and her little sister sort through her things. "She won't be needing those for awhile," they say, tossing aside the contraceptive pills.

But Jo Anne is released without charge after 10 days. While driving her to her parents' house, she tells me what is going on: our friend Barbara Hogan, who has been a member of the ANC for several years, has been unmasked by the security police and, in a terrible turn of events, they have stumbled across a list of her "close comrades".

Gavin is also released a few days later, but most of the others are still in solitary confinement in John Vorster Square, and new detentions are occurring at regular intervals. Gavin is gaunt: his eyes dart around and he fails to make complete sentences. He says that the security police had so much information that, at one stage during his interrogation, he seriously believed that they had a burrow in the hill opposite our houses.

Now that The Struggle has the key of the door, our lives have changed forever. One February morning in 1982, a neighbour phones to tell me that Neil Aggett, a frequent visitor to the village, has died in detention. It is as if all the oxygen has been sucked from the air: I see him at my kitchen table a few weeks before his detention talking about his enjoyment of working in the casualty department of Baragwanath Hospital. "It's just amazing," he said. "You really do save lives. People recover fully—either that, or they are dead."

All the reports say that Neil has hanged himself, but nobody believes it. We organise a motorcade around John Vorster Square, where our friends are still detained. This is one of the few kinds of protests that is not prohibited by any particular law. Dozens of us drive around and around the jail, hooting and snarling up the traffic. Brenda thinks she spots Auret's takkies¹⁰ on the windowsill of a high-up cell. Eventually I am hauled over by a security policeman who takes me into the charge office and slaps me with a huge fine for "unnecessary and excessive hooting".

Thousands of militants attend Neil's funeral—singing and throwing fists. I march the 12 kilometres with them, from the church to the graveyard, photographing all the way. Young suburban fathers stop their lawn mowers and look up at us with terror in their eyes. Wives in curlers gather on the grass verges, holding their babies tight.

When Neil is buried, the ANC flag flies through the white suburbs of Johannesburg for the first time in 20 years.

The next month it is my 30th birthday and we go ice-skating. Afterwards, at the restaurant, we hear the news that several more detainees have been released. Max and Fink arrive, arm-in-arm, and Fink apologises for throwing my first edition of *Alice in Wonderland* at a mouse in his cell. But Jo Anne's friend has not been released and she sits at the long table, surrounded by ribbons and bows, and cries and cries.

For my part I fend off the demons with my camera, spending long hours in the darkroom turning light into solid silver. I am busy with a photographic project at our local shopping centre, hanging out there every Saturday morning without fail. I have decided that beauty is not truth. Beauty lies, like the vitamins in a potato, just beneath the surface

7 Not his real name.

8 The equivalent of £1.67 in 1982

9 The legislation that outlawed cross-race sex.

10 Trainers.

LAND LOVE, 1982

ONE EARLY AUTUMN MORNING MY TRADE UNIONIST FRIEND, Aninka Claassens, and I are barrelling down the N2 in the direction of the south-eastern Transvaal. She has been organising paper and forestry workers and wants to meet people in this area, which is the heartland of the paper industry. Elijah Kunene, one of the union shop stewards, has offered to introduce her to his extended family who live and work on a white-owned farm near Piet Retief. I am along for the ride, to take photographs, for no particular purpose.

We stop at KwaThema township to pick up Elijah and his mother Alice, who accompanies is to visit the family homestead. The road is flat and monotonous and our journey slowed by an endless stream of agricultural vehicles: lorries bearing logs, neatly arranged, and open trucks stuffed with the ragged men who work the land. In front of us there are two bright red “abnormal load” vehicles, and another one coming towards us from the opposite direction. We cannot overtake and we are almost crawling. Suddenly a battered, white Golf tears past us on the right, and then the driver, realising her mistake, swerves across the oncoming traffic onto the grass verge on the other side of the road,

twisting and rolling before coming to a crashing halt in front of a barbed wire fence.

We leap from the car and run to the Golf. The driver has been thrown through the windscreen and fence into the veld. Two children are still strapped into their car seats, screaming: the baby hanging upside down, its fontanelle centimetres from the floor. Ma Kunene wraps the toddler in her blanket and hoists him onto her back, rocking him until he quiets. I try to calm the baby. Aninka climbs bravely through the fence to the huddled heap in the long grass. The woman is gashed about the face and mouth, but miraculously alive.

In a flash the fields are filled with farm workers running to help. A silver Mercedes also stops and disgorges a thickset, white man brandishing a gun. He commences to shout at these good Samaritans, telling them to *voetsek*,¹¹ until they flee in terror. He is not thrilled to see Alice and Elijah either, but is persuaded to drive off and fetch an ambulance.

After the three have been dispatched to the nearest hospital, we make our way slowly to the Kunene homestead. We have to be careful on the farm road, because the Kunene's employer is from the land of guns and silver cars. If he finds us, it will be eviction for them, if not worse.

The farms in this part of the country use an antiquated labour system in which farm workers are employed for half of the year for low cash wages, in exchange for a place to keep their cattle and land to plough. This is known as labour tenancy or, by the local people, the "six-month system". Some years back the apartheid government had abolished this system—not as a reform measure, but as part of the grand apartheid plan to keep South Africa white. No black people are to be farmers in so-called white areas and more than a million labour tenants have already been thrown off the land.

In this region, however, the white farmers—who are land rich and cash stingy—have kept the arrangement going informally. This means that farm workers are paid a pittance, but have no security of tenure and must endure all kinds of brutality to maintain a toehold on their previous land.

People here, both black and white, are irrevocably connected to the earth. The Afrikaner Nationalist anthem, *Die Stem van Suid Afrika*,¹² is as much about land as nation—our eternal mountain ranges and far-deserted plains, the sunglow of our summers—land love is deep in “die murg van ons gebeente” (the marrow of our bones). It is tragic that this shared emotive issue cannot hold and unite our people.

For myself, this is a more complicated matter. Ever since I had discovered the true lie of the land,¹³ the landscape lost its innocence. The majestic mountains reaching down to vast coastlands, the bushveld teeming with game, now seem somehow tainted. My friend Diana, the daughter of wealthy sugar farmers, liked to point jokingly at the rolling green hills saying, “See, those are my hills, these are my trees. I own them.”

At the homestead we are greeted warmly by Elijah’s family—his brother Petrus, his wife and many, many children. Old man Kunene is already here on a visit. With his bare feet, stick and ragged black coat, Baba Kunene looks the part of a rural grandfather, although he has been living in the township since he retired a decade ago.

Aninka and I have packed a tent and food, and plan to camp nearby, but the family will not hear of it. It’s extremely rude, they say, to turn visitors away. I am amused to imagine what my mother would have done if I had pitched up unannounced for the weekend with two black strangers.

Elijah’s brother, Petrus, is a truck driver and he, too, has lived and worked in town for many years, earning a half-decent wage. But he was forced to return to the farm when his parents retired, to provide labour in exchange for their tenure on the land. Petrus has many tales to tell about the white farmers around here. One of his friends is currently in prison for digging up a row of last year’s potatoes to feed his family. People are paid between R10 and R20¹⁴ a month and work brutally long hours. We hear about beatings for the slightest misdeed, and even murders that go unpunished, with the collusion of the local police force and courts.

Aninka brings out her tape recorder for a formal interview with Ma Kunene. She was born on a farm nearby, where they earned nothing at all.

But it was the “six-month system”, and her parents were at least able to plough and grow a surplus of mealies.¹⁵ Now things have changed. “They don’t want you to plough, and yet the money is too little,” she says. “Now we are old, what will we get? Those boers¹⁶ who used us for free—what will they do for us now that we are old? Nothing.”

In the late afternoon light, Alice and her husband pose for me in their favourite place—a corrugated-iron shelter next to the vegetable patch. Then the makoti¹⁷ produces a meal of freshly slain chicken, complete with embryonic eggs, and the sweetest pumpkin I have ever tasted. Aninka and I are anxious about the slaughter of a pregnant beast, which must surely translate into financial loss for the household, but it seems that African hospitality overrides material concerns.

Later we are shown to the hut where we are to sleep and one of the children presents us with a large enamel bowl and a jug of water. What we really need of course, after a meal and a long journey, is a lavatory. We look around and are unable to locate an outhouse. Too polite to ask, we opt instead for the forest.

The night is spent in the kind of delicious sleep that can be found only where there is no background hum of electricity. I am woken by roosters crowing and the laughter of children, who are trying, by all means, to peer into the hut. Aninka is already up and chatting. She smacks her lips around the isiZulu words. It resembles the pleasure she gets from a good cup of tea. I see her expand and shine in this rural world.

Later we pack up and set off to meet some trade union members in a nearby township. En route we stop at the hospital to see how the accident victim is faring. The young woman is sitting up in bed, her frog face green and swollen, but she has neither broken bones nor major injuries. It turns out that her mad dash from the Highveld was to escape an abusive husband, and she was not quite in her right mind when she drove headlong into the oncoming traffic. Her parents have travelled overnight to be with her and to care for the children.

“The children are not interested,” she laughs. “They can’t recognise me at all.”

Elijah gets the evil eye from the racists who run the hospital, but they are unable to turn him away.

This area is one of the most conservative in the country. Many of the farmers are descended from German missionaries, who arrived here a century before, but they seem to lack the most basic rudiments of human compassion. Most farmworker families are indigenous to the area, having lost their traditional land rights to white title deeds after the 1913 Land Act. They are serfs in the land of their birth, in the most literal sense.

Years later, when I am researching a film on the land question, I come across the people of Gannahoek, a community whose oral history provides an archaeological dig of dispossession. They had always lived and farmed on the stretch of land in the Natal midlands: they and their forefathers, and their forefathers before them. The community leader tells us, “I am a tree of this land.” He and his people came here long before the whites ever set foot in South Africa, brandishing guns and title deeds.

When the white farmers arrived, they kindly invited the community to work for them on the six-month system. Their forefathers’ land then became what is known as a “labour farm”, providing a place for the labour tenants to plough and graze. Next, with the modernisation of labour relations, the new owner decided to sell the labour farm and evict the Gannahoek people from their ancestral land.

Aninka has spent much of her life immersed in the stories of rural people. In 1983, her passion for the land takes on a new edge when she joins the Transvaal Rural Action Committee, usually known just as TRAC. This is a project of the Black Sash and is devoted to preventing forced removals of black people from designated white land. Over four million black South Africans have already been dispossessed and dumped, often on open ground in the so-called homelands, with just the rudiments of survival—tents and long-drop lavatories. But there are still many people clinging to the land—labour tenants on the farms and isolated communities, which the government refers to as “black spots”—that are destined to be removed.

TRAC works with a team of canny lawyers from the Legal Resources Centre, which is adept at finding loopholes in the law to forestall or delay eviction orders and forced removals. As well as providing legal and other support, TRAC helps people claim benefits they are due, such as pensions and Workmen's Compensation.

One of the communities that Aninka visits regularly is Driefontein, a farm in the Eastern Transvaal, which the community had bought in 1912, the year before the Land Act was passed. Since the 1970s, the community has been fighting an ongoing battle with the government, resisting removal, and recently one of its leaders, Saul Mkhize, has been shot dead in cold blood by a policeman during a peaceful protest meeting.

I accompany Aninka and a party of young lawyers to meet the people of Driefontein and the neighbouring farm of Kwa Ngema, also a "black spot". It has been raining and predictably the car gets stuck on the muddy farm roads. When one of our party gets out to push, in his suit and city shoes, he is also mired in the mud, to the mirth of the local people who stop their work to help. He hops on the grass while a laughing child cleans his shoes, one at a time.

It is a scene of rural idyll: people are ploughing the fertile earth and birds flit through the long grass. But this belies the hardship of life on the land for these overcrowded communities. Aninka takes me to meet the Hlatshwayos, who live in a crumbling mud house on the edge of Driefontein. Timothy had been a farm worker until the day the open truck transporting him to the fields overturned, killing one man and breaking Timothy's neck. Now his wife Anna has to support the family, as well as look after Timothy, who is paralysed. She works in the commercial forests—a 12-hour day including the walk there and back—and on her return has to cook and care for her bedridden husband and two children.

They are so poor that she is forced to steal firewood from the white farms before she can even start cooking the evening meal. "It's a very dangerous thing to steal that wood," she says. "Every morning I wake up late. I'm tired because the night before I've gone under the fences to steal

firewood and I've watched out for the GGs (government cars). If I see the cars I have to come back slowly in the dark with the wood."

Anna spends her weekends working on the house, which is collapsing and must be fixed quickly as the mud walls are washed away each time it rains. "I am working all by myself building this house—putting on the mud and trying to steal those long poles which I have to bring back on my head," she says. "Anyone who'll help, I have to pay ... There's only one brother who sometimes helps us."

That evening we stay at the house of Saul Mkize's widow, Beauty, who has taken his place as a community leader. Sleeping here is an unexpected pleasure. The interior walls stop half a metre below the thatched roof and noises drift from room to room—whispered conversations, the sound of a kettle boiling, sighs of people turning in their sleep.

Before heading back to Johannesburg the following day, we visit Kwa Ngema, another farm to which communities still have the title deeds—given to them in 1904 on behalf of King Edward for "good behaviour". The government is determined to move these two communities and has now invented a new excuse—a planned new dam, which by an extraordinary feat of engineering seems to run straight through Driefontein and KwaNgema, but bypasses all the neighbouring white farms. Caroline Ngema takes us to the family graveyard where decades of graves have been uprooted and moved by the government to another site nearby.

With TRAC's brilliant PR work, the eyes of the world are focused on forced removals, and this and the lawyers' diligence prevent many from taking place. It looks as though crops of toilets in the bare veld are a thing of the past, but the state still manages the occasional coup—such as evicting the Mogopa people from their ancestral land on Valentine's Day of 1984.

Exploiting loopholes in the law often involves danger and daring exploits—Aninka and the other TRAC staff, mainly women, racing on country roads in right-wing territory in the dead of night. One day I, and a journalist from the left-wing Afrikaans newspaper, *Vrye Weekblad*, accompany Aninka to deliver a spoliation order¹⁸ on a farmer, who has

been demolishing the homesteads of people he plans to evict. He accomplishes this by means of a heavy chain attached to his tractor and thrown around the centre pole of the hut. Families are helpless to resist the violence of his actions, but a spoliation order, an ordinary tool in the common law, may be successful in deterring him.

The only trouble is that this order has to be delivered in person. On the way to the farm, we discuss the possible outcomes: will the farmer have a gun? Will he use it? Will he just set his dogs on us?

We drive onto the farm and are directed to a field where the young farmer is working. Aninka approaches him, spoliation order in hand, and in polite Afrikaans explains her business. He snatches the paper and stamps it into the mud, shouting at us to get off his property, or else. This is the moment when Aninka's trusty station wagon decides to stall and the three of us are pushing the deadweight of the car through the field as fast as we can go.

After this we travel to the tenants' homestead, several kilometres away on another farm. Seeing my camera, the family insists on bringing the old gogo¹⁹ out of her hut. She is too frail to walk and they haul her into the yard in a sling of blankets. I fear that the exertion may kill her, but she sits with dignity on the blankets and cushions her grandchildren have arranged. She was a girl living here during the Anglo Boer War and she does not plan to leave, she tells us, her proud, blind eyes staring out into the dying light.

11 'Go away', Afrikaans, impolite.

12 The Call of South Africa.

13 Meaning the range of laws and regulations that dispossessed black people, starting with the 1913 Act that confined black South Africans to 13 per cent of the country.

14 £6-£12 in 1982.

15 Maize.

16 Farmers.

17 Daughter-in-law.

18 An order from the court that an item of property, or something a person has been using, be returned to its owner immediately, or rebuilt if destroyed.

19 A granny.

WORKING WOMEN, 1982-1984

A GENTLE RAIN IS FALLING AND THE EVENING AIR IS MOIST and green as I sit at my window writing to myself and drinking too much red wine. Crown Mines is full of pain and paranoia, and photography is leading me by the hand into heavy situations against which I have no defence.

I am currently working on an audiovisual programme about a woman who works night shift in an old age home in Hillbrow. Many mornings I fetch Maureen from her workplace and drive her home to Soweto—she exhausted from a 13-hour shift, I yawning from the earliness of the hour. The township is dense with the smoke of cooking fires and the Soweto traffic allows us to have long conversations about work and family life. Maureen is shocked that I have no plans to have a husband or children, but accepts it as part of the weirdness of the white world.

Friends seeing me on the road at such unsociable hours assume that I have a secret lover in the township. But my affair is with the world of working women, a project which later becomes a book of the same name.

Maureen prefers nursing to her previous job as a machinist in a factory, even though the hours are brutal and the pay is worse. “I’ve liked nursing from childhood,” she tells me. “To be of help to the society, not just for my

own benefit, not for gain, but to have that knowledge of helping the sick. I used to feel pity for a person who can't do anything for herself."

Every morning she risks rape and murder by commuting from Hillbrow to the township, before the sun is up. Maureen lives in a two-roomed house in Mofolo South with her own mother, five children and two grandchildren. Because there are so many in her house, she only gets to sleep a few hours in the day. "Sometimes twelve to two, sometimes eleven to two, but I don't sleep longer than that, that's for sure," she says. "On the weekends it's worse. I don't sleep at all on the weekends. We have got neighbours this side and that side, and they are drinking. They are so noisy. They open up their 'grams' and you can't sleep at all when there is noise."

Maureen has dropped three dress sizes since taking on this job, but she does not complain. "Sometimes you feel funny. Sometimes you feel fresh. There are days when you feel sleepy during the night," she says. "You must feel drowsy, like it or not. It does affect me. There are days when I feel so tired, it's as if I am not well."

Maureen invites me to spend the night in her ward, which is filled with elderly white women, lost in a world of senile dementia. These are the standing order grannies, abandoned by children who have emigrated to Australia.

I am trespassing in this place—I cannot ask for permission as it will surely be denied—but Maureen's fellow nurses will not tell and the old ladies cannot. Although I question the morality of photographing the living dead, I proceed without a valid release, believing it justified by the sociological nature of the work.

Issues of representation are important for all photographers, but particularly acute for white photographers in South Africa. We spend much time discussing this, and the agency accorded to subjects in front of the lens. Now I am struggling to represent two painful realities that exist in permanent dissonance. This situation represents a blatant contradiction between my personal creed as a photographer and my political commitment, and I do not sleep well at night.

I follow Maureen back and forth, trying not to stand on the cracks between these heavy worlds. I rage against the conditions under which Maureen is forced to live and work, but shrink from her roughness with the old ones when they soil themselves or cry out in the night. I dread the early morning journey through the smog of Soweto, and even fear it, after the time my car is stoned.

Maureen's family laughs at the photographs I bring them every week. One day Maureen says to me, "Les, once you have completed, don't be scarce, come and visit us." But my camera has taken many souls, and I cannot give them back.

Around this time there are important developments in the institutional world of documentary photography. By now there are several of us working for left organisations and documenting the unfolding liberation struggle. Since Neil's funeral, when a group of us tried, unsuccessfully, to cover the proceedings in a concerted way, it has been clear that there was a need for collaborative work. Photographer Paul Weinberg and I approach the South African Council of Churches for an office at Khotso House, and support to establish a photography collective.

In June 1982, I have a one-woman photography exhibition at the Market Theatre and then head off to attend the Culture and Resistance festival in Gaborone, a few kilometres inside the Botswana border. The conference has been hosted by the exiled group Medu and there is a definite presence of ANC cultural people, with recruiting going on around every corner. In our student years, Rick Turner had always warned us of the dangers of mixing above-ground and underground political work, and we have already seen the consequence of this with the Hogan²⁰ arrests, but a tide has been unleashed and there is no going back. I am somewhat disappointed not to be approached—not that I would have joined at that point, but it might have been nice to have been asked.

There is an air of excitement, with fervent discussions on "culture as a weapon of struggle" throughout the days. Exiled musicians play every night, including Abdullah Ibrahim, who performs his new piece, "Hit and

run, hit and run / Freedom comes from the barrel of a gun". He follows this with a chilling, unaccompanied vocal tribute to Solomon Mhlangu, the young soldier from the ANC's armed wing, uMkhonto we Sizwe (MK), who was hanged in 1979 for a crime he did not commit.

My work is part of the group photography exhibition and, at the last minute, I am invited to participate in the (all-male) panel. Peter McKenzie, who is an active member of our photography collective, makes the keynote speech saying, "Photography must move its allegiance away from the aesthetic to the social function of photography." From now on we must see ourselves as cultural workers, not photographers or artists.

Within a short time, the photography collective has morphed into a formal agency, Afrapix, with Paul, Peter and Omar Badsha playing leading roles. I am a founder member and participate in meetings and group exhibitions, but although my work is committed to the same ends as my comrades, my approach to photography feels somewhat at odds with the cultural worker agenda. I am too engaged with the ordinary, rather than the directly political aspects of apartheid life, and overly concerned about photographic quality.

Each month brings a tightening of state violence and repression, and a corresponding escalation in response. In December 1982, South African army commandos creep into neighbouring Lesotho in the dead of night to kill 42 people they suspect of being ANC guerrillas. Many of the dead are ordinary civilians. Children even. This the worst of several illegal cross-border raids that neither the international community nor the neighbouring countries seem to have the interest, will or capacity to prevent.

ANC President, Oliver Tambo, flies into landlocked Lesotho to bury his people and South African newspapers carry his photograph and paraphrase his words for the first time since 1961, although he may not be directly quoted.

Until now the ANC's armed wing has had a policy of avoiding bloodshed, particularly of civilians, and has largely confined their attacks

to economic and military targets. In a speech, clearly aimed at the South African government, Tambo tells the 10,000 people attending the funeral that ANC supporters can no longer understand this morality, and that the ANC's stance of non-violence is alienating their supporters.

"We shall move in the direction dictated by the masses of our people," he says. And the demand is now to target military personnel and to take the struggle into the white areas.

The reprisal attack comes in May 1983 in the form of a 40-kilogram bomb, placed outside South African Air Force headquarters in Pretoria. Eighteen people are killed and over 200 injured, including several passers-by.

I have always loved street photography but now I start photographing the streets of the inner city in earnest—to try and understand what it means to be human in this time and place. Every Saturday morning, I stand on a street corner in town and catch people in my lens. Sometimes I use a slow shutter-speed, which smoothes the faces out into an anonymous blur that spreads across the frame, as if I have taken a giant scouring pad to the world.

The events and crises of the previous years have taken their toll and when even my dreams are soiled by violent death, I join the throngs of lefties in the therapist's waiting room. To my surprise she eschews the present and leads me across the burning coals of childhood.

In 1983 I return to SACHED to make a book of interviews and photographs for the growing women's movement within the trade unions. The Working Women project gives me an opportunity to build on my longstanding interest in women's struggles, to explore the places where women work and live, and hear the stories of their lives. Consultants lend expertise and assist with the interviews, which, under the influence of Studs Terkel, I choose to edit in the form of a series of testimonies to the complexity and nuance of everyday lives.

This is a period when women are surging into the workforce like never before, but remain concentrated in the "home-like" sectors: the food, garment, textile, and service sector industries. In a savage tautology, these

jobs are undervalued and badly paid, leaving women on the bottom of the pile of South Africa's already over-exploited workforce.

Since 1980, when I first set my inappropriately sandaled foot in a foundry on the East Rand, the industrial environment has fascinated me, and it is a pleasure to be photographing in factories. Although these are deemed "home-like" industries, the work bears no resemblance to the domestic version. Examples: cutting fabric on a giant machine with an unguarded blade; gluing endless strips of leather together with your index finger; spending all day lifting and lowering the heavy lid of a laundry press, dubbed the 'abortion machine' on account of the many miscarriages it had caused.

Women are doing boring repetitive work for low wages. But factory jobs are better paid and more tolerable than domestic service, which is the easiest work to come by for a woman in the city. Here race, class and gender intersect in a toxic mix. One domestic worker tells me: "The madam used to say 'Here's your place, here's your cup. You mustn't use my crockery. It's as if I'm dirty or she's going to become black,'" she says. "You don't want me to sit on your chair but I work in your house. I give you food, like that, with my own hands, but you don't want me to use your things."

Another domestic worker describes how her mistrustful "madam" would lock all the cupboards each day when she went to work. On days when she forgot, "she'd phone home and say 'Oh Stephanie, please call one of the children and tell them to hide the keys away'."

The trade unions' main concerns revolve around workplace issues such as equal pay and conditions for women workers, paid maternity leave and support for childcare. However, a common thread through all the interviews is the relationship between men and women in the home: the double shift that women have to bear.

"I cook for my husband. He's tired from work," says domestic worker Elsie. "Sometimes we come in at the same time. He wants his tea and he will sit down. You'll be 'the girl' again in the house and he is the boss reading the paper."

For many women the working day is bordered by problems: the danger of travelling at night, sexual harassment, violence. “The position of women is too heavy with many things,” explains one factory worker. “Say you are looking for a job: When you reach the factory, you find the induna²¹ there and you ask him. If you like the job the induna will tell you that you must sleep with him before you get the job. And you’ve got no choice. You want to work and your children are starving in Soweto. So some women sleep with those men. Some women sleep with the bosses because they want more money or easier work. They do it because they want to live, not because they are mad or what.”

As women become financially independent, they are increasingly dismissive of the role of men in their lives and marital relationships are in tatters. “Marriage? I don’t care for it,” says factory worker Rose. “I don’t want my daughters to get married: if they are educated it’s better that they earn a living wage. They can have children and support them, and they will have a better life. In Soweto, marriage is no more.”

She goes on to explain: “I think it’s caused by drinking. Men drink too much after they get married and the wife looks and thinks ‘No, I can do without’. Women bring the money in and men stay at home because they don’t want to work. Some men are already crippled by liquor. So, he’s just an extra baby for the wife ... soon there will be no more marriage. Just boyfriends and girlfriends.”

Across the land the spirit of defiance is growing. Despite the arrests and trials of the previous years, the South African left is more unified and organised than ever before. In August 1983, a loose coalition of civil society, political and labour organisations unite under the umbrella of the United Democratic Front (UDF), ostensibly to fight the government’s new and phoney reform strategy, but actually to provide a unified front for the internal liberation struggle, without jeopardising individual organisations.

Police repression intensifies: dispensing with the niceties of detention and torture, they seem to have embarked on a campaign of outright

abduction and murder. Protesting funeral-goers are shot at, leading to more funerals and more deaths: a tragic cycle, seemingly without end. Within a year, a full-scale war has broken out in the townships, beginning with a protest against a rise in rents in the Vaal Triangle in September 1984. Within the first few days, 30 people are killed. This insurrection is characterised by a new and terrifying development: the “necklacing” of suspected informers with burning tyres.

These are the youths who had been traumatised by police action during the 1976 uprising—this unprecedented violence is a legacy of the recent past.

Soon the townships across the country are burning. SACHED staff members are hugely affected: army troops have been sent into the townships and they are living in a permanent state of siege. People come to work with tales of police action and retaliation in the form of the execution of puppet councillors and police by angry crowds. In one particularly disturbing conversation, I am told that this execution is actually a democratic process—councillors are given the opportunity to recant and if they do not, it’s “off with their heads”.

It is often difficult for people to even get to work at all in the mornings and there are times when we are all working from home in response to stay-away calls. There is a tacit understanding that this is the beginning of the end: normal life will not resume until the apartheid regime is dead and buried.

Working Women is published in May 1985 and launched in a community hall in Noordgesig, on the outskirts of Soweto. The trade union women I consulted have taken ownership of the book and large numbers attend the meeting, which begins with their favourite song, *No women no cry*. The book is well reviewed by all but the state broadcaster, which criticises it for painting “too black a picture” and being too full of “socialist rhetoric and trade union jargon”. But the fact that it is even discussed on public radio at all is astounding—and confirms my belief in the impact of personal testimony.

After the book is published, I am busy preparing a travelling exhibition with text and images on lightweight boards that can be easily mounted in community halls and other informal venues. Its first outing is scheduled for the launch of the new trade union federation, the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), in July 1985. But on the eve of the launch, the country is plunged into a State of Emergency. Many of my trade union friends and book contributors are detained and it will be several months before COSATU formally sees the light of day.

The Emergency imposes severe restrictions on the media—publication of images or verbal descriptions of unrest situations are forbidden without permission from the authorities, and the South Africa Broadcasting Corporation, our compliant national broadcaster, becomes a parody even of its former self.

In October 1985 I make an audiovisual programme that contrasts the news on SABC with what is actually going on in the country. Good News reviews a fortnight of the main English news bulletins to show that over 30 per cent of all coverage is devoted to sport, entertainment, disasters and foreign news. The item dominating the airwaves this fortnight is the Achille Lauro hijacking by the Palestinian Liberation Organisation in Mediterranean waters—this one item alone accounts for 13.5 per cent of news time. The Tricameral Parliament and other aspects of the government’s so-called reform programme make up 10 per cent of the news.

The State of Emergency is mentioned only once, and the township insurrection not at all, despite the fact that this is the week of the notorious “Trojan Horse Massacre” in which plainclothes policemen shot unarmed protesting children from a box on the back of a railway truck. They popped up above the sides of the box and fired with automatic weapons, killing three and injuring 15 adults and children. The shooting, filmed by the American channel CBS,²² has taken headlines all around the world.

Back home the character of the Crown Mines community is shifting. The more engaged activists are moving out to anonymous locations; others are buying houses in the suburb (for cash, with their parents’ money). I now

have a live-in lover who indulges in comedy, political intrigue and substance abuse, with equal enthusiasm. He lives by the Theory of Universal Debt—those that have must give and they will be rewarded in later life—and he is always bringing home people in need. Once it is an activist on the run from the security police, with a bullet lodged in his spine. Another time he finds a young Mozambican refugee at the side of the main road, who has no money, no clothes and speaks no South African languages. My partner gives him his only two spare shirts and the boy stays with us until he connects with a Mozambican community on the East Rand.

There is no privacy for anyone on the mine. When you fight or fart your neighbours know all about it. A friend is mugged on her way home from work one evening and breaks two fingers. When Christina hears the story, she laughs: “Huh. Not likely. That was the day she was trying to hit her boyfriend with a broomstick.”

One night, the secret of Christina’s escape from the pass police is revealed when, during a raid, I see her draw the inspector into her room, and close the door.

20 Barbara Hogan, ANC member arrested in 1981. See Chapter 2.

21 A leader, in this case appointed by the boss.

22 Still available on You Tube at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3qxwd-Joz1vo>.

ANOTHER DAY IN THE SUBURBS, 1986

DECEMBER 1986, MY LAST SUMMER IN THE VILLAGE. Rand Mines has notified us of its intention to demolish Crown Mines and although several of my friends are planning to lie down in front of the bulldozers, I decide to move. I need a stable base from which to work and a functioning darkroom; and, after 10 years of community life, it feels like it is time to leave home.

In the spirit of demolition, I let the grass grow and the gutters sag. The front gate has all but disintegrated and damp is moving into my bedroom. The silly season is upon us and I party into the night, coming home in the blue dawn of a Highveld summer. In the new year I move into a large flat on the main road of the inner-city suburb of Yeoville, with its eclectic mix of junk shops, second-hand bookstores and delicatessens.

The country is in meltdown, both politically and economically. In response to the Emergency and its escalating death toll, the international community has ratcheted up the pressure. Sanctions are biting and the international banks have given notice that all loans are to be terminated. In response, the government of PW Botha has been employing a twin strategy—alongside draconian repression of the popular will, it has

embarked on a limited reform programme. Some aspects of petty apartheid have been abolished and, more significantly, the influx control legislation has been relaxed.

During my long darkroom hours, I listen to talk radio and am fascinated by the opinions of white callers who, despite the media blackout, are aware that things are going badly wrong and the future of the good life is in question.

Young and old are quite comfortable about voicing violent, racist views. Example: "The Prime Minister should have a day when everybody can collect a gun and just kill one of them so they might stop all the fighting." (Marco, 17 years old); or "I can teach them to about 40 per cent. After 41 per cent his [sic] brain is starting to vibrate ..." (Joe, factory foreman).

The majority, however, are contemplating change and this reveals the limits of the collective imagination, such as 14-year-old Jenny who says, "There are so many of them, how are you going to ask them into your homes and be friendly with them? If you ask a family, you are going to ask about 12 people for dinner."

Many callers are experiencing a terror of crime that is way out of proportion to the actual situation on the ground, and white neighbourhoods are becoming increasingly militarised. One man, having shot an unarmed intruder to death, explained the consequences: "I think when people buy a firearm they should know they are going to kill somebody somewhere. Or that is a possibility ..." he says. "To watch a man's blood seeping out of him ... the terrible, terrible sight of a person dying that you have killed ... This happened two years ago and nothing will ever be able to wipe it out. Look, I had to appear in court and nothing was done to me. But, quite frankly, I think if they had taken me and hanged me it would have been kinder to me."

I start work on a new project of interviews and photographs, attempting to make sense of white Johannesburg. My own community has always fascinated me and since I left the protective circle of its values in my late

teens, that fascination has developed a cutting edge. So far this has been expressed photographically, but there are issues here that are too complex for images alone. I need to understand how (and if?) apartheid supporters exist in a healthy way in their own families and social worlds, while playing a negative or destructive role in the broader society. And what about the apathetic majority, who are just living the kinds of lives lived by normal, middle-class people all over the world? I have never understood where to draw the line between an acceptable concern with the personal world and moral responsibility towards others; or where to cast the blame—disinformation by the state or wilful avoidance of reality. I set out to explore these questions, to learn how my fellow country-people are constructing their worlds in this society, so divided by race and class, torn by violent conflict and undermined by a failing economy.

As I cannot pretend to be a neutral observer, I depart from the oral tradition of previous work and embark on a series of conversations of the sort one would have over the garden wall (if only it were possible to see over the high fences).

Photographs are an essential component of this project, (later named *Another Day in the Suburbs*), but I avoid portraits of the interviewees, many of whom elect to remain anonymous anyway, in favour of suburban themes—security, lifestyle, leisure.

I start in the easiest place: the English-speaking middle class to whom I have ready access. I interview a teenage hairdresser, still living at home with her parents in Houghton, the suburb of old money. Ginny²³ tells me that although she does not believe in apartheid, she thinks black people are too uneducated to “take over the country”. “They won’t keep us in charge,” she says. “They’ll want to run everything and they are not intelligent enough.”

Like most of her peers, she has never had black friends or even been into a township and she uses the censorship of the media as an excuse for not keeping up with current affairs. “I’d rather talk to the ironing girl who lives there. You get more of a true picture,” she says.

Ginny is unaffected by the political situation—she has no family in the army and all her interactions with black people are friendly “because I am friendly to them ... so where does it affect me?” she asks. “OK, I’m scared if I drive into town on my own. You know you get a bit nervous and you lock your door. But it doesn’t affect me.”

Another more liberal group of suburbanites is disturbed by the escalating crisis, but they feel impotent to act. Pamela, a middle-aged Jewish housewife living in a townhouse complex in the north-eastern suburbs, is a typical example.

“There could even be shooting and killing in Alexandra, which is five minutes away from us,” she says. “And look at us. We would never even know that it had happened. And its beautiful here—isn’t it?” she says. “I think people are afraid and reluctant to move out of this lovely soft cocoon.”

She readily admits to being unable to overcome this inertia. “If anybody were to say to me, ‘Why don’t you do anything about it?’ I’d say, like they did in Germany during the war, ‘well I was afraid to,’ or something like that. They probably sat in their lounges and said they felt guilty because it was happening, and I am doing the same thing.”

“Ten years from now we will either be dead or we will be making money,” says Jan, who lives with his wife and son in one of the newer, far northern suburbs. This young couple welcome the limited reforms of the PW Botha era and are coping with the abolition of petty apartheid. “One evening we went to the cinema and I said to Elsie ‘There’s blacks in the cinema,’” says Jan. “And at first you are taken aback, and then you realise what has happened and you accept it. It’s the same with restaurants now. I’m a *suiwe*²⁴ Afrikaner and I don’t find it offensive. You know, for years the closest neighbour that you’ve had has been your maid in her room in the back yard.”

Brian is the head boy of a multiracial private school, where integration is already working well. “There’s no such thing as black and white any more,” he says. “It’s just people now.” But it seems that friendships do not extend beyond the school gates. “You can’t understand how they think,” he admits. “You need to get a lot closer to them for that and,

unfortunately, that's not allowed because of the environment we live in. You develop a certain friendship, but it's not deep down."

Brian believes that a united middle class can bring about peaceful change to the benefit of all. "I look at my own needs now. What's going to happen to my children, what is going to happen to me in 30 years' time? Will I be driving to work in my Rolls Royce or driving to work in my Casspir²⁵ with my R4?²⁶ That's the choice as I see it."

These are the extent of the average liberal views in the suburbs—a kind of wobbly commitment to a non-racial future, bordered by self-interest. Many are speaking about emigration, which is a real option for those with money when times are tough. An Australian immigration consultant tells me that she is sick to the stomach by her social encounters, finding herself the most popular person in the room. "The other day I went to the opening of an art exhibition and I had barely walked in the door and there was a queue of people waiting to see me," she says. "For two hours all the kugels²⁷ were jangling their gold bracelets at me, asking about migration."

But emigration is a painful and divisive issue for many families. Melanie tells me that her family life is threatened by her decision that they should emigrate to prevent her 16-year-old from becoming "a policeman in the townships". This has thrown her political disagreements with her husband into sharp relief. "My husband wears blinkers and his way of handling things is just not to think about it," she says. "This morning I said to him 'It's not right to detain children' and he said, 'I don't know, it depends on what they have done', so I said, 'If they were white they wouldn't be detained.'" We actually have stupid conversations like this all the time. They say couples that emigrate actually have such tension that they come very close to divorce. I don't even know what the prognosis is for people who disagree to start with."

Security is an important theme in all of my interviews. I come across a mother who is so afraid of bombs that she will not take her toddler into a supermarket. But she is happy to drive him around the city, despite the

fact that only four people have been killed by ANC bombs in Johannesburg in the past three years, in comparison with the hundreds that have died in road accidents. When I ask if she knows the statistics, she readily admits her fear is irrational. "I suppose there is a sense of guilt about it. In my head I don't consciously believe for a minute that anyone deserves to have these things happen to them," she says. "But, on the other hand, I am part of the problem, I'm not part of the solution and therefore, at a gut level, there's a feeling that I and my family are fair game. In my head I don't believe that but, in my stomach, I believe it."

Fear of crime is everywhere: high walls barricade Johannesburg suburbia and residents are cowering behind them in terror. "I wouldn't be surprised to find a moat with crocodiles," laughs one neighbourhood security consultant.

I interview Clive Derby Lewis, a Conservative Party member of Parliament,²⁸ about a new neighbourhood security system he is planning. Although nobody he knows has been physically attacked, he is preparing for war in the leafy suburb of Greenside where he lives. He believes that the National Party government has "gone soft" and that force is necessary to restore law and order. When I inquire about the actions of the police and army in the townships, he says, "That's not force ... Force is where you actually go in and you shoot people and you crack skulls and that sort of thing." For him the unrest in the townships and petty crime in the suburbs are essentially related: black people are moving into the suburbs to escape the unrest and with them have come a new cohort of criminals. "I mean I even had a case here where a bloke actually did try to intimidate our employee at the back into accommodating him," he says.

The story went like this: "One morning I saw footprints in the garden and so I called our employee and said, 'Look are you getting someone sleeping in your room at night without my permission?' Because you know, when she asks me to allow her husband to sleep here, as far as I'm concerned, that's fine. And I couldn't understand why there would be any subterfuge now. And eventually she spilled the beans. And of course, I waited for him the following night and I showed him what would happen

to him if I ever caught him near the wall again. I said I would wait for him and I would blow his head off his shoulders.”

It is not possible to talk about the suburbs of Johannesburg without specific mention of domestic workers, whose world is enclosed, both geographically and psychologically, within their boundaries. Although the relaxation of influx control makes it easier for domestic workers to commute from their own homes to those of their employers, it is still more common for them to live on the property.

These women and men are the guarantors of the comfort of suburban homes—the beautiful lawns, the immaculate living rooms with their laundered curtains, the shiny cars—but their own lives take place in secret, back rooms, which the employer’s family seldom enter.

“We learned it by example,” explains Pamela. “My mother was a wonderful, gentle person but we had this maid who worked for our family for 26 years and she used to finish work and go to her room. And we never thought what it must be like to sit in a tiny room with a candle and be lonely and eat by herself and have her own cup and saucer and plate; so many things that horrify me now. I often lie awake thinking about it. How sad it was that I wasted years being so uncaring.”

While I am working on my suburbs project, David Goldblatt, now the photography editor of *Leadership* magazine, commissions me to produce a photo essay on the leisure time of domestic workers. Thursday and Sunday afternoons are still the most common days off for most domestic workers, but for many, time off is at the whim of the employer. Occasional hours are snatched to spend with friends on the pavements, in the parks and backyard rooms. It is a relief to spend my days meeting and photographing domestic workers—from the wealthy suburbs to inner city Hillbrow—and a welcome reminder of the goodness of ordinary people.

“I say they should sterilise every black woman by the time she gets to 30 because the country can’t afford to have more people,” says Marie, a single mother living in Mayfair.

Since the mid-1980s, with the whiff of reform in the air, Indian and coloured²⁹ communities have begun moving into the poorer white suburbs like Yeoville, Hillbrow and Mayfair. It is the working-class whites in these areas that are the first to experience actual change in their daily lives, and they are not coping too well. In response to the growing Indian community in Mayfair, the ratepayer's association has launched a campaign to "Keep Mayfair White". Marie, one of their supporters, agrees to talk to me about her predicament: Indians have moved in all around her and, although it's illegal, the police are doing nothing to stop it. She feels it is a giant conspiracy between the increasingly liberal National Party and the money-grubbing estate agents, and she is on edge.

Marie is fully aware that the people of the new community are wealthier and take better care of their houses than her former Afrikaans neighbours, but this adds to her chagrin. She says her relatives and friends are always teasing her about being a koeli-boettie³⁰ and living in moegoe³¹ Mayfair, and when I ask her how she finds her new neighbours, as people, she answers, "I don't, because I try not to have any contact with them. I feel very strongly about living apart. It's in the Bible," she says. "If my kid grows up with all these Indian and coloured and black people around her then one day she won't know better. She might marry one of them."

It is people like Marie who are feeding the growth of the extreme right-wing organisations such as the Afrikaner Weerstandsbeweging (AWB). I am keen to talk to politically active right-wingers who are not high-profile leaders and, through a beautician in a working-class suburb, I hear about an Afrikaans businessman who fits the bill. It is even hinted, darkly, that he may be involved in some underground paramilitary group. I telephone the man, shall we call him Boet, who is all too willing to talk to me, asking if I will meet him in his office. Or should he come to me? I know one of these is definitely the wrong choice, but in a state of panic, I give him my address. The minute I put down the phone the reality of inviting a possibly armed, right-wing militant into my home comes crashing down and I spend many hours removing posters from the walls and hiding other evidence of my own beliefs.

He is a good-looking man, this Boet, and he tells me, by way of introduction, that he aims to be a millionaire by the age of 30. After I have introduced my quest, he embarks on a carefully pre-prepared exposition of his views: a strange perverted sort of social Darwinism that divides the world into good and successful people (white) and the bad ones (black), who are poor and have failed everywhere they have tried to govern. “If you integrate them,” he says, “civilisation will come to an end.”

When I ask why, as intelligent people, we can’t make sure we get the best of all cultures, he has a ready reply. “Culture is the name print of a specific race or sub-race,” he says. “Only 13 civilisations have achieved notable standards and all of these are white.” (This grouping includes what he refers to as the “white Egyptians”). “White people are good and have a high level of creativity—but the black people have none. Every time they see a bus, they burn it. Or they see something, they bomb it. When they see a body burning, they eat it.”

“To compound matters,” Boet says, “our whole social system is under the control of people with psychopathical [sic] problems. These are the Semitics or the half-blacks,” he says. This grouping includes most doctors and lawyers and 98 per cent of the South African Communist Party. I refrain from pointing out that the SACP is largely black, but ask him why, if he believes that black people are so evil, does he feel that he belongs in Africa.

“History has shown that you can earn land if you can prove that you are developing that land and not destroying it,” says Boet. “We came to Africa and we developed this country. Black people initiated nothing. They are destroying all our creations.”

Unlike most of my other interviewees, Boet is very hopeful for the future. “You must remember that the whites of South Africa are the highest in the world. They are the most unique and purest white race on Earth and this is due to the value of differentiation, of identifying themselves as much more intelligent beings than other races ... Our genetic combination is unique and the world will look up to South Africa because we will do things here that will be a trigger on the global sphere

to a very high social order, a high cultural appreciation and an extremely advanced technology.”

Thanks in part to the teachings of Rick Turner, I have long believed that the violence and injustice of apartheid damages the perpetrators, as well as their victims. I see this in the people I am meeting: even interviewees who have stressed their indifference to the political crisis reveal the occasional glimpse of the white ants in their foundations. The psychological cost of denial has to be profound.

I feel certain that the current spate of family murders, where a parent (usually the father) kills all family members before committing suicide, is part of this psychological reckoning. I go to Pretoria to visit Rev. JT de Jongh van Arkel, an Afrikaans theologian who is the only academic to have published work on family murders in South Africa. Van Arkel defines family murder as an act of love. “It can be compared with an extended suicide,” he says, “where the solution the person finds for him- or herself is extended, and the rest of the family is included.”

Van Arkel has studied all the recent family murders and has found that the majority are in the Afrikaans community. Although they are triggered by common economic, family and health problems, he believes that the phenomenon can only be understood by understanding the nature of these patriarchal and religious families, and the values of the broader society. He argues that Afrikaners are now suffering an acute form of existential hopelessness.

“Everybody knows that within a couple of years we will have a black government,” he says. “For black people this offers hope, and the English-speaking people may go elsewhere. But we Afrikaners have been here for 300 years and we’ve got nowhere else to go. Our language is the language of this country and we’ve been involved in this country—whether in a proper way or not—and we can’t go anywhere. So, if there’s no future for us here, then there’s no future.”

The levels of violence in a society, where both sides justify violence for a just end, make death a more probable outcome, he says. “Although

family murder is not an escalation of ordinary violence, this aspect of our society makes it easier because people feel they are allowed to do it.”

Van Arkel believes that compulsory military service has played an important role in this conundrum. “[Young men] are very thoroughly and properly trained to make war and to forget everything that they have learned about ordinary morality,” he says. “And then they come back to ordinary life where they are supposed to be loving and sensitive, and think about what they are doing. They get helped to become insensitive, but they don’t get helped to become sensitive again.”

Paul Verryn, a Methodist minister, at this time based in a lower middle-class parish in Western Johannesburg, tells me that he has often pondered the spiritual cost of apartheid.

“I think we, as white people, have traded the most valuable human qualities for things like money, like possessions, like security,” he says. “I think that we have lost aspects of sensitivity and of love. Dynamics of love have gone out the window because we have held onto other things. We have a distorted view of what we think human relationships are really like, and I think that’s one of the reasons that the divorce rate is four in five marriages in some parts of the country. As a priest that concerns me because we are lacking qualities which, for me, make a society of tomorrow.”

But Paul’s deepest concern is for the township congregations he knows so well. He regularly attends the mass funerals of people killed by the security forces and he is noticing a profound change in mood. “My greatest fear at the moment is that we are entering a period of severe depression,” he says. “I’ve been to lots of funerals; I was at the Cradock funeral, the Alex funeral, the Duduza funeral³²—but I have never seen grief like I saw at that funeral in Soweto last week. It was absolutely hopeless ... to have men weeping like that. You felt they were taking their strength from the soil they were lying on.”

“The thing that angers me about our government is that they have wasted so much. I went into Alexandra the other day and a woman I met

there said to me, ‘we are watching our gifts and our resources and our lives run through our fingers like sand. What is God trying to do to us?’”

23 All names are changed.

24 Pure.

25 Landmine-protected military vehicle.

26 An assault rifle used by the South African Defence Force.

27 From Yiddish, ‘pudding’; South African Jewish slang.

28 Later convicted of being part of the conspiracy to assassinate ANC leader Chris Hani.

29 Mixed race (South African usage).

30 Coolie brother.

31 An idiot.

32 All funerals of township residents and activists shot down by the police

ARE YOU READY? 1990

BY THE LATE 1980S, THE APARTHEID STATE is beginning to dissolve around the edges and although PW Botha continues to wag his finger, his party brethren are pulling tongues behind his back. Eventually they boot him out altogether and the reformist FW de Klerk becomes the new president. For some years now, the ANC in exile has been receiving a steady stream of visitors of all descriptions wanting to talk about the future. The country has already survived the release from Robben Island, on compassionate grounds, of two ANC stalwarts and there are high expectations that more leaders will soon be out.

I have moved three blocks up the hill into my first property, on the top floor of a modest, 1940s, Yeoville apartment block. From my west window I see the sun set over the Hillbrow skyline, as if by design.

The inner-city suburbs have changed beyond recognition as people lay claim to the land that is theirs. The streets are filled with colour and energy. There are hawkers and hairdressers on every other corner, amid a hubbub of taxis and street musicians. In the business district, black and white students and office workers jingle together in front of vast building sites that bear testimony to a new confidence in the future.

By the end of 1989, all the Robben Island prisoners, except for Nelson Mandela, have been released and mass democracy marches are taking place all over the country. Everyone knows it's only a matter of time before our lives change forever.

These events result in a recalibration of my life. I put aside the nagging suspicion that “property is theft”, and enjoy being a homeowner. For the first time I am house-proud, studying lifestyle magazines, buying brightly striped Italian crockery at the Boardman's sale and cooking ambitious meals for my friends. I have also begun photographing the new Johannesburg: in colour.

On 2 February 1990, I am at home making minestrone soup, with one eye on the live broadcast of the opening of Parliament. From my part-time job as picture editor at the Associated Press, I am aware that FW de Klerk is expected to make an earth-shattering speech, but who could blame me for doubting that this would stir up more than a few old vegetables?

Anyway, the soup burns while I take to the streets, dancing and singing with the overjoyed masses at the news that the ANC has been unbanned and Nelson Mandela is to be released.

The celebrations develop into an impromptu march around the city; people are waving placards and shouting the news to passers-by. It is more like a track event than a march—its path being controlled by self-appointed marshals, battling to keep the crowd from under motorists' wheels and in front of the frantic policemen whose job it is to stop us.

Black and white office workers come out to stare, and to document the incident with their Instamatics. I even see a tannie³³ in crimplene throw a clenched fist salute that would be the pride of any militant.

On the night that Mandela's release date is announced, a march moves through the city for several hours, gathering people as it goes. Elderly matrons in their Methodist church uniforms join white-coated hospital workers, Saturday night movers and ladies from the red-light district, toyi-toyi³⁴ up and down the streets.

For a few weeks the inner city becomes a liberated zone. There are marches and processions through town every other day. One evening I spot a group of thickset men with blond crew cuts and black boxer shorts running towards the town shouting, “Fuck Mandela”. A black bystander, revealing his faith in the new South Africa, turns to me and says, “Don’t worry; they’ll all be arrested by the time they get to town.”

These weeks have been tough on my neighbour’s Maltese poodle, which has been driven into an apoplectic state by roving nocturnal bands. My other neighbour is puzzled at the display of black, green and gold crinkle paper outside the local shops, which she has confused with advance celebrations for Easter. She is one of the millions of white South Africans who have never seen the ANC flag. At our local bank, when I commiserate with a woman who is being pushed around by an inefficient teller, she rallies with the comment, “Yes, it’s because of all these bloody black baboons that they put behind the counters these days.”

Further out in the suburbs, the birds sing next to the winking pools and the maids turn out their Swiss rolls while the madams are at bridge. Out in the suburbs they are afraid that their wealth will be redistributed; they are afraid that sanctions will not be lifted; they are afraid of the armed struggle; they are afraid of the right-wing backlash. Nobody has ever taught them how to be anything but afraid.

The SABC is belatedly trying to educate its viewers. “It’s history in the making,” says presenter Clarence Keyter as he waits for Nelson Mandela to step from his 27-year incarceration. (That was just after he said that Victor Verster was one of the most beautiful prisons in the world.) And many, including those who have been taught to believe everything the television tells them, are excited.

For the first time in its 14-year history, the state-run broadcaster is giving coverage to genuine opposition leaders. Now the SABC is looking for ways to deracialise their three, segregated channels. We hear that they

are even considering the introduction of black contestants into *Kupid*, a popular Afrikaans mating and dating programme.

A friend of mine has always said that when whites find out the truth (ie about black people being human), they are going to be so mortified that they will all kill themselves. Now I am beginning to wonder if the increasing incidence of family murders in Afrikaans homes has something to do with this. Just last week there were three cases. In one, a certain Mr O bludgeoned his wife to death and strangled his two children as they lay sleeping, and then gassed himself in his car. In the spirit of the new times Mr O found compassion for his black domestic worker. To prevent her trauma at the shocking discovery of the bodies he left her a note. It read, 'Poppie. Don't go into the house, everybody is dead. Just call the police and wait for them. Master.'

³³ Afrikaans, aunty.

³⁴ A dance done by South African protestors.

POSTSCRIPT

As NELSON MANDELA EMERGED, smiling and conciliatory after 27 years in prison, white South Africans were forced to examine their souls. Within three months the Nationalist government and African National Congress met to agree on the way forward to a new democracy.

I had always been sceptical about the “great-man” theory of history, but Madiba’s extraordinary presence engendered a certain hope. I even met him in my dreams—once on a Sunday picnic in Yeoville Park.

But although February 11, 1990 was a day of great rejoicing, there were dark undertones on the street. Many attending the release celebrations, including press photographers, were robbed and mugged in the undisciplined crowds—the first time I had heard of this in the struggle years so far. Over the coming months, attacks on comrades and ordinary civilians in the townships of the Vaal and the already conflict-ridden areas of Natal province, escalated. By the end of the year the term Third Force, denoting a shadowy underground movement funded by the right wing, became common usage. An era of murder, which surpassed the state assault of previous years, was to begin.

For me personally, the release of Madiba was a turning point. All my work had been geared towards telling untold stories, but now that seemed superfluous and I felt the need for new focus. Broke from years of non-remunerative projects, I turned to television where I began working for independent British film companies documenting the dying days of apartheid.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Some chapters contain material that has been adapted from previously published books and articles by the author.

Chapter 2: Care groups of Elim, Afrika magazine, 1982

Chapter 4. Working women, Ravan Press, 1985

Chapter 6: Johannesburg diary, Face magazine, April 1990.

The late David Goldblatt has been a source of encouragement and support during the making of this book and throughout my creative life.

Thanks also to the following who read and commented on the manuscript: Dave Bell, Mary Ann Cullinan, Aninka Claassens, Frédérique Delacoste, Jae Maingard and Mark Newman, as well as Glenda Younge who copy-edited the text (all remaining errors are mine!).

CROWN MINES

Langlaagte Deep, Johannesburg, was one of the oldest mining villages on the Witwatersrand. The rows of brick-and-iron cottages were built in 1902 to house skilled Cornish miners working on the newly-established gold mines. Several other smaller villages and houses, along with mine offices and the working gold mines formed the Crown Mines complex.

I moved into Langlaagte Deep with my friend Mark Newman in March 1977, as the gold mine was closing down. Near our house was a single-sex hostel, which was still occupied by migrant black mine workers from the Bantustans.

Within a short period of time a vibrant alternative community had come to occupy the village, and Crown Mines had taken on the character of a “liberated zone”. Trade unionists, political activists, artists, musicians, photographers and a whole range of other NGO workers lived alongside students and young families and enjoyed an informal communal life.

In 1978, when I took up photography, the Crown Mines community was the subject of my first project.



Self portrait in my kitchen, top road,
Langlaagte Deep, Crown Mines, 1978.

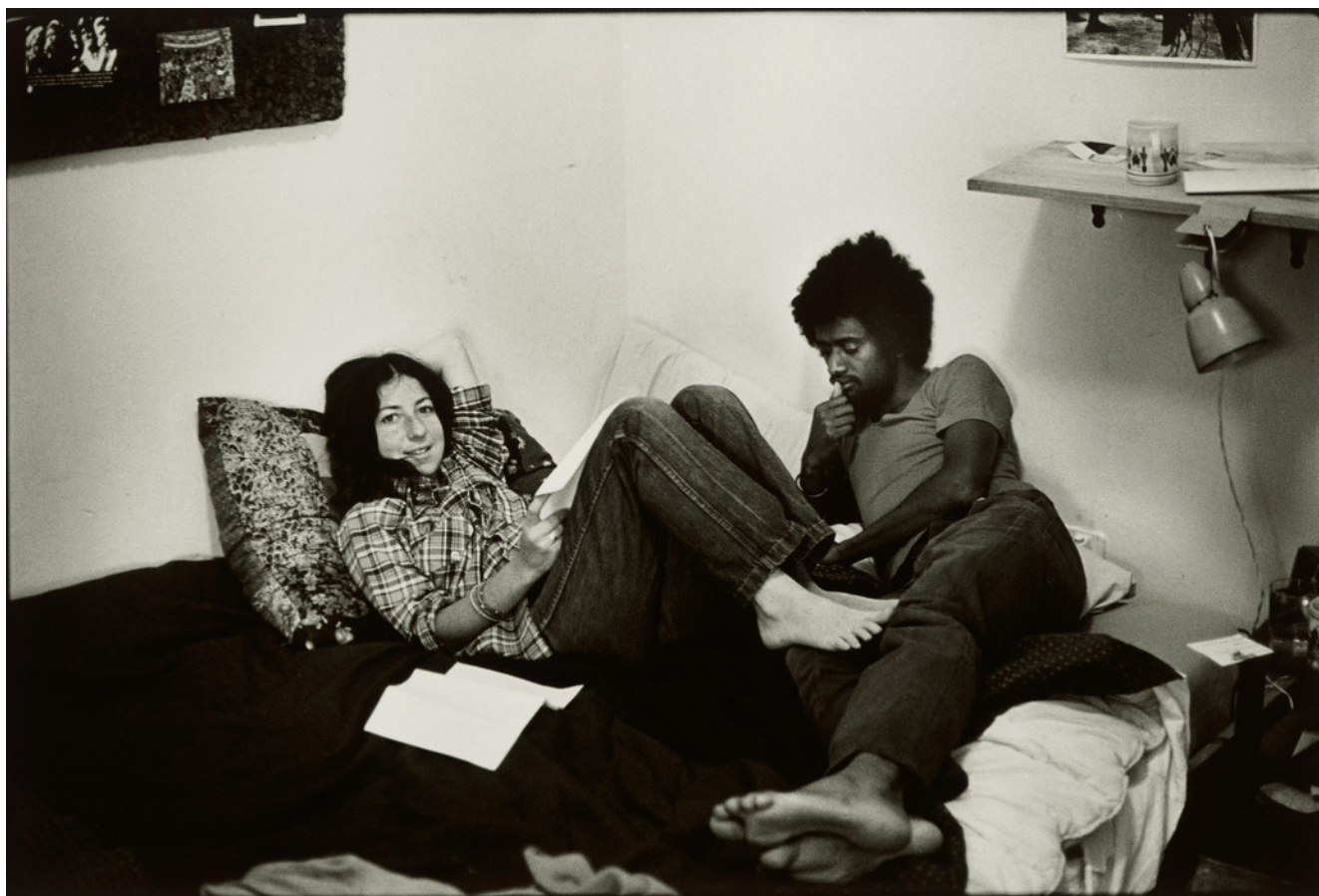


^ Guards at entrance of Crown Mines compound, 1977.

∨ Partially demolished compound showing cement bunks, 1977.



The hill opposite the houses in the top road,
seen from my bedroom window. 1977.



Mel and Hass at 849 Langlaagte Deep.
Crown Mines, 1980.



Mark in the kitchen, 849 Langlaagte Deep.
Crown Mines, 1978.



Picnic on a mine dump.
Crown Mines, 1977.

Surfing the mine dumps.
Crown Mines, 1977.





Geoff coming home from work,
top road. Langlaagte Deep, 1977.



Sonia, Heather, Rita and Mushie,
top road. Langlaagte Deep. 1977.



Morice at 849 Langlaagte Deep.
Crown Mines, 1980.



Sue and Roger at Peacock Cottage.
Crown Mines, 1978.



Nick's first birthday party, top road.
Langlaagte Deep, 1980.



Des, Paulina and friend discussing the sewing group, top road. Langlaagte Deep, 1980.



Jo Anne at Peacock Cottage.
Crown Mines, 1980.



Eddie at Peacock Cottage,
Crown Mines. 1980.



The ANC flag flies through the city of Johannesburg during trade unionist Neil's Agget's funeral. Outside St Mary's Cathedral, Johannesburg, 1982.



Mam' Lydia, trade unionist and close friend of Neil Agget, in her room at the bottom road, Langlaagte Deep. Crown Mines, 1982.

LAND LOVE

Love of the land is deeply embedded in the national psyche, but tragically this has failed to unite black and white South Africans.

By the 1980s, millions had been removed from their ancestral land and dumped in the so-called homelands by lunatic apartheid laws designed to “keep South Africa white”.

Over the years I documented many different aspects of rural lives. My first project as a freelance photographer was a journey to Elim Hospital in the poverty-stricken homeland of Lebowa. The hospital had trained local women as community health workers to help villagers prevent and care for common diseases. Spending time in the area made it clear that most health problems in the area were rooted in structural aspects of rural life such as poverty, landlessness and unemployment.

Later there were many journeys made with my land activist friend Aninka Claassens who worked for the Transvaal Rural Action Committee (TRAC) to support communities fighting forced removals. Across the country there were people still clinging to the land—labour tenants on the white farms and isolated communities in so-called white areas that the government referred to as “black spots”.



Women work the vegetable garden in the grounds of Elim Hospital, 1980.

Community health workers dancing and singing their health education messages, Lebowa, 1980.







Ma Dlomo Lugogo with grandson next to her vegetable garden. Near Matatiele, Transkei, 1984.



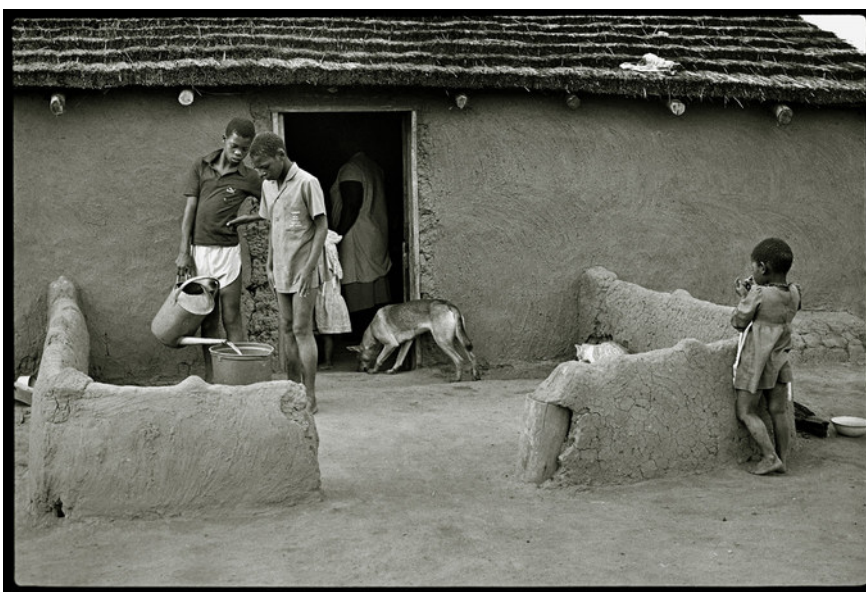
Anna Hlatshwayo in front of
the house that she is repairing.
KwaNgema, 1983.



Alice and Baba Kunene in their favourite spot next to the pumpkin patch. Pampoenkraal farm, Eastern Transvaal, 1982.



Baba Kunene with one of his
grandchildren in the maize field.
Pampoenkraal, 1982.



^ Elijah Kunene (left) with his brother Petrus, who is a driver on the white farm. Elijah, who works on the Reef, is visiting for the weekend. Pampoenkraal, 1982.

∨ The Kunene grandchildren at the homestead. Pampoenkraal, 1982.

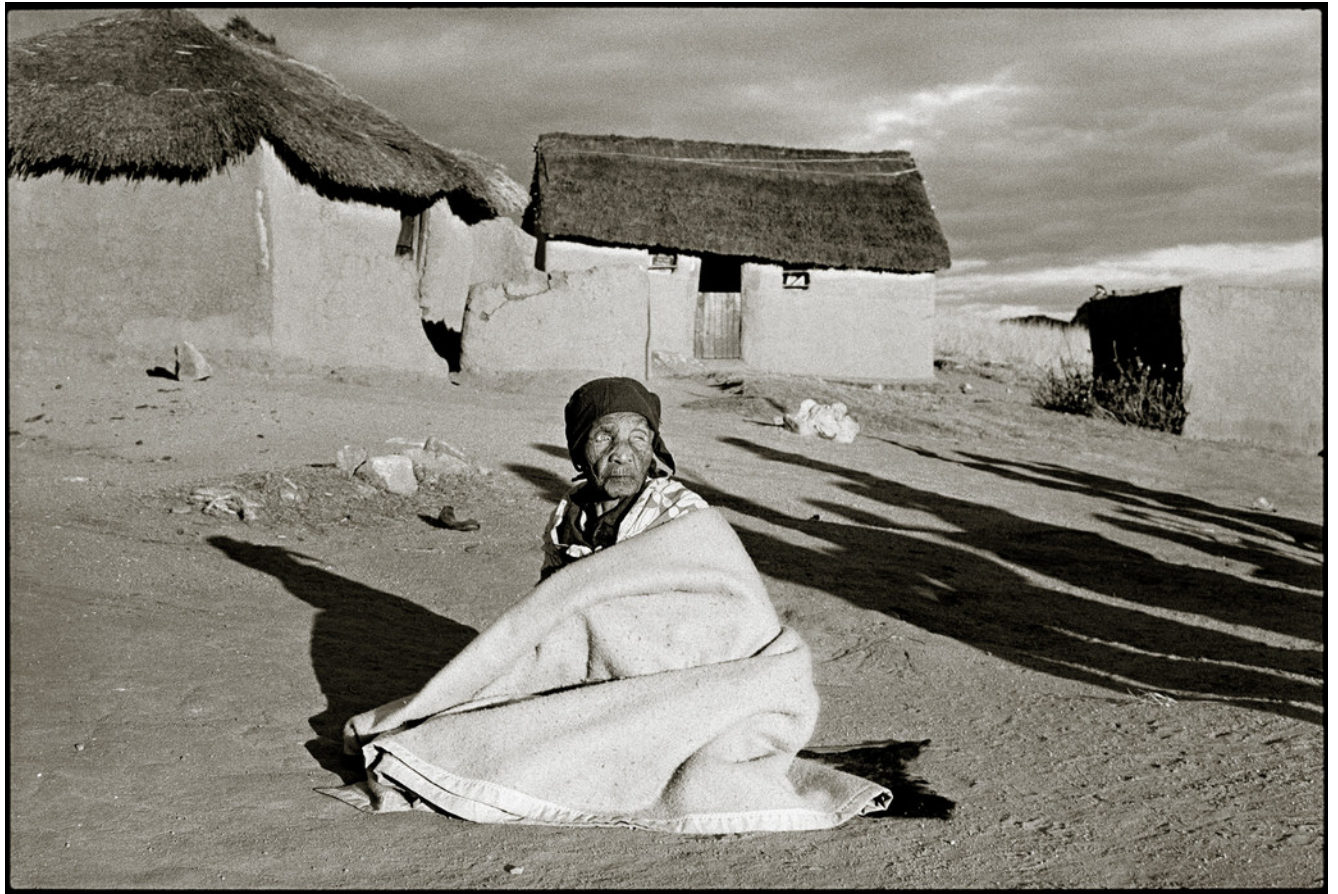


Cattle sale at Pampoenkraal. 1982.



^ Ploughing at KwaNgema,
eastern Transvaal. 1983.

∨ Aninka Claassens from the Transvaal
Rural Action Committee, talking to
labour tenants in the Piet Retief area.
Eastern Transvaal, 1989.



Christina Nkosi at the labour tenants' homestead on Zaaihoek farm where she has grown up. She does not know her age but remembers being a girl during the Anglo-Boer War. The white farmer was attempting to evict the labour tenants on his farm. Eastern Transvaal, 1989.

WORKING WOMEN

By the 1980s black women were surging into the workforce like never before. They were largely restricted to “home-like” jobs such as in the textile, food and garment industries, and the service sector. Because these were seen as “women’s work” they were undervalued and badly paid, leaving women on the bottom of the pile of South Africa’s over-exploited workforce.

As a feminist it was logical that I would focus my lens on the daily lives of women. “Night shift”, an audio-visual programme about the life of a care worker, was my first project on this subject.

In 1983 I was commissioned by SACHED, an educational organisation, to produce *Working Women*, a book of interviews and photographs aimed at the growing women’s movement in the trade unions.

Anna Moloi who cleans 19 passageways a day. Braamfontein, Johannesburg, 1980.





Maureen arriving in Soweto after her working night. 1982.



Maureen resting at home.
Mofolo South, Soweto, 1982.



Maureen sharing a bed with her grandson and mother. This is the sleeping arrangement on her nights off. Soweto, 1982.



Maureen with one of her patients at the old age home. Hillbrow, Johannesburg, 1982.



Maureen resting while the patients sleep.
Old age home, Hillbrow, Johannesburg,
1982.



^ Maureen at the knitwear factory.
Johannesburg, 1981.

∨ Maureen at home, a year after
she started working night shift.
Soweto, 1982.



Gogo Betty Tshayinca who has
been a domestic worker for 55 years.
Johannesburg, 1984.



Elsie Mbatha, Gogo Betty's daughter.
Johannesburg, 1984.



^ Ma Julia, domestic worker, in her room behind her employer's house. Johannesburg, 1985.

∨ Ma Julia at home with her grandchildren, Soweto 1985.



Pauline, domestic worker, doing the washing for her own family. Johannesburg, 1984.



Mavis, dressed for church in her backyard room. Bez Valley, Johannesburg, 1987.



Essie, domestic worker on her
afternoon off. Norwood, 1987.

Minding a knitting machine. >
Johannesburg, 1981.







Checking garments for faults at a knitwear factory. Johannesburg, 1981.



Cutting with an unguarded blade,
knitwear factory. Johannesburg, 1981.

Minding a laundry press, dubbed >
"the abortion machine" because it
has caused so many miscarriages.
Johannesburg, 1984.







^ Ironing in a Johannesburg clothing factory. 1984.

∨ Hand sewing in a Johannesburg knitwear factory. 1981.

Frisking at the end of the working day. Johannesburg knitwear factory, 1981





Night cleaner polishing the boardroom table. Johannesburg, 1984.



Trade unionist Mam' Lydia Kompe speaks
at the launch of the book *Working
Women*. Noordgesig, Soweto, 1985.

ANOTHER DAY IN THE SUBURBS

By the mid-1980s South Africa was under a state of emergency and the country was in turmoil. In the face of impending political change, white attitudes were polarising and life in the suburbs became increasingly militarised.

I began a new project of interviews and photographs that aimed to understand how my compatriots were constructing their worlds in a society so divided by race and class, torn by violent conflict and undermined by a failing economy.

For several years I documented suburban life, pursuing themes of security, lifestyle and leisure in my hometown, Johannesburg.



Couple passing the police display,
Rand Easter Show. 1988.



^ Conservative Party polling table at the whites-only election. Yeoville, May 1987.

∨ Foreign Affairs Minister Pik Botha judging a Mothers' Day card competition. Norwood Shopping Centre, 1987.



Couple in last embrace before army
intake. Johannesburg, 1988.



Dress shop window. Yeoville, 1986.



Instructor at shooting range.
Johannesburg northern suburbs, 1988.



^ Schoolgirl on block watch patrol.
Linbro Park, 1987.

∨ Civil defence class.
Braamfontein, 1987.



^ Emigrating family.
Rooseveld Park, 1987.

∨ Emigrating dog.
Northern suburbs 1987.



Rand Hunt Club drag racing in the
Kyalami area. 1988.



Dog parlour. Sandton, 1988.



Mighty Man competition.
Rand Easter Show, 1987.



Miss Wet T-shirt, Ambassador Hotel.
Hillbrow, 1987.



Melville Mardi Gras. 1987.



Rocky Street festival. Yeoville, 1987.



Going to school. Parkmore, 1988.



Muldersdrift, 1987.



Wits University students protesting against new regulations to curtail the freedom of the universities. Braamfontein 1987.



Johannesburg Black Sash members help to repair the roads as a gesture of support for residents who are fighting the removal of their township. Oukasie, 1987.



Yeoville Residents' Association marches to the local public swimming pool to speed up its desegregation. Rocky Street, 1991.



Houghton, 1988.

Trade unionists celebrate the unbanning of the ANC. Johannesburg inner city, February 2, 1990



Yeoville Residents' Association marches to
local public swimming pool to speed
desegregation, Rocky Street, 1991.
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The Star
FRI FEB 2
**ANC,
PAC
BANS
LIFTED**

Are you
ready?
Mandela
is
coming!

Are you
ready?
Mandela
is
coming!



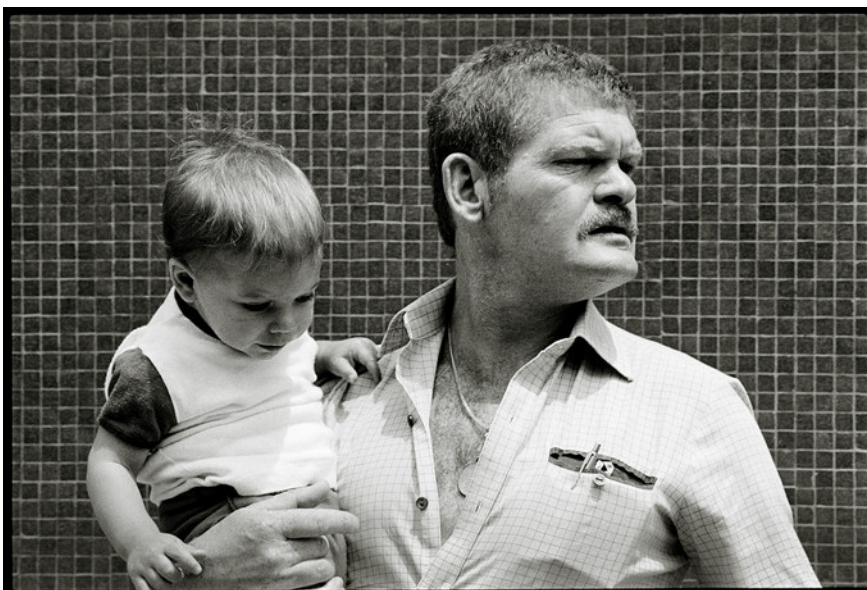
JOHANNESBURG STREET PORTRAITS 1976-1987



Inner city, 1976.







Southdale Shopping Centre,
southern suburbs, 1982.



Southdale Shopping Centre,
southern suburbs, 1982.



Rosebank Shopping Centre,
northern suburbs, 1987.



Rosebank Shopping Centre,
northern suburbs, 1987



Inner city, 1984.



Inner city, 1984.



Southdale Shopping Centre,
southern suburbs, 1982.



Inner city, 1984.



Inner city, 1984.



Inner city, 1984.



Inner city, 1984.



Inner city, 1984.

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